



**UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU**

Turku School of
Economics

Integration of highly skilled immigrants in Finnish organisations

Challenges and enablers

Master's thesis
in International Business

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18.6.2024
Turku

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

Master's thesis

Subject: International Business

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Title: Integration of highly skilled immigrants in Finnish organisations – Challenges and enablers

Supervisors: Ph.D. Eriikka Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, M.Sc. Elena Sivolapova

Number of pages: 92 pages + appendices 9 pages

Date: 18.6.2024

Highly skilled immigrants are seen as a competitive advantage for many countries in a global discussion and raises interest on a global scale. From an international business perspective, the question of highly skilled workforce has many layers. Finland is a country taking part in the global war for talent – the wish to attract more highly skilled immigrants is noted both in the public discussion as well as within the academic community. Thus, researchers, professionals, policymakers and organisations are trying to find ways to both attract the highly skilled individuals, while being challenged with the talent retention and the integration of the immigrants working in the organisation. In this study the theoretical framework is accompanied by the look into Finnish media landscape and the public discussion. The literature review includes a look into the international mobility and immigration literature.

This thesis aims to explore how the highly skilled immigrants view their own integration process in a Finnish organisation. The thesis sheds light on the individual experiences and draws a picture of the enablers and the challenges affecting their integration that the individuals have experienced in the Finnish companies and in Finland. The study was conducted as a qualitative study and the data collection method was semi-structured interviews. Seven interviews were conducted, with seven individuals from different backgrounds, with one uniting factor: all of the informants are highly skilled immigrants working in Finland and have made the decision to stay in the country for a longer period of time. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

This study provides insight into the factors that either support or hinder the integration process of the highly skilled immigrants. According to the findings, the key factors supporting the integration include workplace actions, personal characteristics, support from colleagues and family. The data reveals some new, emerging themes as well, concluding unofficial support, language and flexibility of Finnish worklife as some of the themes that support integration of individuals. The challenges include language barriers, cultural differences, some personal characteristics, lack of workplace actions, laws and policies. The emerging themes that the data revealed as challenges with integration are stereotypes and lack of correct information from official sources.

The main findings of the empirical research are mostly in line with the prior literature and the theoretical framework of the thesis. The best integration outcomes are achieved when both the individual and the organisation are willing to take part in the integration process. Integration must be seen as an reciprocal process, where everyone involved are active and adaptive. Personal motivation and willingness to adapt play a key role in the integration, yet the companies and organisations have a significant role in supporting the individuals to fit in the organisation and find the meaningfulness and motivation to find their own place in the organisation as well as in the host country.

Key words: Integration, workplace integration, highly skilled immigrant, qualified immigrant, talent retention, immigrant, Finnish workplaces

Pro gradu -tutkielma

Oppiaine: Kansainvälinen liiketoiminta

Tekijät: Siiri Sanni Elisabet Silvasti

Otsikko: Kansainvälisten osaajien integraatio suomalaisissa organisaatioissa – haasteet ja mahdollistajat

Ohjaaja(t): KTT Eriikka Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, M.Sc. Elena Sivolapova

Sivumäärä: 92 sivua + liitteet 9 sivua

Päivämäärä: 18.6.2024

Kansainväliset huippuosaajat nähdään kilpailuetuna monelle maalle maailmanlaajuisessa keskustelussa ja aihe herättää keskustelua globaalilla tasolla. Kansainvälisen liiketoiminnan näkökulmasta kysymystä huippuosaajista voidaan ajatella monella tasolla. Suomi ottaa osaa maailmanlaajuiseen kilpailuun, jossa kilpailaan osaajista, ja toive houkuttaa lisää korkean tason osaajia on huomioitu niin julkisessa keskustelussa kuin akateemisen yhteisön sisällä. Näistä syistä tutkijat, organisaatiot sekä päättäjät yrittävät löytää keinoja yhtäläillä houkuttaa uusia osaajia Suomeen, samalla kun heitä haastavat organisaatioissa jo olevien kykyjen säilyttäminen ja maahanmuuttajien integroituminen organisaatioon. Tässä tutkimuksessa teoreettisen viitekehyksen lisäksi ajankohtainen julkinen keskustelu on saatettu osaksi tutkielmaa lyhyellä katsauksella mediakenttään ja artikkeleihin, joita suomalaisessa mediassa on kirjoitettu muutaman viime vuoden aikana. Kirjallisuuskatsaus keskittyy huomioimaan kansainvälisen liikkuvuuden ja integraatioon liittyvän kirjallisuuden ja teorian.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää kuinka Suomessa asuvat korkean tason osaajat kokevat integraatioprosessinsa suomalaisissa organisaatioissa. Tutkimus selvittää yksilöiden omia kokemuksia sekä auttaa hahmottamaan, minkälaisia tukevia tekijöitä tai esteitä yksilöt kokevat integraatioon vaikuttaviksi tekijöiksi suomalaisissa organisaatioissa. Tämä tutkielma on kvalitatiivinen tutkimus, ja tiedonkeruumenetelmänä toimivat puolistrukturoidut haastattelut. Tutkimuksen data on kerätty seitsemän yksilön haastatteluiden avulla, joilla on yksi yhdistävä tekijä: he kaikki ovat huippuosaajia, jotka työskentelevät Suomessa, ja he ovat päättäneet jäädä Suomeen pidemmäksi aikaa. Haastatteluilla kerätyt tiedot analysoitiin teemaattisella analyysillä.

Tämä tutkimus käsittelee tukevia ja estäviä tekijöitä, joilla on vaikutusta korkean tason osaajien integraatioon. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että integraatiota tukevat työpaikan tarjoama tuki, henkilökohtaiset persoonallisuuspiirteet sekä perheen ja kollegoiden tuki. Haastatteluissa kerätty tieto toi ilmi myös uusia teemoja, jotka vaikuttavat integraatioon suomalaisissa organisaatioissa. Nämä ovat epävirallinen tuki, suomalaisten hyvä kielitaito ja suomalaisen työelämän joustavuus. Integraatiota hidastavia tekijöitä olivat kielimuuri, kulttuuriset erot, henkilökohtaiset piirteet, työpaikan toiminnan puuttuminen sekä lait ja käytännöt. Uusia ilmitulleita teemoja ovat stereotyyppiä niin maahanmuuttajilla itsellään kuin organisaatioissa sekä haasteet löytää oikeaa ja ajantasaista tietoa virallisista lähteistä.

Empiirisen tutkimuksen havainnot ovat linjassa edeltävän kirjallisuuden ja teoreettisen viitekehyksen kanssa. Parhaat lopputulokset integraatiolle saavutetaan, kun niin yksilö kuin organisaatio ottavat osaa integraatioprosessiin. Integraatio tulisi nähdä vastavuoroisena prosessina, jossa kaikki osaaottavat ovat aktiivisia ja sopeutuvaisia. Henkilökohtainen motivaatio ja halu integroitua ovat suuressa roolissa integraatioprosessin edetessä, mutta myös organisaatioilla on suuri rooli maahanmuuttajan integraation tukijana. Organisaatioilla on suuri rooli niin integraation tukijana organisaatioissa kuin merkityksellisyyden ja motivaation löytämiseksi uudessa kotimaassa.

Avainsanat: Integraatio, työelämäintegraatio, kansainvälinen osaaja, korkean tason osaaja, osaamisen säilyttäminen, suomalaiset organisaatiot

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1 Introduction

This study examines highly skilled immigrants' experiences about their integration in Finnish organisations. The research introduces the literature on integration of immigrants, explains the concepts that are utilized in the thesis and presents what is known about the integration of highly skilled immigrants. Finally, the experiences of immigrants in Finland are collected by interviewing highly skilled immigrants currently living and working in Finland. This section presents the research background and the motivation for the study, the purpose of the research and the structure of the thesis. There are versatile studies made of integration, yet in this country-specific study the focus is on highly skilled immigrants in Finland. In this thesis the objective is to look at this phenomenon – integration of highly skilled immigrants in the workplaces in Finland. This thesis contributes to the discussion of highly skilled immigration and the theoretical framework of the factors influencing the integration of immigrants.

1.1 Background and motivation for the study

There is a scarcity of research done on the individual-level antecedents regarding integration (van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 634). Very little, or no research has been done on how highly skilled immigrants' "personality traits, cross-cultural competences or family dynamics are associated with their acculturation modes, coping effectiveness, and integration success outcomes" (Hajro et al. 2019, 346). The growing number of qualified, university-educated immigrants deserves more attention than it has got (Cerdin et al. 2014). This study is conducted to answer relevant questions related to workplace integration of immigrants and shed light on the individuals' perspectives on these matters, focusing on the highly skilled immigrants employed in Finland. Finland, as many other countries, is facing the issue of the aging population (Tilastokeskus 2016). The integration of immigrants is seen as a major challenge on a global scale.

Highly skilled immigrants are essential to the global economy. Countries and employers depend on them, to maintain their competitive advantage as well as to be able to grow economically. (United Nations 2017, 1; World Bank 2022; Ravasi et al. 2015.) The issue of labour and skills shortages are recognised all over the world, including EU area. European Commission has reported skills and labour shortages and addressed the key issues in the annual review of 2023. In the "Employment and Social Developments in Europe, Addressing labour shortages and skills gaps in the EU" -report the commission

has concluded the current situation in the labour market. The publication explains the current state of the labour market, consisting of, but not limited to, the occupations that are currently expected to face labour shortages. The occupations and fields include the healthcare sector, construction and science as well as technology sectors. Engineering and mathematics are also prone to face the skills shortage dilemma. As the publication states, there are skills shortages in both highly skilled workers as well as lower-skilled and manual occupations. (European Commission 2023.)

Finland wants to attract significantly more international experts (Valtioneuvosto 2023, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2020). Although highly skilled immigrants are essential on a global scale, the subject of integrating highly skilled people has been understudied (van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022). It is a rather difficult task to first attract skilled immigrants to the country, yet it is as demanding for the country to assist them in adjusting, integrating and obtaining career success in the host country, and thereby keep these individuals in the country while meaningfully contributing to the economy (Usanova et al. 2023, 330). Highly skilled immigrants, often holding degrees beyond bachelor level, are included in the organisation's talent pool alongside expatriates, both self-initiated and assigned. This reasons the importance of their integration, both for the immigrants themselves and for the organisations that employ them. (Cerdin et al. 2014, 163.)

