

# **“Like stepping into a spaceship”: Adjunct lecturers lived experiences during their initial time in teacher education programs in Sweden**

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## **Abstract**

*The Swedish teacher education has undergone numerous reforms and is currently heavily influenced by neo-liberal governance, which shapes the internal work for different kinds of teacher educators. The study focuses on how a group of adjunct lecturers within a regional university college, experienced their initial period in the profession of teacher education programs in Sweden. The study departs from Seeman’s theoretical framework. The findings indicate that adjuncts lecturers do not feel that their knowledge is being appreciated or valued within the organization. The adjuncts lecturers are driven by a desire to contribute relevant professional knowledge, teach, and serve as good role models for teacher students. From this, conflict arises—mainly due to a governance system which heavily emphasizes standards, documentation, and high academic expectations. In conclusion, the study reveals how the organization's demands may differ from what adjunct lecturers anticipate, potentially leading to various forms of work conditions and alienation.*

*Keywords:* adjunct lecturers, higher education, teacher education, teacher professionalism

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## **Introduction**

Research on teacher education has been conducted for a long time, especially on the complex role of being a teacher educator (Clanidin & Husu, 2017). There is currently an extensive field of research concerning the position of university teachers within higher education, particularly with regards to professional development (Hadar & Brody, 2017). In a globalized era where the governance of

higher education is characterized by new public management, teacher education has been restructured extensively in many parts of the world, including Sweden, resulting in changed work structures for teacher educators. Now, teachers are held accountable for the outcomes produced, there is a high degree of documentation, evaluation, goal orientation, efficiency thinking and instrumentalization of standards (Angervall et al., 2020).

However, it is important to not label teacher educators as a homogenous group, this applies both on an international level as well as in a Swedish educational context. For example, not all teacher educators have the same starting point for teaching at the university, and a group of teachers (adjunct lecturers) do not have a doctoral degree but have working experiences from schools in the municipality. Their specific experience base is also usually why adjunct lecturers are hired to teach within the Swedish teacher education. When adjunct lecturers enter the university, their working situation within the academic hierarchy is described as a messy situation full of demands and conflicting interests within the working place (Angervall & Baldwin, 2021). Studies have shown that teacher educators feel a lot of stress and low self-esteem during their first years in academia regardless of whether they were adjunct lecturers or researchers (Izadinia, 2014).

The legitimacy of teacher education is built upon the idea of a strong scientific foundation and researchers who ensure the quality of education, as the education programs are regularly reviewed by the Swedish Higher Education Authority. Research has explored the significance of teacher education being grounded in research, highlighting that a crucial aspect involves aligning the educational content with scientific research and ensuring that teachers possess research proficiency (Wahlström & Alvunger, 2015). This puts a certain group of teachers—adjunct lecturers—in an uncertain position since they lack a doctoral degree. In a teacher education program that has increasingly become academically oriented, it is a dilemma that adjunct lecturers have, for a long time, been defined by the absence of something, rather than what they can offer (Agevall & Olofsson, 2022). Historically, the position of adjunct lecturer has undergone fluctuation, with predominant employment observed at smaller colleges, and comparatively less frequent employment at larger universities. Since adjuncts lecturers largely teach in heavily female-dominated programs, as the teacher education program, women also constitute the majority within this professional group (Agevall & Olofsson, 2022). The teacher education programs have undergone several reforms, the latest one in 2011, currently there is another reform pending (Dir. 2023:111). The common denominator among these reforms is focus on how the quality of teacher education programs can be enhanced and how the scientific quality can be ensured. When quality is addressed, it often leads to discussions in terms of the need for doctoral

staff at the institutions. While this might not be surprising, it also per se contributes to positioning adjunct lecturers as something less desirable. When institutions cannot recruit doctoral staff, adjunct lectures are hired instead. Many adjunct lecturers then embark on a path to try to enhance their actual competence through master's theses, and sometimes even by initiating doctoral studies (Agevall & Olofsson, 2022).

