

# A week in Halden – a trip to unlock the new door of intercultural competence

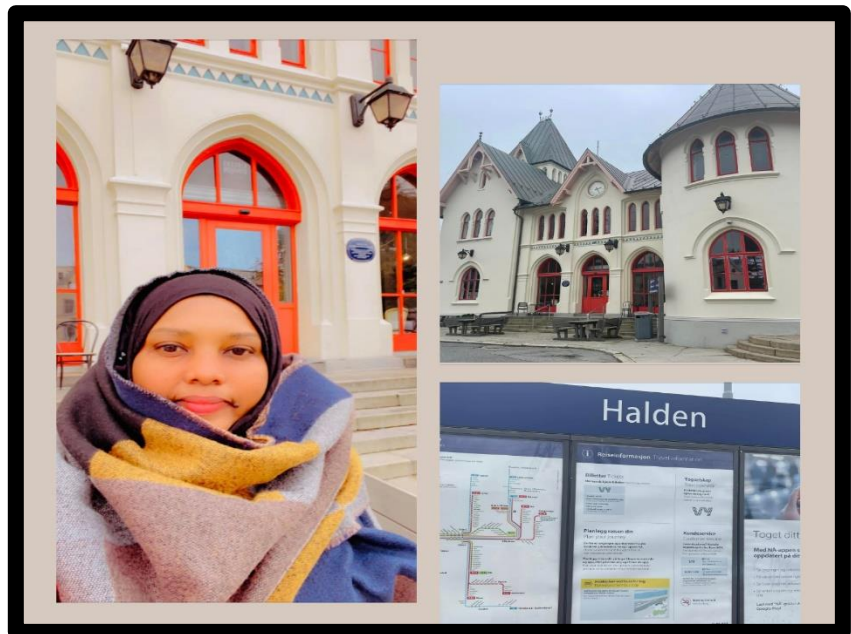
9<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> September 2023 by Maryam J. Ismail

*Have you ever wondered how teacher educators are preparing future teachers to teach and thrive in a diverse and interconnected world?*

*Join me as I recount my transformative experiences and insights from this eye-opening trip.*

*This is a weeklong adventure to unveil Halden*

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In a world that is becoming increasingly diverse and interconnected, the importance of intercultural competence in education cannot be overstated. Aspiring teachers and teacher educators hold the key to shaping the next generation of culturally aware and globally engaged educators.

Recently, I had the privilege of embarking on a transformative journey to Norway, a country known for its inclusive educational practices and commitment to diversity. The aim was to gain insights into how intercultural competence is fostered in aspiring teachers and teacher educators.

I have been in Norway several times for different purposes and project, however my recent fascinating journey from the 9 -16th September 2023 was indeed a transformative experience. This trip was part of [NoZa -Intercultural Mobility Project](#) involving students/faculty exchange programme. The trip was truly a deep dive into the world of intercultural competence in teacher education and an exploration of how teacher educators are shaping the next generation of culturally aware and effective educators.

## Norway's Educational Landscape

Norway is known for its rich cultural diversity and progressive approach to education. My visit proved that it is an ideal destination for this educational adventure. It is renowned for its high-quality education system, and I was eager to understand how they prepare teachers for a multicultural and interconnected world. Norway's inclusive policies and emphasis on intercultural competence in education make it a perfect hub for those interested to explore more on our intercultural mobility initiative between the School of Education at the [State University of Zanzibar](#) (SUZA) and Faculty of Teacher Education and Languages at [Østfold University College](#) (HiOF). I was inspired by Norway's commitment to diversity and equality. The moment I was in Norway, I confirmed that commitment is what set the stage for innovative approaches to teacher training, teacher professional development and multicultural classrooms.