The subject is broad and complex, however, this thesis is exclusively centered on the highly skilled immigrants, that have high qualifications and tertiary level education. The focus of this study is narrowed down to smaller group of people because of the wideness and versatility of the topic and for making it easier to grasp and limit the phenomenon, which holds a lot of different aspects and perspectives. There is a wide need for the future studies to take into consideration all the possible scenarios and groups of people immigrating to Finland, and this thesis has the purpose of focusing on one smaller phenomenon, which is the highly skilled immigrants that have a specific level on education. The need for this narrower view comes from the theory; many studies are concentrating on immigration in general, or integration of immigrants, but not concentrating solely on highly skilled immigration or more in depth, what the integration means in those cases (Teräs et al. 2024, 109).

1.2 Focus of the research

There are several levels that the phenomenon can be analyzed. The analysis can be conducted at the national level, considering governmental policies, or at the organisational level in relation to employment practices and the company's commitment to its workforce. The individual level, perspectives and needs associate with inclusion and integration. The latter level is studied in this thesis. The main emphasis is on the individual experiences on integration and what are the enablers that enhance the integration as well as the challenges that might affect negatively on the integration of the migrants. This study is concentrating both on the existing factors hindering the integration, and also on the possible factors enhancing and supporting integration. The individual level will be studied with a qualitative research method; the study will be conducted as interviews. This study contributes to the field of international mobility and the immigration literature.

This study focuses on highly skilled immigrants and their integration process in Finland. The aim of the study is to find out what are the challenges and the enablers in the process of integration in to the Finnish organisation and Finland as a country. The knowledge possessed right now is that Finland has many advantages as a country, but still it fails to get people to integrate in to Finland (Zafar 2019). According to undersecretary Elina Pylkkänen (Valtioneuvosto 2023) more than half of the people who have immigrated to Finland move out of the country before five years. The welfare society and relatively high salaries and high standard of living are Finland's advantages. The welfare state ideology shapes intergration initiatives both in the national as well as local level in Scandinavian countries, including Finland. (van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022.)

1.3 Purpose and structure of the study

The objective of the study is to gain knowledge of the individuals and how they view the progress of integration into Finnish organisations. The purpose of the study is highlight findings from a qualitative study on integration of immigrants. The objectives were three-fold: 1. To understand how the workplace integration is experienced by the highly skilled immigrants in Finland, 2. What challenges there are in the workplace integration process and 3. What factors are supporting the workplace integration process and acting as enablers to integration. In the literature review the challenges and enablers of integration are raised by looking at the studies and academic literature made of the

topic. In the empirical part of this study the immigrants who have moved to Finland and are currently living in the country and working in Finland in a field that represents their skills, were interviewed.

This study contributes to the literature of international business by shedding light on the individuals' viewpoints about the worklife in Finland, focusing on the integration experiences that the individuals have. The study provides a viewpoint to the phenomenon of integration by interviewing and getting the individualistic opinions from the interviewees. In Finland the phenomenon of international talents is well known and written about, yet there is an information gap in how the immigrants are integrating in to the workplaces. It is vital to fill this gap since there is a competition for talent going on in the world and it is important to structure the picture of the significant or characteristic points that contribute or hinder the integration in the Finnish working life.

This thesis aims to investigate the individuals' views about the integration into Finnish organisations. The focus is on the individual and personal level, the research seeks to find and describe the potential challenges and enablers affecting the integration of immigrants in the Finnish workplaces. The purpose of the study is specified by the research question found below.

Research question:

How do highly skilled immigrants experience the integration process in Finnish organisation?

Sub-research questions:

What are the challenges hindering integration in Finnish organization?

What are the factors supporting integration in the Finnish organization?

The main research problem is approached by using the two sub-questions. The first sub-question is aiming to find answers to what challenges the immigrants find to be hindering their integration process. The second sub-question aims to find answers to the enablers in the Finnish organisations in the immigrants' views.

The limitations of the study are the following. This study is only concentrating on the highly skilled immigrants, it excludes all other kind of immigration. The viewpoint of the

study is solely on integration in the workplace; it does not conclude the whole concept of integration in to a society, nor does it include the issues that immigrants may have in the recruiting processes. This study considers only one country, and the workplace culture of one specific country; Finland. This study is tied to time, the immigration policies and international trends and changes may change and therefore one of the limitations is also the perspective of time. The final limitation refers to the wider discussion of integration, where the society and the political decisions or country-wide decisions can be a factor in the integration process.

This study is structured by following way. The first part is introduction, which concentrates in introducing the subject and addressing the focus of the study. Second chapter concludes the theoretical background and as a literature review, it aims to find the challenges and enablers affecting highly skilled immigrants' integration in an organization, what is found so far about the phenomenon. This discussion is tied to timely aspects; some of the articles that have been written in the Finnish media are introduced, as well as some country-specific aspects; the government policies and actions that have been taken.

As this study is solely focusing on the individual views, rather than organisational, or country-wider view, the challenges and enablers of integration are solely based on the individual level. The third chapter concludes the research design and is divided into describing the research method, data collection and analysis methods. It also includes the evaluation of the study. The data is collected through semi-structured interviews, and the data collection method is justified in the above told chapter. Fourth chapter concludes the findings of the study and fifth section describes the discussion of the theoretical contribution as well as the practical implications and the recommendation for further research. Finally, the whole thesis is summarized.

2 Highly skilled immigrants' integration

Highly educated and trained immigrants are becoming noteworthy drivers for countries' innovations. This chapter focuses first on briefly explaining what concepts the thesis utilizes, then examining some of the Finnish media discussion and country initiative that are showing the topicality of the thesis, after which the integration of highly skilled immigrants is examined with the help of literature. After that both the enablers and challenges influencing the integration of highly skilled immigrants are highlighted at with the help of academic literature.

2.1 Explaining the concepts

2.1.1 Integration

Integration means the process of successfully joining or mixing with with a different group of people (Cambridge Dictionary). Both in public and academic discourse the word 'integration' has been used to refer to "processes that entail the socio-economic, political, social and cultural adaptation of newcomers" (Wessendorf & Phillimore 2019, 125). Integration can be described as a two-way process; society changes as the population becomes more diverse while immigrants acquire needed skills for working life and society. Successful integration process requires the commitment to "equality, non-discrimination and the prevention of racism as well as the promotion of positive attitudes." (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland.) Spencer and Charsley (2021, 15) have presented critique towards the concept of integration and they propose that integration should be looked as something that cannot be separated from the complexity of broader socio-economic processes of change.

2.1.2 Highly skilled immigrant

In this thesis the concept that is on the focus is highly skilled immigrants. The terms migrant and immigrant are often confused and even mixed with each other. In this chapter the difference between the two close concepts are highlighted to prevent misunderstandings and misuse of the terms, which are close but yet different. These concepts often intertwine in both public and private spheres. Within the academic community there are many concepts that overlap and are used as well; the immigrants who are working in a different country than their original home country are often referred

to as expats. Dictionaries often distinguish ‘immigrants’ from ‘migrants’. Immigrants are referred to as people who are, or intend to be, settled in their new country and taking up permanent residence (Cambridge Dictionary; Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Migrants are referred to as people who are temporarily resident. However, in public debate, and even within research specialists, these terms are used interchangeably. (Anderson & Blinder 2024, 2).

According to Habti and Elo (2018) highly skilled immigrants can be defined as individuals with high qualifications, they have contacts all around the world and have the ability to work in multi-cultural settings as well as to speak and interact in multiple languages. Salt (1997) defines highly skilled as immigrants with tertiary educational qualifications or its equivalent, although the skills can as well be acquired through experience. Välimäki et al. (2023) define highly skilled immigrants similarly to Salt - as working age persons who are highly educated, who are studying for a university degree or who, through long work experience, have acquired skills for tasks requiring a high level of expertise, and who usually have experience of working in several countries. The highly skilled immigrants often practice self-initiated expatriation – which differs from the traditional expatriation. Self-initiated expatriation means that the people are motivated to move to another country for some other reason than an organisation sending them there (Habti & Elo 2018). Yet it is noted in the prior literature that self-initiated expatriates, as a distinct group of people, are not immigrants, and therefore these concepts are not to be used interchangeably.

In this thesis the term that is used throughout the thesis is ‘immigrant’ or ‘highly skilled immigrant’. Expatriation is often mixed with immigrating; and expatriates can be divided also into different categories based on their own motivation for the migration; there are expatriates who are assigned to another country by their employer; assigned expatriates (AEs) or organisational expatriates (OEs) (Selmer & Luring 2011) and there are self-initiated expatriation (SIEs) which means the expatriate does everything by oneself; the process of moving to another country, the official work needed, seeking and finding a job just to name a few. (Suutari & Brewster 2000, 418; Suutari et al. 2018) SIEs are immigrants who have moved into a country and seek employment post-mobility (Chhinzer & Oh 2022, 215).

When comparing AEs and SIEs, there are differences that have been noted. SIE’s tend to be younger, more frequently female, more often single and often they do not have children, even if accompanied by a working partner than AEs. SIEs are distinct from AEs

in terms of motivation, their personal characteristics and their experiences during the cycles of expatriation. SIEs find host country reputation more important than AEs, who then again are more concerned with career factors. SIE's tend to undertake relatively low-status and casual roles, working at lower organizational levels than AEs. (Selmer et al. 2023, 117.) SIEs are one group of internationally mobile workers, yet there is no reliable databas of the numbers of SIEs. However, it seems like there is more self-initiated expatriation than there is assigned expatriation. Brewster et al. (2021, 329) propose that more studies are needed about SIEs.

Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels (2020, 1) state that there is no universally agreed term or definition to define highly skilled immigrants; the writers raise couple of the terms; “highly-educated” or “highly-qualified” immigrants are both used when referring to the same term. According to the authors, the definition varies depending on on the source as well as the country and context. In politics the term is based on salary scales, and for some it is the education level that is looked at, when defining the highly skilled immigrants. There are also different terms used, and this all can cause confusion in the real-life world, when discussing about the topic. Some of the highly-skilled immigrants are not referred to as immigrants at all but rather as “expatriates, lifestyle migrants, cosmopolitans, Eurostars, elite migrants or knowledge migrants” (Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2021, 2). Sometimes the people who have immigrated to a new country are called international or foreign talent (Yeoh & Lam 2016, 637). Cerdin et al. (2014) refer to highly skilled immigrants as ‘qualified immigrant’. And then again, all countries have their own translations to the words; in Finland the daily newspapers oftern refer to ‘huippuosaaja’, which would translate to a word ‘top talent’ in English.