Adjunct lecturers construct their own professional role in relation to conflicting demands within the organization. The study aims to explore the experiences of adjunct lecturers who are relatively new to teacher education by addressing *what lived experiences emerge in the discourse of becoming an adjunct lecturer within teacher education programs?*

## **Background**

In a Swedish educational context, Angervall and Baldwin (2021) describe Swedish teacher education as caught in a societal crosscurrent. The background for this designation is related to an era of new public management, results-oriented management, and frequent reforms of teacher education in Sweden. Before a new reform can be implemented, a new inquiry is initiated to improve teacher education. Recently, the Swedish Ministry of Education announced there will be another inquiry into how teacher and preschool teacher education can be developed (Dir. 2023:111). The results of this review are expected to be presented at the end of 2024. This constant restructuring leads to mission stretch, which can be described as a fragmentation of responsibilities (Angervall & Baldwin, 2021). Simultaneously, everyone involved in teacher education is influenced to streamline by the demands placed on teacher educators. The outcome of the governance system is described as turning teacher educators into alignment slaves, audit puppets, and technophobes. This contributes to a disempowered profession that is not driven by critical thinking but follows the system's demands for subordination (Levinsson et al., 2020).

One study explored the perspectives of new adjunct lecturers in teacher education regarding the conditions and opportunities within their roles (Angervall & Baldwin, 2021). Many perceive an increased workload due to expanded responsibilities, increased administration, and simultaneous efforts at efficiency. Teachers in teacher education have less control over their roles, and female adjunct lecturers face challenges. They bear a heavy workload with a lot of teaching, have

fewer opportunities for advancement, and receive harsher evaluations from students than their male colleagues, who are automatically granted credibility (Angervall & Baldwin, 2021; Angervall & Beach, 2020). This gender regime has also been highlighted by Kalm (2019) and Selberg and Anving (2018), who reveal the academic housework that many women engage in, as well as through the description of the academic female workforce (Angervall & Beach, 2020).

In this study, the primary focus lies on Swedish teacher education and adjunct lecturers as part of a restructured educational system. How educational programs are structured and governed is currently a global phenomenon, which can be defined as a denationalized and instrumental conception of education. This implies that the primary tasks of teachers have been altered due to this shift in education:

...a denationalised and instrumental conception of education is characterised, at a general societal level, by a shift in the direction of internationalisation and privatisation, and, in the more concrete arena of governance and curriculum, by a shift towards management by requirements and control. (Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012, p. 353)

The demands on staff in teacher education have not decreased since the publication of Sundberg and Wahlström (2012), more than a decade ago. Today, it is common practice to work according to the distinctive features that the governance approach presupposes, which in the adjunct lecturers' work is characterized by working according to concepts such as: more detailed guidelines, standards which imply emphasis on results, achievement, and performance of articulated knowledge. The focus on alignment as a tightening of the different elements of the curriculum chain, such as measure learning outcomes and assessment, and scoring rubrics are dominant (Florin Sädbom et al., 2019; Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012). When the latest teacher education program was implemented in 2011, the Educational Science Core Component was introduced in all teacher education programs regardless of their specialization. This core consists of common courses totaling 60 credits that all teacher students are required to study for developing a common professional language. The courses usually cover the following content: education organization, learning and development, theory of science, research methods, social relationships, conflict management and leadership, special education, assessment and grading, evaluation and school development (Åstrand, 2023). It is also within the educational science core that many adjunct lecturers teach, as the course content fills a particular position for connecting education with the profession. The adjunct lecturers may

still have employment in schools and, therefore, possess relevant professional expertise that can benefit teacher students.

Rex (2020) conducted a study investigating the contribution of adjunct lecturers to the enhanced integration of theory and practice in teacher education. This study involved qualitative interviews which delved into various facets, such as the contextual conditions influencing their roles, their collaborative engagement with university-employed colleagues, and the nuanced assessment of advantages and disadvantages inherent to the adjunct lecturer position. The findings suggest that it is necessary to clarify expectations concerning the role of adjunct lecturers to ensure fair working conditions and to optimize the utilization of their expertise and experiences in teacher education. Adjunct lecturers who lack prior experience of working at university require an introduction to the demands of higher education, particularly in the context of teacher education. Those adjunct lecturers who were initially afforded sufficient time for preparation have reported an easier adaptation to their roles (Rex, 2020). In another study concerning adjunct lecturers, the focus was on determining the core elements of the profession for university adjuncts, identifying available career opportunities for them, and understanding the career paths sought after by adjunct lecturers (Sandström & Waldenström, 2012). In the interviews conducted, a clearer structure for introducing new hires to the workplace was called for. Each interviewee highlighted deficiencies in the current system and suggested the value of having a designated mentor from day one—someone who could provide comprehensive guidance and serve as a reliable resource for significant and minor inquiries. The interviewed adjunct lecturers see their main task primarily as being good teachers, a kind of role model responsible for developing teaching and designing inspiring tasks so that teacher students ultimately develop into good educators themselves. They are driven by teaching and do not see that a doctoral degree needs to constitute a natural step in competence development.