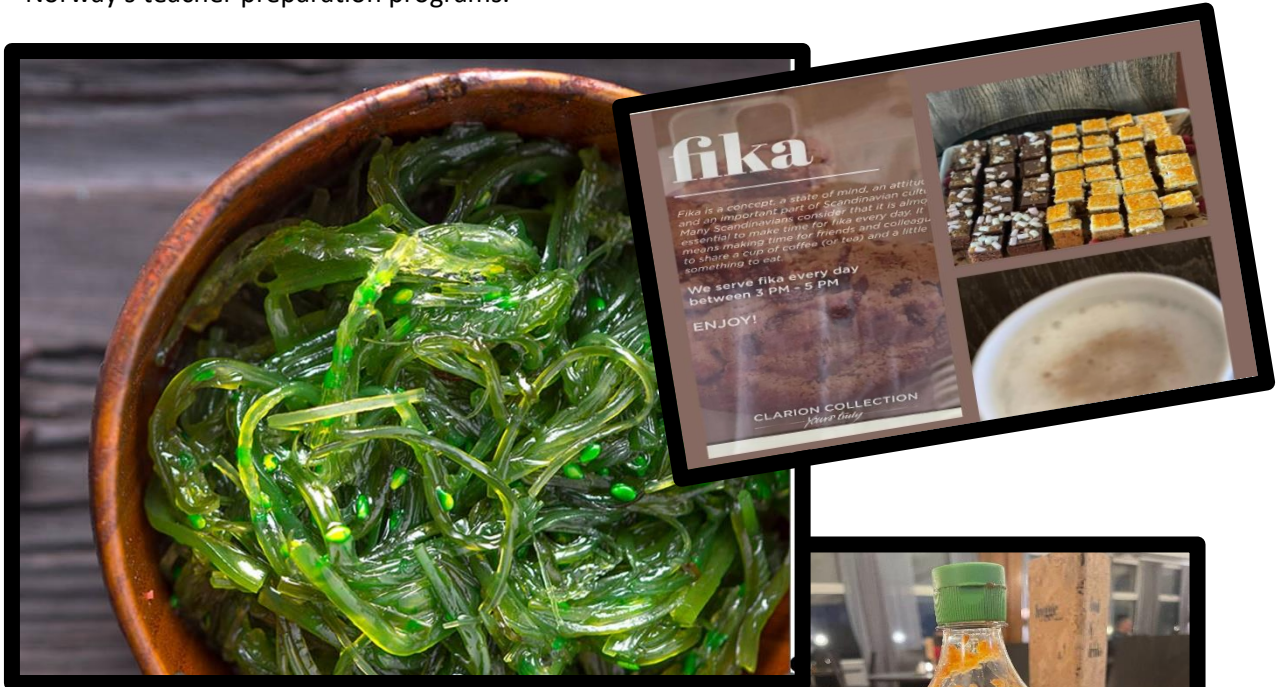
## A Glimpse of Norwegian Culture of Inclusivity

Upon my arrival in Norway, I was immediately struck by the warm and welcoming nature of the people.

Norwegian culture is deeply rooted in values of inclusivity and equality, which I soon realized extended to their educational practices. The warmth and openness of the Norwegian people were indicative of a culture deeply rooted in the values of inclusivity, equality and respect, values that were consistently mirrored in their approach to educational practices.

## Fika time

Honestly, I used to enjoy “fika” every afternoon at Clarion Hotel. I’m a calorie conscious person, but I couldn’t resist the fika time. It was lovely. This was just the beginning of my journey into the heart of Norway’s teacher preparation programs.



## Faith and Flavour

Navigating the world as a food enthusiast has been a thrilling journey, yet my sole challenge emerges from adhering to religious dietary restrictions. Despite this limitation, I've discovered a fascinating realm of culinary creativity, finding joy in exploring and adapting dishes that align with my religious beliefs.



While I thoroughly enjoyed the concept of fika, I encountered challenges with unfamiliar foods, often resorting to my phone to identify them in English. As a Muslim, adhering to dietary restrictions, particularly abstaining from pork, required extra vigilance. However, I navigated this culinary journey with curiosity and chose to adopt a vegetarian diet for a week, directing my passion for food towards exploring alternatives like seaweed. Despite these adjustments, I never found myself lacking in intriguing and satisfying culinary experiences.

I loved the green seaweed, and this hot chili sauce :)

## Exploring teacher training at Østfold

I, Maryam Jaffar Ismail and my colleague, Abdulrahman Suleiman Khamis from the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) had the opportunity to explore Østfold, where we had the privilege of learning how teachers were prepared and observing how they instill intercultural competence in their preservice programmes.

One of the key takeaways was the emphasis on diversity and inclusion, self-awareness, and cultural sensitivity. Teachers-in-training are encouraged to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds and biases, which in my view is a critical step in becoming effective educators. Student teachers are often exposed to classrooms with diverse student populations. This exposure helps them develop strategies to address the needs of a varied student body. I personally learnt that in teacher preparation in Norway, it is not just about teaching but also about understanding, appreciating, and celebrating differences.

We also learnt how student teachers in Halden have a comprehensive teacher education program that combines academic with practical teaching experience. A strong emphasis is on the integration of theory and practice in teacher education. Student teachers are exposed to educational theories and methodologies, and they are expected to apply these concepts in real-world classroom settings.

Similar to Zanzibar is school placement, student teachers are assigned to different schools where they work under the supervision of experienced mentor teachers. This placement allows them to observe and actively participate in the teaching-learning process. Also, student teachers are encouraged to reflect on their experiences, assess their teaching methods, and continuously improve their skills.