The term migrant is used of a person who moves from a country to a country, or perhaps even back and forth. Often the term is used more specifically when referring to a migrant worker. Immigration, then again, refers to more stable and permanent stay. An immigrant has moved to another country and they have therefore permanently decided to stay in the country (Cambridge dictionary). An immigrant has made a conscious decision to leave their home, with an intention to stay in the foreign country they move to and settle there. Immigrants often go through a long vetting process to immigrate to a new country. Immigrants often become lawful permanent residents and eventually citizens. What is to be noticed is that immigrants have the freedom to return home whenever they choose to do so. (International Rescue Committee 2018.) In the Table 1 below the

intersecting concepts are introduced in a form of a table, to offer a clearer presentation of the four different concepts.

	Motivation	Length of stay	Integration
Self-initiated expatriate; SIE	Self-initiated expatriation	Temporary relocation, length of stay varies	Integration is aimed for; some connections with locals
Assigned expatriate; AE or Organizational expatriate; OE	Assigned expatriation	Temporary relocation; 3-5 years	Superficial integration; not a lot of ties to host country
Highly skilled immigrant (or e.g. highly educated immigrant; qualified immigrant)	Self-initiated	Permanent stay, repatriation is not planned, aim to stay in the host country	Integration is aimed for; ties to host country; strong connections with locals
Migrant	Self-initiated; sometimes forced or decided due to circumstances	Flexible, often moving from country to country, repatriation not planned or may be impossible	Superficial, may not aim for a lot of ties to host country

Table 1 Intersecting concepts

Above the intersecting concepts have been divided to four categories; SIEs, AE's, highly skilled immigrants and immigrants. These terms have then been further given short descriptions about the differences the concepts have regarding the motivation to move into a new country, length of stay and integration aims. The table aims to show the differences between the intersecting concepts, to provide understanding about the terms.

2.2 Takes from media 2022-2024

On European level the discussion of highly skilled immigrant and the need for the special talents has been accelerating for the past years, mostly in the 2010's. European Commission has settled an agreement in 2021, which has the goal to introduce new and more efficient rules to attract highly skilled workers to EU, with more flexible admission conditions, enhanced rights and more easier policies in moving more easily between EU countries. It is recognised that EU is competing with other destinations in the race for talent, and therefore it has been on their interest to create new rules for the non-EU skilled workers (European Commission 2021).

In Finland the latest discussion on the traditional media has been revolving around immigration as well. Alexander Kritikos, professor and a scientific member of the executive board of the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin), states in an article published by Yle (25.5.2023) that Europe is not as attractive as USA is for highly skilled immigrants. He is also noting that in Europe there is not enough people that can reply to the needs in the employment market and that Europe as a whole needs highly skilled immigration "more than ever". In the same article the interviewee who has been living in Finland for 12 years and is working in the IT field is praising Finland for the fact that in Finland English can be used and understood everywhere, and the service is possible to get in English.

One of the issues is that people come to Finland but do not stay in the country; In Helsingin Sanomat (hs.fi 10.1.2024) two interviewees who have both studied in Finnish higher education are leaving Finland due to different reasons. Both of the interviewees name a reason which explains the need to leave the country; no jobs in their own field. In the same article it is stated that the cost for Finland per one foreign student depends on the study field, but it has been estimated to be around 8000 euros per year. It has been estimated that if approximately a quarter of the foreign students would stay in Finland to work after graduation, the employment brings more taxes to Finland than the education of the foreigners in Finland has costed. In year 2000 in Finland, there were approximately 1500 foreign degree students. In 2023 the number was almost 32 000. (hs.fi 10.1.2024).

Kauppalehti (10.11.2023) has raised discussion about tax relieves for highly skilled immigrants, according to the paper this would act as an incentive to help the highly skilled persons to stay in Finland. Based on research evidence, taxation matters in this case. Work-based immigration can be attracted with temporary tax incentives, to which top

talents have seen to react strongly. The current government, with its leader and prime minister Petteri Orpo, is proposing a way to improve the tax incentives intended to attract international talents. The proposed idea would follow Danish model. The maximum working time of a key personnel is proposed to be extended from 48 months to 84 months. In this way, a fixed 32 percent withholding tax would be levied on the wage income of the key person for three years longer than at present. With this adaptation the level would be the same as in Denmark. Denmark is seen as a relevant reference point.

Kaupalehti (22.4.2023) writes about the new competence center that has a purpose of easing the process of job search efforts of immigrants living in Espoo. The difficulties and disappointment arising amongst immigrants were the reason why the center has been founded. Many immigrants face disappointments when trying to find a job that corresponds to the skills of the immigrant. Employment mismatch being the issue, the main point for the service development was to find the solutions to fix the mismatch. 450 immigrants living in Espoo get to be part of the service annually, and the results have been exceptional. More than half of the immigrants taking part in the service found employment through the service within a year. Finland, among other EU countries, has also developed some easements to residence permit practices for groups of special skills and experts (OECD 2022). According to Välimäki et al. (2023, 38) Finland's strengths in immigrants' opinions are similar; Finland is a safe country with a high standard of living, there is balance between the work life and free time. Families with kids have a positive image of Finland. Then again only few of the respondents saw Finland's salary level, job opportunities or the opportunities to advance in one's career as strengths of the country.

The latest changes made by the Finnish government are affecting the people who are working in Finland currently. The Finnish government has proposed stricter rules that would apply for the immigrants in Finland, which is criticised by a group called "Specialists in Finland", which consists of immigrants working and/or studying in Finland. The newest proposed government program as well as some ministers' attitudes against the immigrant population have raised a lot of concern within the group. (Iltalehti 25.7.2023) One perspective to the integration in Finland is also raised in an article in Helsingin Sanomat, where the reporter is writing about the small voting percentage in the presidential elections in Finland. The reporter is working as an electoral officer and reports of her experiences. She states that when she was working in the Vantaa region, where 25 % of the population is speaking some other language than Finnish as the first language,

there is remarkably low percentage of the voters who have a foreign background (hs.fi 28.1.2024). In February 2024 the government decided to not put in practice the proposed change that was represented in the government's program before. The change that was presented and highly opposed by the opposition parties as well as many specialists in Finland, was suggesting that a foreign citizen in Finland must leave the country after 3 months, if their employment ends and they cannot find a new job within the 3 months time. The government has decided to change the statement. In the future the time of finding employment will be six months. European Commission has reported persistent labour shortages in many occupations all skills levels included. Shortages in both high-skilled and low-skilled occupations are expected (European Commission 2023.)

The ongoing public discussion has on its part been a motivation and driver for this study. Markku Lahtinen and Johanna Larsson from Helsingin Kauppakamari (hs.fi 3.9.2023) write in their opinion piece about the importance of internship possibilities in Finnish companies for international students. These internships for international students are an important factor when looking at the fact whether the students stay in Finland after their studies are completed. The writers also suggest that one of the bottle necks in the process of employers finding the students and vice versa are is that in Finland there is no recruitment and placement platform that would efficiently reach the international students. Another point of view is introduced in Kauppalehti (10.11.2023). The managing editor is criticising Finland's government's attitudes towards immigration and the fact that these negative attitudes weaken the image that international talents have of Finland. She writes that these attitudes have been received negatively among the highly skilled migrants who are employed in Finland. She argues that the startup-entrepreneurs view the government program as a factor that harms the country image, since the program is aiming to tighten immigration legislation and work-based residence. The image disadvantage has already arisen, since where Finland used to be viewed as a attractive country among the employees of platform economies and gaming companies, now Finland is viewed as a closed and repulsive. (Kauppalehti 10.11.2023.)

2.3 Country initiative

Finland is implementing new policies to promote immigration. Finnish Government's press release (2022) asserts that the process of getting and obtaining a residence permit will be made easier for the students arriving to Finland. This aims to allow the students

to obtain a residence permit for the whole duration of their studies in Finland. This law is also aiming to help the students to get employed after their studies. Under the new act, the type of permit for students will be changed from temporary to continuous – which aims to help the students to obtain a permanent residence permit in the future. There are also programs created to increase the attractiveness of the country. Talent Boost is a national program in Finland that aims to enhance the attraction of international talent and immigration as well as rooting in Finland. The purpose of the program is to make Finland more known and attractive to highly skilled international experts as well as to improve the employment of international experts in Finland (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland: Talent Boost). Another ongoing project on the national level is ‘The International Talent Finland’, which has the purpose of inquiring how to attract international talents to take part in building the country. The project has a timeline of 2021-2023. The project is said to serve the need of the public and private sectors to acquire new skills as well as to prepare for an aging population. (E2 Research.) These programs and government-funded agencies can be helpful for firms employing immigrants. Chhinzer and Oh (2022, 225) suggest in their research that it is beneficial for the employers to strategically partner with specialized private or government agencies to help attracting and evaluating immigrants seeking job.

Finland has a major skills shortage ahead; by 2030 the working age population will face a decrease of approximately 130 000 people (Confederation of Finnish Industries). According to Business Finland’s report, the data that they collected for the FDI barometer, raises alarm about the availability of skilled labour in Finland. Foreign Direct Investments (FDI’s) are crucial to Finland; they support the economic growth of the country, drive jobs and innovations. Finland is advised to take steps to help the companies meet their growing demand for skilled workers. (Business Finland 2023.)

“The war for talent” as a phenomenon is ubiquitous on a global scale, referring to the development of a competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees (Human resource management international digest 2021). The official data shows that there is no significant improvement in the employability of foreign origin skilled workers in the last decade. Finland has been ranked high in the international rankings considering education, technology, innovation, standard of living and even happiness, yet the country has problems in retaining the talent that it has attracted. (Zafar 2019.) The studies show that a significant amount of those who have moved to Finland do not stay in the country

– half of the men who have moved to Finland from western countries, were not living in Finland anymore after the follow-up time of 10 years (Demography 2023).

Etla (2023, 2) shows in their report that the number of employed immigrants has increased. This validates the need for further studying within the subject; to retain the talent, companies should focus on the actions and how to foster the integration. Some of these actions could be for example onboarding, international HR, committing employees, changing the working culture to acknowledge the international talents. The influence that the immigration has on the local population is dependant on the field and the level of employment; in other words, there is evidence that the wages of highly educated natives increased when there has been immigrants employed in the company (Beerli et al. 2021, 1009).