The role of adjunct lecturers in teacher education has undergone several changes due to different reforms since the mid-1960s. There was a significant expansion in the employment of adjunct lecturers during the 1990s due to the expansion of higher education and an increased number of students in undergraduate programs. Throughout the years, however, a distinction can be observed between the older universities, which have higher research funding and a greater number of professors employed, with a lower proportion of adjuncts employed, compared to colleges, which generally have a higher proportion of adjunct lecturers, less research funding, and fewer professors employed. This structure is also found within teacher education programs in Sweden, where the position of adjunct lecturers is challenged within the framework of its governance,

with a strong focus on scientific foundation that often falls on the importance of researchers (Agevall & Olofsson, 2022). All things considered, the knowledge contribution of this study revolves around exploring how adjuncts in teacher education describe their entry into academia. This is a specific focus where more understanding is needed to describe how adjunct lecturers' experience may be identified.

### **Theoretical stance**

The findings in this study are discussed using the concept of alienation within the context of neoliberal governance in higher education. When working hermeneutically with interviews, the content of the statements reveals itself through how the data speaks to the interpreter in the analysis phase. In the material, a substantive aspect of the participants' sense of alienation emerged, which could be described and discussed through Seeman's theory (1959). His theory was used to discuss the study's actual knowledge contribution. This method thus had an abductive approach, where the central part of the method is a research process involving interaction between theory and empiricism without any predetermined assumptions (Wilhelmsson & Damber, 2022). Although discussions of alienation have historically been associated with Hegelian and Marxist intellectual traditions, the concept has undergone further development and can be used to describe the situation of knowledge workers, also called white-collar<sup>1</sup> occupations, in modern society (Mills, 1951). A white-collar worker, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is a person with a university degree, in this case, adjunct lecturers in teacher education. When it comes to Karl Marx's theories of alienation, he described workers as manual laborers within industries and their position as alienated in a capitalist societal system. Today, a larger group of people in western society work outside of the manufacturing industry, leading to a need for a new interpretation of the concept of alienation. The development of the theory can be used to shed light on the conditions of existing workgroups in society, including adjunct lecturers, who thereby also become a type of white-collar workers. The concept of alienation can be described and defined in many ways depending on different theorists and time

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of white-collar workers derives from the American sociologist, C. Wright Mills who published the book *White collar* in the 1950s, describing social alienation and formation of a new middle class in the USA.

eras (Leopold, 2022). In a sociological perspective, Seeman (1959) introduced an evolved model for analyzing alienation by addressing five alternative meanings of alienation in the workplace: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement.

Seeman (1959) explains the concept of powerlessness as when an individual feels powerless and does not believe they can influence their situation within the framework of a social system as a workplace. It is a discrepancy between the individual's needs and the demands of the workplace. Meaninglessness, on the other hand, implies that the individual does not see their role, cannot grasp the work, and that the overall picture is lost within the organization where they operate. Normlessness can be described as a situation where the individual no longer shares the organization's goals, but rather experiences a distance which can lead to normlessness in work. The concept of isolation, on the other hand, implies an individual who does not subscribe to the typical merits highly valued within the given workplace; in academia, this could for instance be many publications in high-ranking journals. If the individual does not see it as valuable, it can contribute to isolation in the academic context where the system ranks this behavior highly. The last concept highlighted by Seeman is self-estrangement, which can be understood as a loss of pride in one's own work, where the inner motivation for the work's long-term goals disappears.

## **Method**

The regional university college, where the study has been conducted, has offered teacher education since the 1990s and can be described as a medium-sized institution located in central Sweden. During the years 2019-2021 there had been an extensive employment of adjunct lecturers. Choosing the participants was made by a targeted selection due to the design of the study (Buchanan & Bryman, 2011). The adjunct lecturers who were asked to participate in the study were relatively newly employed at the time, and all of them taught within the educational science core in teacher education and had most of their employment at the university college. Fifteen teachers were invited to participate in the study, since it was these fifteen individuals who were hired during this period, ten of whom agreed to participate.