Mentor teachers play a crucial role in guiding and supporting student teachers during their practical training. They provide feedback, share insights, and help student teachers navigate the challenges of classroom teaching.

We have been told that all employed teachers at some point take leave, and student teachers become incharge of the whole school, doing all roles.

We learnt that teacher education institutions provide the students with the opportunity to take part of their education abroad: internationalization, civic education and multicultural dimension are considered important. The student must have knowledge about, and an understanding of multicultural society, awareness of cultural differences and being able to use these as a positive resource. They must have knowledge about human rights and the rights of indigenous people. The teachers must promote international cooperation and solidarity to achieve sustainable development and reduce social differences.

Student teachers learnt that assessment is not a final exam but a series of checkpoints. Assessment methods may include anything - from classroom observations, portfolio, handwork, collaborative assessment, and evaluations of their ability to implement pedagogical strategies.

### *Key takeaways:*

*diversity and inclusion,  
integration of theory and  
practice, school placement,  
reflective practice,  
collaboration with mentor  
teachers, continuous  
assessment and professional  
development.*

I was also impressed to learn that teacher education in Norway was no destination; it was a perpetual journey. Student teachers learnt early on that the quest for knowledge had no end.



## Multicultural classroom with music and hands-on learning

We (Maryam and Abdulrahman) had the opportunity to explore Østfold University College in Halden. We called it Halden adventures...

We participated in [Gunhild Brønne Bjørnstad](#) and [Jon Sverre Thorstensen's](#) class<sup>1</sup> as active observers. The class was multicultural. The class encouraged open dialogue, active listening, and the exploration of various teaching methods to cater to students from diverse backgrounds. The interactive nature of these sessions made it evident that learning through experience is a powerful approach.



<sup>1</sup> Aesthetic Learning Processes (15ECTS) is a module in the course [Nordic Citizenship Education](#).

We witnessed how students got the opportunity to develop creativity, interact, reflect, and communicate using aesthetic means and tools. The lesson facilitated creative learning through different forms of aesthetic expression, dissemination, and presentation, which helped them with self-confidence.



One of the highlights of my trip was witnessing how Østfold incorporates inclusive teaching strategies into their teacher preparation program. Teachers are taught to adapt their teaching styles to meet the needs of every student. The concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was an integral part of the educational framework, ensuring that all students have equal access to knowledge.

I like to post on social media, and I caught people by surprise when they saw me hold a guitar.



## Is teaching a feminised profession?

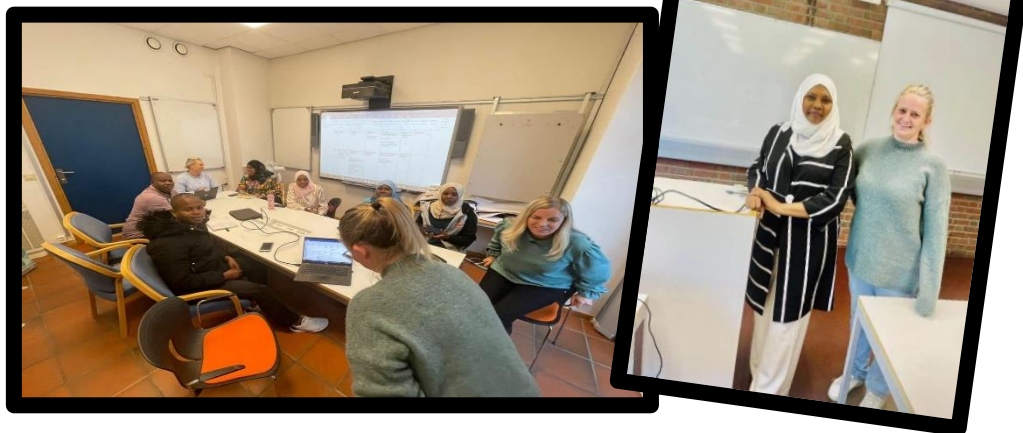
I am a teacher and I love everything about teaching. Interestingly, I have observed something familiar-closer to home. It looks like both in Norway and Zanzibar, teaching is a highly feminized occupation. In the Zanzibar context, more than two-thirds of teachers from all levels of education are women. The proportion of female teachers decreases as the level of education increases. You will find more female teachers at pre-primary and primary; they decrease at lower-secondary and upper-secondary, and then you will find few women in tertiary levels. I previously thought since Norway is considered to have high gender equality at home, at work and in public life, I would find a different student teachers' profile.

## Conversations and Connections: with aspiring teachers, schoolteachers, and teacher educators

While exploring Østfold, I had the privilege of engaging in insightful conversations with educators and schoolteachers. These interactions provided me with a deep understanding of the significance of intercultural competence in the teaching profession.