Citizens of EU member states, the Nordic countries, Switzerland and Liechtenstein do not need a residence permit for Finland, but they must apply for so-called EU registration if they intend to stay in Finland for longer than three months. In year 2021 there were slightly over 11000 registrations of EU citizens. (Välimäki et al. 2023, 25) As Finland is facing a major skills shortage, there still is a significant number of immigrants in Finland who cannot find their place in the labor market. This indicates the inability to commit everyone to building and developing society (Välimäki et al. 2023, 27). In 2021 Finland introduced for the first time quantitative targets to education and work-based immigration: Finland is aiming to double the work-based immigration from its current level by 2030 and triple the number of foreign students to 15 000 students per year. Finland aims to have 75 % of the students to stay in the country for work after graduation (OECD 2022).

EU citizens are receiving privileged treatment in Finland. But besides that, EU law has also introduced other groups that get privileged treatment. Highly skilled employees from non-EU area are described to play a significant role in the competitiveness of EU. European Commission has put forward a new EU Blue Card Directive, which was successfully entered into force in 2021. The objectives of the new directive are to attract highly qualified non-EU nationals as well as to make the processes of issuing the Blue Card faster with establishing the fast-track procedure. (European Commission: EU Blue Card).

2.4 Integration of highly skilled immigrants

In this chapter the challenges and the enablers regarding the integration process of a highly skilled immigrants will be examined. Rajendran et al. (2017, 449) found more factors hindering integration than factors fostering it. Integrating in to the labour market one significant question concerns the availability of training and support aimed at employment. Offering many different levels of language training and conversion training can solve these problems (Välimäki et al. 2023, 28). In a study that asked the immigrants' views about Finland and Finnish people, the respondents found it difficult to get to know Finnish people. Välimäki et al. (2023, 48) recognised that individuals feel disappointed in Finland and Finnish people, and an alarming fact is that many immigrants who have stayed in the country longer view Finnish people more negatively. In general the challenges that skilled immigrants are facing are the lack of local work experience, lack of local professional network, discrimination, non-transferable skills and qualifications acquired from the home country and poor language skills (Tran et al. 2022, 336).

Immigrants' well-being depends on both workplace inclusion as well as successful integration into society. Integration is a reciprocal process where newcomers are incorporated into the new society (Wilkinson 2013, 1) and it is measured in terms of inclusion and participation in for example political, socio-economical and cultural dimensions of society (Phalet & Swyngedouw 2003). Successful integration for immigrants in general includes equal access to employment and working conditions, as well as many other social determinants (Selvanandan & Reid 1, 2021). Workplace integration is considered successful if skilled immigrants achieve the same advancement opportunities in the workplace as locals. Integration success also relies on the overall securing of employment. (Rajendran et al. 2017, 437). Immigrants find the integration process long and adjusting to living in Finland taking a lot of time. Students find it easier to adjust to living in Finland. Most likely the reason behind students' finding it easier to integrate and adjust to living in the country is based on the studies that paces the daily life, social networks that the studies bring and the support got from other students. Students also find that the international community has a significant meaning as a single factor in the integration process (Välimäki et al. 2023.)

Kawi and Xu (2009, 181) have identified in their study that there are facilitators and challenges to the integration of immigrants. The writers have identified that there are external and internal barriers and facilitators. Internal factors can be controlled by the

immigrant, those factors relate to the actions of the person themselves. External factors consist of factors that are beyond the control of the person. Internal factors include, but are not limited to, for example continuing education (facilitator) and lack of communication skills (barrier). External factors could be for example logistical support (facilitator) or inadequacies of orientation programmes (barrier). To promote the adjustment of the skilled immigrants, both internal and external need to be addressed to find optimal outcomes for the integration. When looking at the phenomenon of acculturation or adjustment, the move to a new country is seen as a stressful life event, which brings stress, discomfort and spurring changes. In order to be able to begin to function effectively in their new environment, the individual enact these factors (Hajro et al. 2019, 335).

2.5 Enablers

Highly skilled individuals often possess characteristics that are distinctive for them. These qualities can be, but are not limited to, ability to adjust, sociability and open-mindedness and these personal characteristics can act as enablers when a person is integrating into a workplace. Van Riemsdijk and Basford (2022) have identified that employers and coworkers have a significant role when it comes to the integration of highly skilled migrants in the workplace. The authors also aim to show that immigrant integration is a multi-actor and multi-directional process. In the article they shed light on the multitude of factors that are involved in the long-term integration of highly skilled immigrants. In the next sub-chapters the enablers influencing the workplace integration of immigrants found in the literature of international mobility and immigration are presented.

2.5.1 Colleagues and family

According to van Riemsdijk and Basford (2022) coworkers play an important role in the workplace integration. Coworkers provide practical information, companies can have “buddy programs” and the former workers can provide insights into workplace’s culture and company norms. Informal peer mentoring as well as having an empathetic supervisor can assist in integration as well (Rajendran et al. 2017) Forming friendships with locals plays a key role with the successful integration (Välimäki et al. 2023, 58).

Family plays an important role as a supporting factor and enabler of the successful integration. Families are important for adjustment, well-being and performance and this could be even more important for immigrants, compared to expatriates, since often their only first source of social support is their families (Hajro et al. 2019, 342). Families and spouses are often seen as a supportive factor rather than a barrier or a challenge. They are also more of an enabler driving the immigrant's decisions on moving abroad. (Hajro et al. 2019, 342). Social relations with the host country nationals assist immigrants to obtain access to hidden opportunities in the labour market.

2.5.2 Workplace actions

Diversity committee with policies regarding for example bullying and racism can foster workplace integration (Rajendran et al. 2017, 449). The organisation has been proven to have significant role in labour market effects on immigration; the policy changes that firms have made affect the dynamics of a firm entry, the productivity and growth of the firm (Beerli et al. 2021). In many organisations the importance of also integrating not only the employee, but also their family, has been noticed. Comfort of the families of the immigrants is crucial when the families are thinking about whether to stay in Finland for a longer period of time. (Välimäki et al. 2023, 61.) Organisational support can extend to the immigrant's family as well; offering language courses, career counselling to the spouse or other support with career-related issues (Ravasi et al. 2015, 1342).

Selvanandan and Reid (2021) conducted a study where they piloted Bow Valley Workplace Inclusion Charter (WIC) which presented voluntarily adopted policies and related support system. WIC was designed for the need of helping inclusive practices in the workplaces. WIC was also meant to bring access to several key social determinants for immigrants. Researchers found that this kind of charted would help the workplaces and the real-world implementation of the tool is possible and it can have positive effects in the workplace. There are also implications for practice, that could be achieved by the workplace. Kawi and Xu (2009, 181) suggest that possible practices could include language and communication training, mentoring system, assertiveness training, emotional support, logistical support and assistance with different kinds of licenses and official registrations would be beneficial for the immigrants.

Nishii (2013, 1759) discovered that the *climate for inclusion* has a significant impact on the quality of employees' cross-cultural interactions and it deepens the employees' understanding of cultural differences in the service of collective goals. Hajro et al. (2019,

342) present that if the organizational context is not supportive of cultural diversity and there are no effective HRM policies and practices, immigrants in the organisations find the integration challenging. In this kind of unsupportive environments the immigrants may develop denial behaviours, meaning for example refusing to spend time or take part in activities that would provide contact to host-country nationals. Highly skilled immigrants who feel supported by their employer organisations are likely to be more motivated to integrate than those who feel left alone in the process of integration (Cerdin et al. 2014, 161).

2.5.3 Personal characteristics

Personal and social resources available will have an impact on the number of difficulties the immigrant faces. Personal and social resources also help immigrants to manage and cope with obstacles, for example in the labour market. It has also been found that the younger the immigrant is when moving to a new country, the easier the integration process is. It has also been noted that ethnicity may make people prone to different kind of obstacles in the workplace integration. (Heilbrunn et al. 2010, 256). Having positive attitude and working hard to be valued as a worker can be enablers in migrants' immigration process. Since the migration to other country has been driven by their own initiative, the migrants may feel like it is their responsibility to succeed. Casual conversations on topics such as e.g. sports, politics or celebrities and learning about some local cultural topics would be helpful in workplace integration. A self-help strategy that the respondents in Rajendran's study used was working hard and becoming valued as a member of the organisation – after getting the foot in the door, their capabilities were recognised and they could move up the corporate ladder. These factors and personal characteristics can enable smoother interaction at the workplace (Rajendran et al. 2017, 450.)

Thum-Thysen (2014, 32) finds that a strong believe in “one's control over their own life” has a positive effect on the probability of employment in the host country. Immigrants may find challenges in the labour market, which have been seen to be able to overcome by self-confidence, belief in success, personal dedication and commitment. The author also suggests that if a person feels like they have control over their own life, they believe in causality between their actions and outcomes, which will motivate them to take action. In the studies about integration and immigration, sociability, acculturation and

identity strategies are seen as key factors for integration (Thum-Thysen 2014, 8). Peltokorpi and Clausen (2011) suggests that emotional stability and cultural empathy have positive affect on work and non-work related integration, and Hudson and Inkson (2006, 310) found that openness and agreeability were characteristics supporting and helping immigrants with positive career-related outcomes.

2.6 Challenges

In this study the barriers, challenges and hindering factors, or obstacles affecting the integration are under the term “challenge”. At justified situations the word “barrier” is as well utilized, for the clearer emphasis on the wording. Challenge refers to all the possible negative factors, that are acting as factors that make the integration process more challenging or difficult. There are many possible synonyms that could be used, but in this study, the term challenge acts as a suitable term. These challenges can be overcome – where as a term “barrier” used in all contexts would mean more of a factor that would end, or not let the integration happen. Challenges may hinder and slow down the integration process, but challenges do not mean that the integration process would be impossible.

Researchers have found multiple factors hindering the integration process of immigrants, which can include “educational and previous work experience recognition, professional licensing, lack of local work experience, cultural considerations, language competencies and communication.” (Chhinzer & Oh 2022, 218). Numerous challenges have been identified when studying the integration of immigrants. European Commission (2023, 16) has concluded some of the challenges to be related to integration to the host country to be lack of skills in the host country language(s) and difficulties in recognising the formal qualifications the person obtained abroad. In Singapore the studies have shown that some of the challenges come from the citizens and the dilemma that the country is facing as a state – trying to keep it’s nation’s borders and building deeper roots and sense of belonging among its people, while attracting top talent from different countries (Yeoh & Lam 2016, 651).