The study was carried out in two steps, firstly respondents wrote a reflection about their initial time as adjunct lecturers. Secondly interviews were conducted in

the workplace where they were put in pairs to support each other and frame the discussion during the interview. The adjuncts were paired based on their work within the same teacher education program. The reflection material is not included in the data analysis since it was primarily meant to stimulate the adjunct lecturers' thoughts before the interviews. Due to rescheduling, two interviews were conducted as individual interviews—one of them digital. The requirement to demonstrate compliance with the participants was more important than conducting the interviews in the same way. If this could not have been done, there would potentially have been a loss of participation in the study (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014).

## Participants

All participants in the study are women, which reflects the group at the national level, at least in regional university colleges where adjunct lecturers are more frequently employed. All adjunct lecturers had extensive prior experience working in municipal schools in the education sector for more than ten years.

**Table 1.**

*Information about participants and data in the study*

Date interview 2022	Gender	Coding of respondents	Starting year at the University	Teaching CES <sup>2</sup> in	Interview type	Pages transcribed interviews
24 March	F	Tess	2019	Primary and Subject teacher education	pair interview (+Lisa)	
24 March	F	Lisa	2020	Primary and Subject teacher education	pair interview (+Tess)	19 pages
24 March	F	Catherine	2020	Preschool education	pair interview (+Lisa)	
24 March	F	Isa	2020	Preschool education	pair interview (+Catherine)	24 pages
25 March	F	Helen	2020	Preschool and primary education	Digital individual interview	25 pages
31 March	F	Maria	2020	Preschool and Primary education	pair interview (+Sophie)	

<sup>2</sup> CES, Core Education Subjects—in Swedish: *Utbildningsvetenskaplig kärna*.



31 March	F	Sophie	2021	Preschool education	pair interview (+Maria)	24 pages
4 April	F	Jess	2019	Primary education	pair interview (+Linda)	
4 April	F	Linda	2020	Primary education	pair interview (+Jess)	32 pages
4 April	F	Angelique	2019	Primary education	individual interview	30 pages Pages in total: 154

### A hermeneutic approach

A hermeneutic approach starts with individuals' lived experiences and how they perceive things, i.e., in what way phenomena/events and experiences provide subjective meaning to individuals. The hermeneutic approach can range from a specific methodological approach to a more philosophical view of human existence through a phenomenological standpoint. Thus, the approach allows for multiple entries into a material. One of the key concepts within the approach is the *lifeworld*, which concerns how the individual experiences and how new experiences are added to existing knowledge to expand the individual's horizon of understanding. Cronqvist (2019) emphasizes that discussing one's own lifeworld can be challenging since individuals take things for granted, which Husserl describes as the natural attitude. Humans are constantly in a pre-understanding of something, which can be described as seeing things through our own prejudice (Gadamer, 1989). Therefore, what humans constantly do is interpret to understand and create meaning through lived experiences. When the researcher's gaze is directed towards a material, such as interview data, it involves an interpretive process that seeks meaning through the principle of part-whole, or the hermeneutic spiral (Ödman, 2007). We gain access to the world through language and dialogue, and we focus on the language's function as a bearer of meaning through '*language as a medium that our whole experience of the world, and especially hermeneutical experience, unfolds*' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 457).

In this study an interpretation model was used and originally developed by Davey (2013). The background for this was to find a model that could help interpret teacher educators' experiences in relation to its history, as a marginalized group, constantly negotiating within its governance system, and gain insights into their professional world as teacher educators. The methodology is based on hermeneutic

empirical grounds to describe teachers' professional identity, life and being. The thematization originates from several conducted interview studies with teacher educators where the ontological challenge was to make these thematizations explicit to be interpreted and utilized by others. These themes should not be seen as guiding the empirical data, but rather they are already present in the material being analyzed through its research questions. The themes—*becoming*, *knowing*, *doing*, *being* and *belonging*—are used to interpret the adjunct lecturers' descriptions. All the themes can originate back to the lifeworld of the teacher educators and unfold different lenses—in this case, the adjuncts' experiences, in their professional lives. The first theme, referred to as *becoming*, focuses on their motivation for and experiences of becoming teacher educators. The second theme, referred to as *knowing*, is about how they perceive their own knowledge base in relation to the knowledge base they need to have as teacher educators. The third theme, referred to as *doing*, encompasses all the tasks to be carried out within the context of teacher education, such as planning, teaching, assessment, attending meetings, research, and other professional assignments. The fourth and final theme consists of both *being* and *belonging*, and these two categories are about how teacher educators emotionally perceive themselves within the context of teacher education. It pertains to their academic self-image and how they perceive themselves as belonging to the professional culture prevailing at the institution (Davey, 2013).