I had an opportunity to share an overview of Zanzibar -its culture, people, language and education system, State University of Zanzibar and School of Education. Throughout my exploration, I engaged in enlightening conversations with educators at Østfold.

We also meet schoolteachers (hosts) to pre-plan the welcoming visits to school of our six students from Zanzibar.



## An interesting fresh Book Launch

I enjoyed meeting book editors and colleagues at [OsloMet](#) for book launch where I also featured as an author. You can read the chapter that I wrote with Gunhild Brønne Bjørnstad, Dunia yetu – Our word – Vår verden, in the book [Performative innganger til undervisning – Perspektiver på skapende læring med tverrfaglige tema](#), which is edited by Gunhild Brønne Bjørnstad and Stine Nielsen Ellinggard.



## Indoor Teaching and Learning Spaces at Halden

Immersing myself in the teaching and learning environment of Halden was an absolute joy. The educational atmosphere exudes warmth and innovation, creating a nurturing space that fosters both personal and professional growth.

Moreover, the Gunhild's office at Halden added an extra layer of positivity to my experience. The collaborative spirit and shared dedication to educational excellence created an uplifting work environment, making each day at Halden a delightful opportunity for mutual support and professional camaraderie.







*What an inspiring setting  
for teaching, growth,  
collaboration, and endless  
possibilities!*



## **Cultural Heritage: A visit to Fredriksten Fortress**

I had an opportunity to visit Fredriksten Fortress - a guardian of Halden history. It is an 8-minute drive (4.3 km) from Østfold University College to Fredriksten Fortress. Thank you Nazdar, Ingrid and Ingrid for organizing the trip. We missed Rezarta. These courageous students chose to come to Zanzibar to explore and learn what Zanzibar has in education and day to day life.



I learnt about Fredriksten Fortress before I was in Halden through classroom assignments that allow students to talk about cultural heritage.

In Zanzibar, I am very active in heritage issues. Being the Chairperson of Zanzibar Stone Town Heritage Society, my passion for history and cultural heritage led me to the fascinating Fredriksten Fortress in Halden. Exploring this historical gem not only deepened my connection to Stone Town but also fueled my activist spirit, inspiring a commitment to preserving, safeguarding, and sharing the rich stories embedded within these ancient walls. prompting a commitment to preservation and celebration of our shared heritage.

At that moment, the discussions about cultural heritage were a priceless endeavor, as it served as the guardian of our shared history, nurturing a more profound comprehension of diverse backgrounds, and emphasizing the common threads that bind us together, fostering unity in our global community.

These meaningful exchanges between me and the first NoZa Student Team (Nazdar Shawali, Ingrid Sørensen, Rezarta Obrtinca and Ingrid Schau) granted me a profound insight into the indispensable significance of intercultural competence within the teaching profession. The narratives shared and the lessons gleaned during these interactions were not only invaluable but also illuminated the transformative impact that cultural awareness can have in the realm of education.



## Inspired by the consistent use of local language in education, and everywhere 😊

While in Norway, I was so inspired with the use of the local language even though everyone knows English. I was inspired more when I observed that faculty members chose to switch to the local familiar language in the department meeting. They want to be more comfortable using a familiar language than a foreign language.

And Norwegian was everywhere 😊

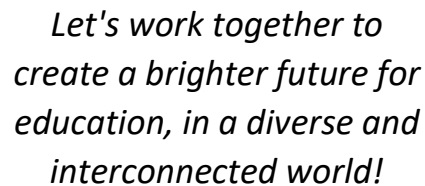


## Bringing the Lessons Home from Norway to Zanzibar

My journey to Norway to learn about preservice teacher preparation in intercultural mobility was indeed a transformative experience, and Østfold was indeed an ideal location for my exploration of intercultural competence in teacher preparation. It reaffirmed the idea that in our increasingly diverse and interconnected world, preparing teachers with intercultural competence is not just important, but imperative. Ostfold 's approach to teacher preparation serves as a model that many countries can learn from and draw inspiration. I returned home inspired to contribute to a more inclusive educational system. I returned home with a renewed commitment to contribute to a more culturally aware educational system.

As I conclude this post, I am reminded of the significance of sharing the knowledge and insights gained from this extraordinary journey. The principles of intercultural competence, inclusivity, and open-mindedness should be integrated into teacher preparation programs worldwide. The paradigm has shifted from training teachers indoors to the World. By doing so, we can empower educators and we can prepare teachers to excel in a diverse and globalized educational landscape, ultimately enriching the lives of students and fostering a brighter, more harmonious world.

I hope my post has piqued your interest and inspired you to explore the realm of intercultural competence in teacher preparation and teacher educator development.



*Let's work together to  
create a brighter future for  
education, in a diverse and  
interconnected world!*