Chhinzer and Oh (2022, 218) suggest that employers are not always aware of their responsibility for the integration of immigrants working in the company and therefore they shift the responsibility of integration to other parties and stakeholders such as the immigrants themselves, government bodies, unions, professional licensing bodies. Therefore Chhinzer and Oh have researched the employer perceptions about who in fact

has the responsibility to help immigrants integrating into the workforce. Välimäki et al. (2023, 104) have also recognized some country-level factors that may hinder the whole process of integration in Finland; these include the bureaucratic governmental activities such as obtaining the needed permissions and the lack of workplace support for the immigrants. In the coming sub-chapters the most common challenges found in the literature of international mobility and immigration are presented.

2.6.1 Language

The European Commission emphasizes linguistic skills and communicational skills as key competencies when thinking about learning in education. Linguistic and communicational skills are also seen as a key factor in when training in a profession as well as for social inclusion and employment. (Beacco et al. 2017, 283.) The lack of language skills can be a challenge to socioeconomic integration (Gauthier 2016, 19). However it is important to notice that language skills should not be a pre-condition for intergration since language-learning can be a lifelong process (Beacco et al. 2017). Language used in the workplace's communication process acts an important role and is often inherent to how culture is expressed. The underlying cultural differences in language have caused intercultural communication challenges (Balante, van den Broek & White 2021, 7).

Language and cultural differences create challenges to intercultural communication (Peltokorpi & Clausen 2011). Peltokorpi and Clausen found out in their study that the largest challenge to communication in a firm is the lack of shared language. Even though the language that should be used in a company is stated and agreed to be English, it was clear that in daily conversation also other languages were used, Peltokorpi and Clausen state. This language challenge is seen to affect the communication of the employees. Those individuals that share the same language, are often having conversations in that language, which brings the lack of intercultural communication. If immigrants and local employees are not making the effort to improve their language skills, it is clear that the language barrier remains. Non-native English speakers that come from different cultural origins, are prone to interpret the underlying meaning of the words according to their own cultural norms, which leads to misunderstandings (Henderson 2005; Selmer 2006).

Van Riemsdijk and Basford (2022) acknowledge that a keyfactor in workplace integration as a highly skilled worker is indeed language proficiency. Language learning enhances for example employability in the future, efficiency as well as social cohesion.

Välimäki et al. (2023, 57) state that two out of three immigrants that have moved to Finland find the language barrier affecting their integration process. Lack of Finnish or Swedish skills have been found to be a significant challenge to employment for those who immigrated to Finland.

It has been addressed by European Union and Council of Europe that language is central to many of the issues that connect with migration, social cohesion and integration being couple of them. This taken into account, it has been noticed that the opportunities to learn the language of the host country can help the integration in the host country (Council of Europe 2017). Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM) project is offering support to policy makers and practitioners who handle the matters of migrants' integration to civil society. LIAM project is Council of Europe's answer to the longlasting political debate and policy initiatives concerning migrants and their integration. LIAM project facilitates support to different parts of the migration process practitioners in the member states; policy makers, providers of language courses as well as those testing migrants' language competences (Council of Europe). Language competence has been addressed by Kawi and Xu (2009, 181) in their article, suggesting that it would be important to facilitate a language and competence training, since communicative competency directly affects the quality of work and in the article's case, patient safety as well.

2.6.2 Cultural differences

Cultural differences can hinder communication. Every country has its own culture that the people are obeying – these cultural differences can affect how people act, how they engage with each other and for example how their body language is. Peltokorpi and Clausen (2011, 520) discussed that there are multiple differences that are results of culture. In different countries the communication is different and adjusted differently according to the status or level of the employer. Power or status differences that are determined by age and experience and organizational position, make the communication different in some countries, whereas in other countries the hierarchy is not as strict. Hajro et al. (2019, 345) have found that if the cultural distance affects the integration of highly skilled immigrants; the greater the distance is, the lower the adjustment.

Culture shock is recognised as one of the main reasons for the immigration failures. The inability to adjust to a new environment is another one (Fitzpatrick 2016, 279). Cultural differences make it also harder to form friendships with locals, some immigrants

find the ways of treating other people very hard to understand. The study that was conducted by Välimäki et al. (2023, 58) introduces the way immigrants see the Finnish culture. One of the respondents describes the Finnish negative politeness and culture that the locals follow, which means that “if you want to be polite, you leave people alone.” Cultural differences include also different attitudes towards work between the home country and the host country, different norms in socializing with the co-workers and difficulties in the communication; a migrant may feel like the communication styles and sense of humour may differ (Rajendran 2017, 447).

The lack of ties to the host community and members of their own occupational field can be a challenge for the integration, when trying to find a job from their occupational field. It may cut them off from some job opportunities, and some cultural norms, or common practices within their profession (Gauthier 1, 2016). Lack of local links has also been addressed as a hindering factor in the integration process (Rajendran 2017, 447). “A number of workplace and integration issues have resulted from dissimilarities of the cultures of the immigrants in the working place to the dominant culture and these cultural differences need to be understood to promote a culturally inclusive workplace” (Balante, van den Broek and White 2021, 2). Government policies may as well hinder the integration of immigrants. Lack of support in securing the first job and difficulties in recognition of the skills are some of the factors hindering the integration process. (Rajendran 2017, 447.) Lee (2005) has also identified the lack of social networks as a factor hindering immigrant’s job seeking and can also lead to under-employment, which can influence the person’s motivation and career in the future. The author suggests that the workplace has a great impact on the person’s development. The organization employing the person must effectively and operationally manage the SIE’s and make sure that the jobs assigned to the SIE’s are challenging and fulfilling. Underemployment may result in poor motivation and negative work attitudes, and negative behaviour.

2.6.3 Personal characteristics

People who are demographically dissimilar from the majority can find integrating into the organisation harder, since even though they are mostly the people most in need of help in forming relationships with their coworkers. With this being said, organisations should work to ensure that employees even with racial dissimilarities are having a choice regarding integration behaviour. (Dumas et al. 2013, 1396.) Hajro et al. (2019, 341) have found in their study that demographic characteristics (for example race, ethnicity and

religion) create a range of challenges to immigrants through their influence on the immigrants' status.

Holopainen and Björkman (2005, 47) discuss in their study of immigrants' personal characteristics and job performance, that communicational ability is an important determinant when it comes to thinking about expatriate performance. The researchers also suggest that it is important for the companies to select individuals with good communicational abilities and candidates that are already living abroad. These qualities makes it more likely for the expatriate to perform well in the organisation. Studies have found that immigrants are often disadvantaged due to having lower sense of being able to control their lives. Immigrants more often believe that their lives are more controlled by external circumstances than by themselves. This kind of mindset acts as a hindering factor in the process of entering the job market, but the negative mindset also hinders integration. (Thum-Thysen 2014, 32.)

2.6.4 Non-recognition of skills

According to Riemsdijk and Axelsson (2021, 5) the difficulties in re-entering the field of expertise for highly skilled migrants may be attributed to the non-recognition of the skills that the migrants have, or the fact that the host country does not recognise the educational attainment that the migrant has. Educational systems differ; there are multiple different lengths of education, multiple different numbers of credit hours and perhaps even examination requirements. Therefore recognition process may be complicated and the lack of recognizing one's talent may lead in employment in a position below individual's level of expertise. Difficulty in getting previous experience recognised particularly at the organisational level. At the organisational level an immigrant may not be employed because of the lack of recognition of their skills (Rajendran et al. 2017, 447).

When the employer lacks "the recognition of foreign qualifications and there is general unawareness of global education standards, the importance of education as an investment value of an immigrant is diminished" (Chinnzer & Oh 2022, 225). The non-recognition of skills has been taken into account on EU level; in 2021 EU Commission welcomed a new political agreement, which introduced changes to the framework. One of these changes is "Qualifications and skills equivalency". New rules include facilitating the recognition of professional skills for occupations in the information and communications sector. This allows also applicants with professional experience that is equivalent to a

higher education qualification in some specific sector to apply. (European Commission 2021.)

2.6.5 Policies

Country's political atmosphere and system may have affect on the immigrants' integration into the labour market. The policy area of immigration and integration may be multidimensional, which may cause it being harder to facilitate the integration process of immigrants, since to achieve the effective integration policies needs partisan bargaining within the cabinet and within the legislature. Single-party majority government should be relatively better at introducing and implementing more coherent and effective immigration and integration policies than other types of governments (Aaskoven 1009, 2020). In Finland the parliamentary elections are held every four years, where the new members of parliament are voted by democratic elections by the population. Every government is pushing it's own policies, and tries to affect the legislation by pushing it to the interest of it's own. In the Finnish systems felxibility is still a must – the government is lead by the largest party, but it is accompanied by other political parties as well. This makes the decisions flexible and somewhat satisfactory to all of the parties.

Inequality based on race, gender or other social factor is contradictory to social justice. It should be made sure that the employer is providing equal opportunities and fair treatment for each employee in tandem with existing employment laws, policies and regulations in the host country. Employers could also strengthen the enforcement of policies and regulatory agencies (Kawi & Xu 2009, 181). Helsingin Sanomat (12.11.2022) has published an article where it is stated that the attitudes towards immigrants is one "lock on the way of immigrants". Also the employers's should think about the importance of the family. Family matters; at the worst case the spouse is affecting the decision to eventually move out of Finland, if there is no job found for them.

2.7 Synthesis

This synthesis aims to summarize the theory chapter 2. Presented academic literature, accompanied with the takes from topical newspaper articles and government activities highlight the theoretical framework of the study. The synthesis aims to clarify and summarize the discussion as well as pull together the theory findings in a clear and

concise manner. The following Table 1 presents the found factors affecting immigrants' integration in an organisation. Table 1 gathers information on what has literature has found, based on numerous studies about integration of highly skilled immigrants. The factors are divided to two categories: enablers and challenges affecting integration into the organisation.