### **Interpretation act**

The material was interpreted through Davey's (2013) themes, via an analysis where the data was initially placed into these different dimensions of values. The interpretations were then tested against each other through a hermeneutic dialectic, where each part is compared with the entirety of the material (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019; Larsson, 2005).

**Table 2.***Example of data interpretation framework*<sup>3</sup>

<b>Example Analysis framework</b>	<b>Coding</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<b>A</b>	<i>My thought when I came here was that my task could be to share all the experience I have gained from working... from actually having worked professionally with what these students are going to be educated in. To share my experiences. But what I feel is that it's not good enough in some way.</i>	Dimensions of becoming adjunct lecturers:  Previous experience versus new position	<b>Becoming</b>
<b>B</b>	<i>I never felt safe in the content. I thought it was terrible and hoped they wouldn't ask so much about the content in the course literature. I hope they don't ask about that, because I can base a lot of the knowledge on my own experience, but I didn't know everything I should know.</i>	Dimensions of their own professional knowledge base:  Previous knowledge base versus new knowledge required	<b>Knowing</b>
<b>C</b>	<i>What I found challenging was having to juggle so many things at once. Being enrolled in multiple courses at the same time, and having to keep track of all the assessment moments with different codes. It was a lot to handle.</i>	Dimensions of the daily work and the professional tasks:  Previous work tasks versus new work tasks	<b>Doing</b>
<b>D</b>	<i>Well, sometimes in certain group situations, I get the feeling that I'm really at the bottom of the hierarchy.</i>	Dimensions of adjunct lecturers' initial experiences of fitting into the professional culture:  Previous position versus new position in the workplace	<b>Being &amp; Belonging</b>

<sup>3</sup> When it comes to coding the teachers' statements, they may sometimes overlap into different categories but have been selected to illustrate one of the themes within the framework of each respective theme.

## **Results**

The results are presented around the themes where adjunct lecturers lived experiences during their initial time in teacher education in Sweden are described through different lenses of being. In the first theme, the adjunct lecturers describe dimensions of becoming teacher educators during their initial time at teacher education.

### *Becoming*

When adjunct lecturers describe their thoughts about starting to work at the university, they highlight several different aspects in their conversations. Tess talks about a longing for a new challenge in her job:

Oh, well, I think the biggest challenge was probably that there was an immense amount of work, in contrast to the school where I had been in routine for almost seventeen years and things were done automatically. That's why I sought to leave and come here to [to the university]. (Tess)

Tess describes that it became somewhat of a work shock to leave a familiar job that was done routinely and embark on her teaching career at the teacher education program. At the same time, there is a striving for a new challenge as the previous job no longer provided the desired level of challenge. Helen, on the other hand, describes an expectation on getting closer to research:

Well, what I find sad and what I had different expectations for when I started at the university, was that we would have a clearer collaboration with research...I was told that I would be part of a research environment, for example. On paper, I am, but I mean, I am not really involved there. I have to say that I am not. I sit in on some meetings and listen, but for the most part, it is quite incomprehensible what they are talking about. (Helen)

Helen had a vision when she started at the university that involved becoming part of a research group. But in reality, she experienced something else. She describes a gap between the researchers and the adjunct lectures where she feels she cannot contribute to the ongoing discussions. Another respondent describes the value of being an experienced teacher as a positive aspect of entering teacher education:

My thought when I came here was that my task could be to share all the experience I have gained from working...from actually having worked professionally with what these students are going to be educated in. To share my experiences. But what I feel is that it's not good enough in some way. That I have to be something more or something else. I think that's been really tough. That it's not enough...of course, one should have a lot of knowledge about this, and everything else, but it feels like it's not good enough, to have worked for twenty-seven years as a teacher here. It's not worth a penny. (Maria)

Maria describes a wish to contribute to her students' education through her long previous experience as a teacher in the municipality. This is an initial intention of becoming a teacher educator for her. However, she describes feeling that having teaching experience alone is not sufficient for teaching within the teacher education program. All the adjunct lecturers highlight different aspects of their initial intentions of becoming teacher educators that involved starting a new challenge in life, contributing with their teacher experience and getting in contact with research. Several of the adjunct lecturers, subsequently, describe a collision between their expectations and what they experienced during their first period as lecturers.

### *Knowing*

In the category formulated as *knowing*, the adjunct lecturers describe their initial perception of their own professional knowledge base. Many of the participants in the study describe their previous knowledge base as not being sufficient when entering teacher education. Catherine describes her situation as a new adjunct lecturer:

I don't know what the biggest challenge is, it was probably more like being new and knowing your profession but suddenly not knowing your profession at all. You sit there and see your colleagues have a lot to do but you can't do anything because you can't help them because you don't know what to do. I thought that was the biggest frustration in the beginning that I couldn't help anywhere. (...) I felt just like...I never felt safe in the content. I thought it was terrible and hoped they wouldn't ask so much about the content in the course literature. I hope they don't ask about that, because I can base a lot of the knowledge on my own experience, but I didn't know everything I should know. I thought that was terribly difficult. (Catherine)

The knowing dimension presents itself through the feeling knowledge loss. Catherine was an experienced teacher entering teacher education, however, she feels ignorant and uncertain in how to approach both colleagues and students in her new position, as well as the literature. She also expresses the feeling of being unsafe. Like Catherine, Jess says that she had to read piles of literature to meet the level of knowledge that she felt was required in the situation. It was an overwhelming feeling:

So, I really had to start studying. I've never studied so much. During my whole life. I've had a lot to do in studies before, but this was like... so I was sitting with stacks of books at home. I remembered my husband saying at home, you're nuts! (Jess)

However, Linda describes that there were also no clear guidelines for completing the tasks, and therefore much was left up to the individual lecturer, which created a stressful situation:

There are no clear frameworks, this is how it is, this is what you have to deal with, and I experienced that, it made me stressed, because if you are to be able to be completely like this, i.e. completely messy, then you have to have a clear framework, but also you are expected... you have tasks and you are expected to do them. It doesn't matter if you are new to the job and have a longer starting distance or if you have been twenty-five years in the job, you are expected to do the same tasks at the same time. I think it's very strange. (Linda)

Regarding the dimension of *knowing*, Linda emphasizes that the expectations placed on new adjunct lecturers were equally high as those on individuals who had been in the profession for many years, and that the time allocation required to perform tasks is equal for both groups. Linda questions this perspective on knowledge and competence. Another dimension regarding knowledge and *knowing* involves the feeling of not being a researcher:

I often end up with the question, who am I to say this because I am not a researcher, but I am a schoolteacher with a master's degree but I still have no importance, so who am I to say this? In that way, you always must refer to some research so that there will be some importance in it. (Lisa)

Lisa, like other adjunct lecturers in the study, returns to the notion that there are those who can, and that there is a group that is not considered knowledgeable enough—which includes teacher educators without a doctoral degree. Here, a hierarchy of knowledge is described that the new adjunct lecturers appear to pick up on within the organization.

### *Doing*

Many of the respondents describe what they felt during their initial time getting into the daily work and the professional tasks at the university. Helen describes her first encounter with the workplace and lesson planning in higher education:

It was like stepping into a spaceship, almost. I was so scared; I mean I was absolutely terrified for my first lecture. I think I prepared for it for about two weeks definitely. I prepared for a three-hour lecture for two weeks and then I went and bought new linen pants because I wanted to look like someone who works at a university. (Helen)

Helen's description emphasizes a sense of overwhelming emotion when she describes her new workplace as 'a spaceship'. Planning a lesson took a long time due to the unfamiliar format of lecturing. Getting acquainted with the pedagogical context was also a challenge. She also describes that there was an idea of how a teacher at a prestigious institution should look like and this required a new set of clothes. Sophie describes the complex role in another way:

What I found challenging was having to juggle so many things at once. Being enrolled in multiple courses at the same time, and having to keep track of all the assessment moments with different codes. It was a lot to handle. I felt that it would have been helpful if I could have limited myself to focusing on just one or two courses where I could invest more time and effort. (Sophie)

Being an adjunct lecturer involves a lot of responsibilities, and working on multiple things simultaneously is described as a challenge. One of the other respondents, Jess, describes the workload as overwhelming:

I don't have any colleagues and I just had to bury my head in the books and work like crazy, every evening and every weekend. It was all about books, books, books, and then the computer in the middle. (Jess)

Jess and the other teachers in the study describe the initial period of familiarizing themselves with their tasks as overwhelming, confusing, and difficult to prioritize. Being new and thrown into multiple new courses is described as stressful, which means that the new adjunct lecturers work extensively to complete their lectures.