Enablers	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace actions • Personal characteristics • Colleagues and family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Cultural differences • Personal characteristics • Non-recognition of skills • Lack of workplace actions • Laws and policies

Table 2 Factors affecting integration

Integration of an immigrant is viewed as a multifaceted process including both individual's activity and help from the receiving society. (Wilkinson 2013, 1; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland). Integration is measured in terms of inclusion and participation in political, socio-economical and cultural dimensions of society. This is echoed by Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019, 125) who suggest that integration is referred to as described above both in public and academic discourse.

Country-level actions are taken in Finland by implementing new policies, establishing new programs and attracting international talent to Finland. It is suggested by researchers that this type of programs and government-funded agencies can be helpful for firms employing immigrants. Chhinzer and Oh (2022, 225) suggest that employers benefit to strategically partnering with specialized private or government agencies. Different kind of programs have the aim to make Finland more known and attractive to highly skilled immigrants while also improving the employment of highly skilled immigrants in Finland (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland: Talent Boost).

Enablers consist of social support such as colleagues and family, workplace actions and personal characteristics. Family has a key role in the immigrant's adjustment process, well-being and performance (Hajro et al. 2019, 342). Social ties with the host country nationals are beneficial; the help of the host country nationals support the workplace

integration. Colleagues provide information and insights into workplace culture and company norms. Informal peer mentoring and having an empathetic supervisor are both seen supportive when it comes to integration of a highly skilled immigrant. (Rajendran et al. 2017; Riemsdijk and Basford 2022; Välimäki et al. 2023.) Workplace actions that have the aim to support the integration are often beneficial and help in creating the social ties and integration in the workplace. Beerli et al. (2021) suggest that organisations are enablers of immigrants' employability, if changes that the firms make are possible. Integration of not only the employee, but the family as well, is highly recommended, resulting in the successful integration (Ravasi et al. 2015, 1342; Välimäki et al. 2023, 63). Personal characteristics resulting in successful integration combine the personality and the willingness to integrate of the immigrant. Open-mindedness, sociability, social resources, age (to some extent), one's mindset and believing in themselves all contribute to successful integration. Self-confidence, belief in success and personal commitment are noteworthy drivers for workplace integration of an immigrant. (Thum-Thysen 2014; Heilbrunn et al. 2010, Rajendran et al. 2017).

Challenges affecting the integration process of a highly skilled immigrant are found in the literature to be versatile, difficulties rising both from the individual's views and personal characteristics as well as from the host society and organisation. Challenges hindering the integration of a highly skilled immigrants include the language barriers, cultural differences, personal characteristics, non-recognition of skills and policies of the host country.

Language refers to the linguistic and communicational skills of an immigrant. The lack of the host country's language skills can act as a barrier to socioeconomic integration of an immigrant. Language used in the workplace's communication acts key role and is often inherent to how culture is expressed. Intercultural communication challenges can appear due to the underlying cultural differences in language (Balante et al. 2021; Beacco et al. 2017; Gauthier 2016). Lack of shared language is a challenge to communication between employees. Language proficiency is a key factor in positive workplace integration and the language skills enhance the employability in the future. (Henderson 2005; Selmer 2006; Peltokorpi & Clausen 2011; van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022).

Cultural differences include communication norms, habits, manners, attitudes towards work, different norms in socialising in and outside of the workplace. Cultural differences can act as a challenge when the differences affect the way employees act and how they engage with each other. There are differences in communication between countries as

well as differences in how communication is adjusted according to the status of the colleague. Cultural differences can make it more difficult to form friendships with locals. Cultural differences include also different attitudes towards work between the home country and the host county, as well as differences in socializing, communication styles and sense of humour. (Peltokorpi & Clausen 2011; Fitzpatrick 2017; Rajendran et al. 2017.)

Government actions can hinder the integration of an immigrant. Political atmosphere and system may hinder the integration into the labour market. Policy area of immigration may be multidimensional, causing it being more difficult to facilitate the integration process. Equal opportunities proposed both by government as well as employers play a key role in the integration process of immigrants. Employers can strengthen the enforcement of policies and regulatory agencies (Aaskoven 2020; Kawi & Xu 2009; Hajro et al. 2019). Non-recognition of skills can act as a hindering factor, if the expertise or educational attainment the immigrant has. Educational systems differ and there can be lack of recognition of skills in the organizational level. EU has taken into account the issue of non-recognition of skills. In 2021 European Commission made a new political agreement to ease the recognition of skills for occupations in the information and communications sector. (European Commission 2021, Chhinzer & Oh 2022; Rajendran et al. 2017).

3 Research design

This chapter describes the research design and aims to justify the chosen methodology. First the research approach is explained, after which the data collection is being explained. Data analysis – section describes the used analysis method. The study is also evaluated in the end of this chapter. The aim of this part is to describe the empirical part of the thesis and to present the research approach.

3.1 Research approach

Studies can be divided into two main categories, quantitative and qualitative studies. These two categories should not be placed on opposite sides nor treat them as opposites, more beneficial is to understand these two approaches as different methodologies, both suitable for different kind of problem solving. It is important to pick a method appropriate to the research problem at hand. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998.) Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 2) describe the qualitative business research as the one to give the researcher the opportunity to produce new knowledge about real-life phenomena in real-life business context, the reasoning to why they work in a specific way and how to make sense of them. Qualitative business research enables providing a critical and reflexive view about the social world of business. “Increasing number of researchers recognize that when the object is concrete human experience, qualitative methods are the most adequate means of knowledge production” (Brinkmann & Kvale 2005, 162).

Qualitative business research relies on several methods of data collection and analysis, when in contrast, quantitative research is focused more on explanations, testing hypotheses and statistical analysis (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 3-5). This thesis’s research approach is qualitative and the data collection was made by interviews. This research’s data collection was made with interviews and the analysis was made with thematic analysis. Interviews are a justified data collection method as they can produce in-depth information about the topic that is studied. The research approach was qualitative, since the aim of the study is to gain knowledge about the individuals’ views and examine them. Other qualitative methodologies consist of case studies, focus groups, observational studies, fully structured interviews and open-ended surveys (Morgan & Smircich 1980, 497). These methodologies were excluded, since the research questions were formed based on individual views and to gain the knowledge about the experiences

and opinions of individuals, interviews were seen as a suitable methodology for this kind of research.

Qualitative research approach fits well in this thesis as the main aim of the study is to study a social phenomenon; integration and the individuals' views about it, and to find answers to the questions by interviewing the individuals as experts of the subject.

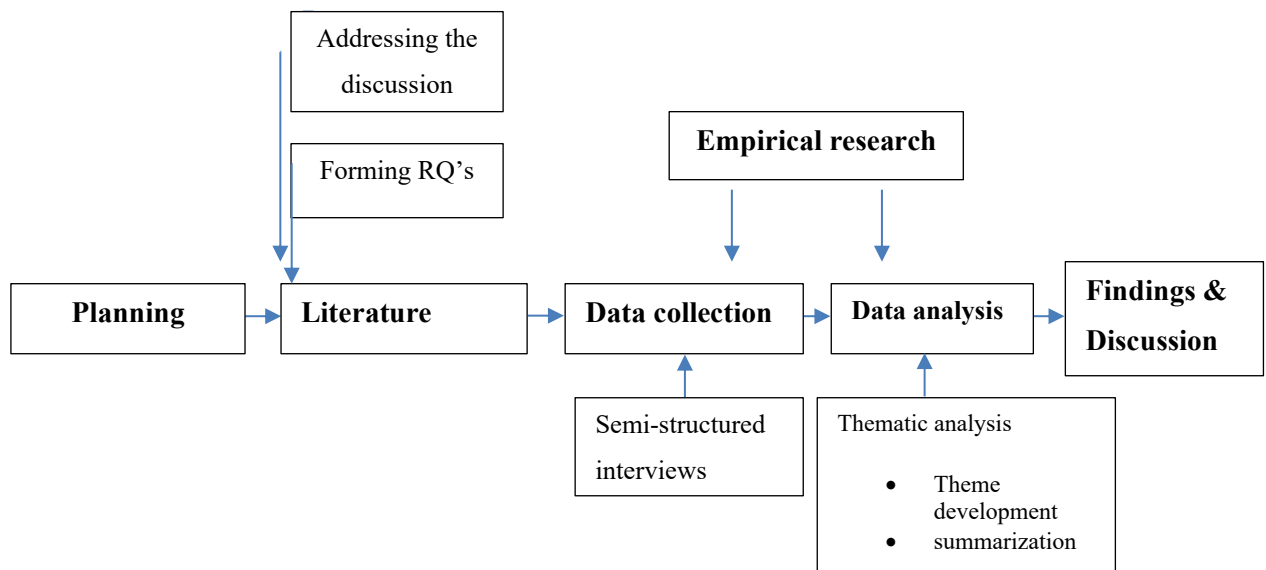


Figure 1 Research process chart followed in the study

The figure above presents the research process chart followed in the study. The figure aims to clarify the research process steps that were taken to show the process development.

The section above presents what the literature states about qualitative research and methods that are useful when conducting a qualitative study. Given the research questions and what the aim and objectives of the study is, and based on the literature, it is justified to use the chosen methodology in this thesis. Next part will concentrate on explaining in more detail what was done and why. The interviewees are shortly listed and introduced in the latter part. Data analysis method is thematic analysis, which offers a way to sum up the findings of the study. The data collected by the interviews is then compared to the prior literature findings after which the study presents the discoveries in the findings and discussion sections. Finally, the conclusion presents the theoretical implications, the practical implications and the recommendation for further studies.

3.2 Data collection

In qualitative studies the common methods for data collection are various forms of interviews and observations, of the latter personal diaries, autobiographies and letters, as well as written and pictorial material or audio material produced for other purposes. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998). *“Qualitative interview is one of the most important data gathering tools in qualitative research”*, according to Myers and Newman (2007, 1). Interviews can be divided into three main categories; structured interviews, unstructured or semi-structured interviews and group interviews. There are various types of interviews and these three that are presented above, are not the only ones. Semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used interview type in qualitative interview (Myers & Newman 2007, 4). In business-related topics, conducting interviews is an effective and practical way to gather information. Furthermore, there may be a lack of information on the specific topic, and thus, it is necessary to produce some. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 94.) Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method, as this type of an interview has a script yet the interview situation allows improvisation. In semi-structured interview process researcher acts as an instrument. (Galletta & Cross 2013, 4.)