### *Being and Belonging*

The aspect of *belonging* pertains to adjunct lecturers' initial experiences of fitting in the professional culture at the university. Many of the lecturers describe experiencing a clear academic hierarchy where they are unsure of their position at the workplace. One of the adjunct lecturers expresses:

Well, that's one of the aspects that I have found to be the most negative about starting at the university, that I have felt...I don't recognize it from any other world either, in the professional life, neither as a teacher nor as a special educator or in other work assignments when I was younger, that there is such a clear hierarchy that does not really depend on who knows best or who can provide input on this issue. Instead, it is often the academic credentials that counts. (Helen)

Helen talks about feeling excluded as an equal colleague due to a lack of the right academic credentials. Feeling a sense of belonging in the workplace means that the knowledge an individual possesses is acknowledged and highlighted. Maria highlights another dimension of belonging related to the dialogue in the professional context:

In my...from my perspective and wanted to be involved but felt like it became so confusing, and I really felt like we weren't speaking the same language, and I don't really know what it is that...but maybe I don't really understand what they're saying. Somehow, it's really like we're not...I don't know if they have more knowledge or different knowledge or different ways of expressing themselves, but I feel like...we're not reaching each other. (Maria)

Maria describes how the language used within academia and among researchers feels foreign to a new adjunct lecturer. She perceives it as if they are speaking different languages, which contributes to a sense of "us" and "them." Lisa talks of the workload and the expectations:



Well, sometimes in certain group situations, I get the feeling that I'm really at the bottom of the hierarchy. The adjunct lecturers get to do those course coordinator tasks that are quite demanding. They get to do a lot of teaching, which I really enjoy, but it's also expected that I further my education so that I can eventually become an examiner. (Lisa)

If you are not a researcher, you are not allowed to do certain things within your position as mentioned above. Lisa, like some of the other adjunct lecturers, describes a feeling of a hierarchy within the workplace. She positions herself as lower in the current hierarchy because she is only an adjunct lecturer, and their main task is to teach on the teacher training programs. Sophie tries to express what she felt when she was new in the workplace:

When I came here, I felt like...you understand, a lower than low creature or something like that. I experienced in meetings and such that I wasn't really listened to, or sort of like, yeah, but what do you say. So, if I said something it was like...I don't know, if it's just my feeling but I thought it was...yeah, I found it difficult and tough. (Sophie)

Sophie's description visualizes a feeling of alienation during her first time at the workplace. This consisted of not being heard or made invisible in meetings. The feeling of belonging was missing, and she did not feel included in the workplace.

## **Discussion**

In an era of a restructured teacher education influenced by neo-liberal governance, there has been an increase of the demands placed on teacher educators, including adjunct lecturers (Angervall et al., 2020; Wahlström & Alvunger, 2015). The academicization of teacher education has led to a situation where adjunct lecturers find themselves navigating between the need to ground education in practical experience and advancing their academic credentials as they are not sufficient. In this study, it becomes apparent that newly appointed adjunct lecturers face numerous challenges during their initial period of employment within teacher education. These challenges are collectively experienced and expressed both structurally and emotionally within the context of teacher education programs. In the study, the respondents consist entirely of women, who often are found in adjunct lecturer positions within teacher education and are a marginalized group in

academia (Angervall & Beach, 2020; Kalm, 2019; Selberg & Anving, 2018). Challenges are evident across all the mentioned themes of becoming, knowing, doing, being and belonging (Davey, 2013). From an emotional aspect, all participants in the study describe various elements that emotionally affected them during their initial time as adjunct lecturers. The structural aspect is not separate from the emotional aspect but closely intertwined in the descriptions of lived experiences. The initial period as adjunct lecturers is described as exclusively tough, stressful, crowded with parallel courses, extensive reading of new literature, and attempting to grasp a new teaching format.

Regarding the first structural aspect of how the adjunct lecturers perceive their new workplace, they express encountering an organization that does not include them optimally with the knowledge base they offer. It concerns how they are addressed or engaged in matters related to education and research contexts. The adjunct lecturers also describe experiencing the academic structure as problematic because it is clearly hierarchical, and their opinions are not valued as highly as those of researchers. These experiences are also present in other research regarding adjunct lecturers (Rex, 2020; Sandström & Waldenström 2012). Belonging to a research environment is not the same as truly gaining access to research and being part of the knowledge production at the institution. The second structural aspect concerns the work structure within teacher education. Here, adjunct lecturers express the experience of a fragmented assignment with very high demands, feeling uncertain about how to approach the task initially. The lived mission stretch is apparent (Angervall & Baldwin, 2021). Despite all the informants having substantial experience when starting their work in teacher education, they all reported some form of competence loss, feeling less knowledgeable and less appreciated in their new role.

The results need to be further contextualized and discussed based on Seeman's theory (1959) on work alienation. In the essence of adjunct lectures experiences, there is a work situation that negatively affects them. It cannot be ignored that many in the study highlight the problematic academic hierarchy, contributing to the feeling of exclusion which highly impacts the feeling of belonging in the workplace. While the study was conducted in a Swedish higher educational setting, the results reflect findings in other studies (Angervall & Baldwin, 2021). When the results are interpreted from the position taken by adjunct lecturers, the white-collar worker (Mills, 1951) position emerges where the economic governance of colleges and universities in Sweden show an increased focus on performance and high demands for academic excellence. The pressure the academic structure and organization places on adjunct lecturers to advance

academically can evolve into a counterforce, as they did not choose to enter the profession primarily for these reasons. What arises then is a form of alienation where adjuncts do not feel they have control of the core of their work and cannot influence the structure of work, leading to a sense of powerlessness. When the work is experienced as instrumental and restricted without autonomy, it will lead to meaninglessness (Seeman, 1959). Both dimensions of alienation, powerlessness and meaninglessness, are highly prominent among the adjunct lecturers in the study.

There are also tendencies among the adjunct lecturers regarding Seeman's descriptions of normlessness and isolation as they express themselves regarding the demands of striving for higher academic credentials. The core values of the work are grounded, by themselves, in the legitimacy of being good educators, having praxis-knowledge and being good role models for teacher students. When the governance of teacher education does not correspond with these typical values but rather rewards those who can work according to governing guidelines, tension arises, eventually leading to self-estrangement (Seeman, 1959). The higher education system rewards a certain type of white-collar worker in a streamlined organization with a particular view on efficiency and knowledge, while adjuncts express that they operate based on a completely different value system and knowledge base. Ultimately, this can lead to a loss of pride in their work. When the adjunct lecturers began their employment at teacher education, they felt like stepping into a spaceship, which really revolves around how to navigate within the structure of education.

The lived experience expressed in the study is ultimately a statement of collision between different systems of value that currently coexist within teacher education. Some do not adopt the forced structure and choose to leave their adjunct positions<sup>4</sup>, while the rest somewhat conform to the organization's demands and force themselves into a unified form which could be described as duplicated white-collar workers in teacher education.

## **Conclusions**

In a societal perspective, the question of what it means to have a governance system that contributes to restricting critical dialogue about what education and knowledge should be in higher education needs to be addressed. In this study, it concerns the position of adjunct lecturers in teacher education, as a marginalized group within

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<sup>4</sup> Some of the adjunct lecturers have chosen to resign from their positions as this study is published.

academia. The same system restricts university lecturers and professors who experience different limitations and demands. The focus is not merely on juxtaposing groups but rather on highlighting the deleterious effects of the system on individuals. This approach does not foster scholarly discourse on education and knowledge, nor does it enhance the quality of teacher education.

### **Implications**

The results of the study have implications for revealing the difficulties that adjunct lecturers experience when entering teacher education and the explicit demands, as well as the implicit ones, forced on them. Consequently, they are alienated in their professional role, showing various forms of alienation and self-estrangement because they do not meet the requirements of academia's high standards related to academicization within the system. Directing focus towards how the structures within higher education affect individuals also provides an opportunity to discuss what could be done to support adjunct lectures during their initial period in the profession. The key consideration lies in discerning the nature of the institution, whether it be a regional college or university in which adjunct lecturers are situated and elucidating the prevailing structural dynamics within the specific academic milieu.

### **Limitations of the study**

Only one institution offering teacher education, and ten adjunct lecturers were included in the study, which could be considered a small sample size. Nevertheless, the content of the respondents' statements is detailed, and they highlight similar aspects, indicating rich data. This is not to say that additional respondents would not have been desirable. It also would have been desirable to conduct the study at multiple university colleges and old universities offering teacher education, where the proportion of adjunct faculty varies depending on whether it is an elite university or a regional university college.

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