Semi-structured interviews are based on an in-depth discussion, enabling a freely formed discussion on the topic of research and allowing an in-depth discussion. The approach allows the researcher to adapt and apply the questions to the interview context, and in addition, see the emerging and unforeseen trends in the interview situation (Yazan 2015, 144-145). The framework of the interview is prepared in advance, but in the interview situation it is not necessary to follow it uncritically. Semi-structured interview allows the repetition of questions in case there is a need to correct potential misunderstandings, clarifying questions or expressions and the discussion outside of the framework's questions. Openness, flexibility and potential improvisation are the strengths of the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the changes to the order of the questions. When discussing about an individual's views and perspectives about a topic of integration, flexible approach was beneficial as the researcher could encourage the participants to raise other issues related to the subject. Interviews are time-consuming and can be costly compared to surveys or email interviews; these are considered the challenges and weaknesses of the research method. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 63.)

3.2.1 Data collection method

In this research the semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Semi-structured interviews are a flexible data collection method, characterized by unique way of being sufficiently structured to allow the data to answer to the research question, while also leaving space for the participants to offer new meanings and ideas to the topic. (Galletta & Cross 2013, 2.) Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) suggest that a benefit of interviews is the flexibility of them. The qualitative method and more specifically semi-structured interviews offer a suitable data collection possibility to fit the study. Galletta and Cross (2013, 4) also suggest that the qualitative data analysis is iterative and the data analysis accompanies data collection.

Interviews were used to gain more in depth understanding of the topic. The utilization of a fully structured format of interviews may have constricted the scope of the interview process. Group interview methodology could have been suitable for this study, yet the emphasis on individual perspectives and experiences regarding integration required a more focused approach. Group interview setting could may have discouraged participants from delving into potentially sensitive or negative topics, potentially limiting the depth of responses obtained. By conducting personal semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to gather the most comprehensive range of participants' personal viewpoints on integration. This methodology allowed for flexibility and adaptability during the interview process, ultimately facilitating the collection of rich and in-depth data.

In Appendix 1 the used interview questions and the planned order of them is presented. This was pre-planned well prior to the interviews. "A semi-structured interview consists of two-level questions; main themes and follow-up questions" (Kallio et al. 2016, 2960). Interview questions were formed by looking at the themes raised in the literature. Although the literature and the media raises important and factual information, there must be enough freedom and flexibility, "open" questions, in order to not only ask about the themes already emerged. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) emphasize that despite the semi-structured interview allows the flexibility, it is not essential to ask any thought that surfaces. Interview guide was formed with the help of the operationalisation chart that (Table 1). The operationalisational chart defines the main research question, as well as the sub-research questions. After that the questions were divided into either of these questions. The operationalisation chart below illustrates how the research questions were

operationalised in this study and questions how they are related to the theoretical background.

Research question	Sub-research questions	Theoretical background	Interview questions
How do highly skilled immigrants experience the integration process in Finnish organisation?	What are the challenges hindering integration in Finnish organization?	1.2, 2.1 (2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.1.5, 2.1.6)	1., 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2., 2.1, 2.2., 2.3, 2.4
	What are the factors supporting integration in the Finnish organization?	1.2, 2.2 (2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3)	1., 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3

Table 3 Operationalisational chart

Operationalisational chart above illustrates how the interviews were operationalised and how the interview questions relate to the themes that rose in the theoretical part. The interviews started out with the background questions. These background questions were used to get to know the interviewee a bit, as well as to be able to understand from which point of view the interviewee is talking about in their interview.

After background questions the theme 1 was integration, and the questions refer to the general integration process in Finnish organisation. The idea of the first theme was to find some first thoughts that the interviewees have about the broad subject. The questions in the first theme are broad on purpose; it was important to also note that the word “integration” was somehow explained, and it was highlighted that the question was about the workplace integration; not about integration in the country of Finland. Theme 2 was the challenges hindering the integration process and third theme was enablers regarding the integration process. The main emphasis on the 2nd theme was to gain knowledge about the possible challenges that the interviewee has experienced. The theme 2 is concentrating on answering the 1st sub-research question. Concluding questions are the sum up of the interview; the main point was to finally let the interviewee state any other emerging themes coming to their mind, if they found anything more to say regarding any of the topics that were gone through. Even though the questions and themes were planned to give answers to the certain research questions, also some other themes could be raised in the interviews. This was also encouraged in the beginning of interviews. It was important

to let the interviewees know that they can be free with the talking and they have the freedom to say all the things that come into their mind without limiting themselves.

3.2.2 Study participants

It is essential to find suitable candidates for the study, in order to get the quality of the interviews to remain high. The participants of the study must have their own experiences and knowledge about the topic (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018). Therefore it was important to know what kind of people are the target group of the study. In this kind of study, where the research question is based on individuals' views, opinions and experiences, it was essential to find the suitable candidates to interview. The interviewees are all immigrants currently working in an organisation in Finland. All of the interviewees had a university degree obtained. All of the interviewees have recent (<13 years) experience from Finnish working life and they have the first-hand experience about working in a Finnish organisations and the interviewees could be described as "highly skilled" due to their background studies and/or work experience. The interviewees were picked based on the above criteria. The suitable candidates were chosen since they could provide insights and information based on the topic of the thesis. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) state that the selection of the interviewees should not be random, but rather considered and suitable for the purpose.

Seven interviews were conducted with individuals from different organisations and different countries. Interviewees were selected based on the own interest in the topic; the interviewees contacted the researcher based on the query that was looking for the interviewees. The query included the selection criteria, so all of the interviewees had the information of what is the criteria for the interviewees. The interview topic and the thesis's topic was introduced, as well as the basics of the interview and how they would be conducted. Interviewees were then sent a privacy notice as well as the informed consent document. Interviewee number was predetermined considering the timeframe of the study and to ensure the quality of the data analysis. In the chart below the interviewee names are pseudonyms created by the researcher to allow all the participants to have a full privacy.

Interviewee	Years in Finland	Country of origin	Work language	Date and length of the interview
Anna	4-6	non-EU	English	18.2.2024 / 96 min
Betty	8-10	EU	English	20.2.2024 / 69 min
Cecilia	2-4	non-EU	English	24.2.2024 / 49 min
Daphne	3-5	EU	English	26.2.2024 / 53 min
Emily	2-4	non-EU	English	28.2.2024 / 47 min
Felicia	2-4	non-EU	English	4.3.2024 / 52 min
Ginny	10-12	EU	Finnish	22.3.2024 / 45 min

Table 4 Conducted interviews

As can be seen from the above chart, the interviewees have been shortly introduced. With this type of topics the saturation is essential to consider, and the researcher should take it into consideration when conducting the interviews. Saturation is referred to when the information gathered starts to be repetitive, and the same kind of answers are given in each of the interviews (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018). The answers to the interview questions were versatile, but there is a pattern that is repetitive when looking at the interviews as a whole. This amount of interviewees was planned right considering the timeframe as well as the subject that was looked at. The interviews were able to provide enough information about the topic, and saturation was reached.

The lengths of the interviews varied between 45 and 96 minutes. The time that was reserved for each interviewee was 60 minutes, and most of the interviews took that time or a bit longer. The researcher made a decision to not force the interviews to end before the interview questions were all gone through, nor for the interview to continue, when all of the interview questions were asked. As can be seen from the interview questions (Appendix 1), the interviewees were given the possibility to speak freely, and conclude their thoughts. Since the interviews were conducted individually, it is natural to have some talking longer, perhaps taking more time, and others replying with shorter answers. All of the interviewees were given equal opportunities to answer to the questions.

The interviews were recorded. Only the voice was recorded, not the video of the interviewee or interviewer. The interviewer wanted to create a safe environment for the interviewees to come as they are, and there is no need to think about one's looks or facial expressions, since those were not analysed and there is no need for that in this kind of

study. These interviews also made it possible for the interviewees to share their thoughts and state their opinions freely and confidentially. Due to geographically different locations, all of the interviews were held in an online platform, with the possibility to turn on the camera if the interviewees felt like it. Organising the interviews in an online environment through an online platform did not affect the interviews. There were no noticed connection issues, and no other hindering factors were noticed by the interviewer within the interviews.

Interviews were recorded, and the interviewer also made some notes based on the important keywords that were raised in the interviews. This was done with the aim to remember the interesting and emerging themes, as well as to tackle the possible technical issues; if the recording was not working or the recording failed for some reason. This was not needed, since all of the seven recordings worked and were able to be transcribed later in the process of data analysis.

3.3 Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative studies is versatile, many different methods and approaches can be used in qualitative studies analysis. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) argue that the basic analysis method that can be used in all traditions of qualitative research is content analysis. In this thesis the data analysing method was chosen to be thematic analysis. It can be difficult to find a suitable data analysis method (Lester et al. 2020). The writers also note that qualitative data analysis can vary between the chosen methodology, field of study or theoretical perspective. Clarke and Braun (2017, 297) argue that “thematic analysis is a method for “identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data.” Thematic analysis can be used and applied across a range of theoretical framework and research paradigms. Thematic analysis is described as a flexible approach offering wide range of applications. (Clarke & Braun 2017, 297.)

After conducting the interviews, the data was analysed. The rawest material was the recordings of the data. Recordings were named by the order of the interviews: Interview 1, interview 2 with continuation. After this a new file is created, where the date and time of the interview was stated. Then the recordings were transcribed. The transcription was made with the Dictate -feature on the Word program and the transcribed data was analysed with the help of content analysis. The transcribed data is skimmed through, marked, gathering the themes a bit already in the first phase of the skimming process.

After that the data, in this case transcribed text data, is classified and themed with relevant themes. With the help of text editor, theme colors were used when classifying the data.

When using theoretical analysis, the researcher generates codes and themes. Themes refer to larger patterns of meaning. These themes are used as the framework for organizing and reporting the researcher's observations. The key point is not only in summarizing what is found from the data, but rather try to identify and interpret the key features of the data. This process is guided by the research question. It is noticeable, that the research question is not fixed and can be reformed throughout the process of the study, when the coding and theme development takes place. (Clarke & Braun 2017, 297.)

In this study thematic analysis was picked as the data analysis method due to its versatility and flexibility. The researcher gathered the data of the seven interviews, which were then transcribed and after that coded with colors. Thematic analysis creates a possibility to identify the patterns in the data. As Clarke and Braun (2017, 297) explain, thematic analysis offers the researcher a possibility to use the method "to identify the patterns within and in relation to participants' lived experiences, views and perspectives as well as behaviour and practices." With this being said, the use of thematic analysis is justified in this study, where the interviews are concentrating on the participants' own personal experiences about integration in the organisations. Braun and Clarke (2006) introduced a six-phase approach to analyze the data. Table 3 illustrates the thematic analysis process introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006).

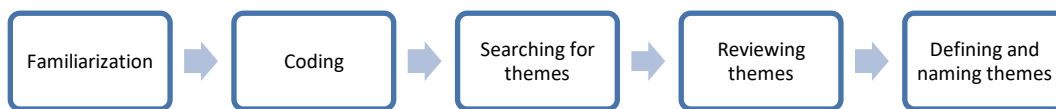


Table 5 Thematic analysis process (adapted from Braun and Clarke 2006, 87)

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach will be explained and analysed further. With the help of this approach, the analysing of the data has been carried in this study, and therefore it is justified to provide an understanding of the method used. The writers argue that thematic analysis does not have a clear agreement in a sense of what it actually is, and what can be described as thematic analysis. The writers also argue that it is important in any study to make it clear to a reader, how the data was analysed and that

there is a clarity on the process and the practices. Therefore, in this study as well, the thematic analysis and how the data analysis was done is explicitly informed.

Braun and Clarke (2006, 86) have introduced a step-by-step guide on how to carry out the thematic analysis after the data has been collected. It is important to notice that thematic analysis involves a constant movement; going back and forth with the data sets and writing is integrated in to the process of analysis; not necessarily done in the end. There are different views and opinions on how much the research should engage with the literature when analysing. On the other side is the point of early reading can narrow the researcher's analytic view and makes the researcher focus on some aspects on the data. On the other side is the viewpoint of early reading can enhance the the analysis of the researcher. In this study the researcher had prior knowledge and they had familiarized themselves with the earlier studies and literature; the theory section was written before data collection, and the literature as well as the news articles and prior data was used when forming the interview questions, for example. Therefore it is justified in this study, that the literature was reviewed prior to data collection.

The writers suggest to do the analysing in six phases, consisting of 1. Familiarizing oneself with the data 2. Generating initial codes 3. Searching for themes 4. Reviewing themes 5. Defining and naming themes 6. Producing the report. (Braun & Clarke 2006.)

Familiarizing oneself with the data starts already in the process of the data collection. In this study the researcher collected the data by themselves, and therefore the analysis could start already during the interview process. The interviews were recorded, but the researcher made some initial notes to pinpoint and highlight the most important, or interesting views that were emerging in the interviews. These notes included words, or a simple concept that the interviewee was raising within their speech. After the recording was completed, the recording was named and transcribed. Transcription process is included in the first part of the process. Transcription process is counted as an important part and it allows the researcher to familiarize themselves with the data. There is no one correct way in thematic analysis to conduct the analysis, so there is no set of guidelines on how to produce a transcript either. It is important to notice, though, that the researcher makes sure the transcript retains the information in its true nature. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 88.) In this study, the recorded data was turned into text by using the Dictate -feature in Word program. The transcription tool is often causing mistakes, and therefore it is essential for the researcher to read and check the transcribed data in case of any possible mistakes, misheard or miswritten words. This contributes to the data's reliability and

validity. After this, the researcher went through the data and started the coding. This step is next explained with the help of Braun and Clarke's (2006, 88) guide.

Generating initial codes is the second step of analysing the data. Phase two takes place after familiarization with the data (Braun & Clarke 2006, 88). In this study the coding meant reviewing the initial themes that had been raised in the literature review, and starting to find any points of views regarding them. The codes were for example language, coworkers, cultural differences. These codes each had their own color, so the researcher was highlighting the text with the coloring system. All the emerging thoughts, that could not go under any of the codes that were used, were then also identified from the data.

The third phase is Searching for themes and fourth phase is reviewing the themes. Phase 3 focuses on analysing and identifying the larger themes. In the analysis Braun and Clarke (2006, 89) suggest to use mindmaps or other visual representations. As a result in the data analysis, two main themes were found. Reviewing the themes is the phase 4, when it is meant for the researcher to analyse the themes and the validity of theirs. Phase 5 includes defining and naming themes. The themes are refined and the data is analysed within these themes. There are two main themes that the codes were then divided into: enablers in the integration process and challenges hindering integration process. These were the points that also answered to the sub-questions in the study, and under these themes the coded answers were then put. In this study, it is important to notice that for example the code "language" could belong to both themes; language could act as a supporting factor but as well poorer language skills could act as a hindering factor.

The themes and the coded factors that could be classified under the theme are represented in the table 4 below.

Theme 1 Enablers	Theme 2 Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Workplace actions • Personal Characteristics • Colleagues • Emerging themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Cultural differences • Personal characteristic • Workplace actions • Laws and Policies • Emerging themes

Table 6 Themes raised in the interviews

Phase 6 is called producing the report. After reviewing and defining the themes, the findings are then reported to the reader. The writing must provide enough evidence of the themes within the data. It is important that the data extracts and the analysis provides a concise and “coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell”. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 93.) In this thesis’s findings -section the data extracts are extracts from the interviewees’. These extracts support the points of what is found in the data, and why the researcher has picked these themes for a closer look.

3.4 Evaluation of the study

This thesis utilizes the evaluation criteria for trustworthiness, which has been introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba’s evaluation criteria has been widely used in qualitative research. The four different criteria that the researchers have introduced are “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 300.) This criterion offers a way to evaluate the trustworthiness of a study. In this part I will analyze my own thesis with the help of this criteria.

Credibility answers to the issue of how the findings of the study relate to reality. The writers suggest that it is vital for the study’s credibility is demonstrated by “the constructors of the multiple realities being studied.” (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 196.) Anney (2014, 276) suggests ways to make the study more credible. These include: prolonged engagement in the field. It is suggested by Anney (2014, 276) that for the study to be credible, the researcher should have experience of over 8 months that has been spent on the field. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 294) refer to credibility as the fact of the researcher being familiar with the topic. Credibility also means that the data is sufficient to support all the claims made in the study and finally, can anyone come to the same interpretations based on the same data. It is safe to say, that the researcher has familiarized themselves with the subject under study. This thesis has been in the making process for over a year, so this criteria has been achieved. In this study the credibility is tied both to the theoretical section, as well as to the empirical part. In the theoretical section the literature that is used is rich and the references are from trustworthy sources. The news that are referred to, are also up-to-date, offering a glimpse to the Finnish media outlets. The reliability of the data analysis is carried out by the researcher, the researcher acted both as the interviewer as well as the transcriber.

Transferability refers to the question of whether the research results can be applied in the prior literature, meaning, if the results are consistent. Researcher has the responsibility to show that the study is consistent with the previous literature and studies in the same field. (Lincoln and Guba 1985.) The idea of transferability is if there is some sort of similarity that could be found in other research contexts (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). In this thesis it was vital to show that the conclusions and findings are somewhat universal and the interview data shows that the findings are consistent. But as well the data reveals some cultural aspects that can be defined as something relating to the country where the study was conducted (Finland). The thesis aims to form an image of the integration process in Finnish organisations, told by the people who have first-hand experience of this. Then the interviews were analysed and the data that was collected was themed and analysed also with the help of the prior literature.

Dependability answers to the question of whether the researcher is able to form a clear, reliable and truthful picture of the phenomenon by understanding also the instability and change (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 299). Dependability, based on Eriksson and Kovalainen's views (2008, 294) means that there is a logical, traceable and documented process of research. It is the researcher's responsibility to offer the information to the reader. The trustworthiness of this study is demonstrated by presenting the interview guide as well as by describing the whole process of research in detail in the "research design" part of the study.

Confirmability refers to the researcher and whether the researcher is giving an objective image of the subject that is under study. Good confirmability means that the research findings and interpretations are easy for the reader and understandably put for anyone who reads the study. Researcher's findings are supposed to show that they are not only imagination, but rather consistent and in relation to the prior literature. (Lincoln & Guba 1985.) In this thesis the main emphasis has been on enriching the findings with the suitable extracts from the data. Transcripts of the interviews provide a clear understanding and the researcher has taken into account that the transcripts are reliable and any extract that is in the final thesis, has been reviewed and the recording has been listened to, as well.

"The ethics of qualitative research design place distinctive demands on the principles of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, social justice and practitioner research." (Shaw 2008, 24). Ethical points must be considered in a research, therefore they are taken into consideration in this study as well. There are two ethical problems

addressed by Shaw (2008, 15) regarding informed consent and confidentiality and privacy. Shaw (2008, 15) argues that informed consent could be hazardous, the participants may not know when they are under investigation or they are not able to tell or raise the issues when in the process. Rhodes (2005, 25) suggests that ethics is not simple, the moral requirements are understood more in depth this day, and therefore it is crucial to rethink the role of ethical conduct of research. A dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee is essential to enable the researcher to interpret the interview data. It is essential to understand and follow the “principles of respect to ensure that the research is enabling for the participant and facilitates humane transformation to achieve empowerment.” (Aluwihare-Samaranayake 2012, 76).

Qualitative studies have the aim to explore and capture subjective experiences, meanings and voices. This can result in ethical challenges both for the participants and the researchers. (Aluwihare-Samaranayake 2012, 76.) Qualitative studies, having the human interaction in a critical role, affects interviewees and the knowledge that is produced through the qualitative research affects the understanding of the human condition. Ethical issues arise in qualitative studies because of the complex nature of researching private lives. In interviews the dilemma that arises is between wanting as much knowledge as possible, and at the same time respecting the integrity of the interviewees. This ethical dilemma is not easily solved. (Brinkmann & Kvale 2005, 157-156, 169.)

Ethics in research should take into consideration both “the protection of human subjects but also consider what constitutes socially responsible research” (Aluwihare-Samaranayake 2012, 76). Brinkmann & Kvale (2005, 167) highlight the importance of both micro- and macroethics in qualitative research. Microethics refer to the research subjects’ rights and the researcher’s obligation to follow good norms; subject’s consent to participate in the research, securing their confidentiality, inform them about the characteristics of the research, their rights to withdraw at any time, avoiding harmful consequences to for the subjects and to consider researcher’s role. In this study the informed consent (Appendix 4) was sent and in the informed consent there is clearly stated what is the point of the study, how the individual interviews will be carried out. It has also been clearly stated in the informed consent document that the participant is free to withdraw from the study and that it is voluntary to participate in the study. It was clearly indicated that the interviews are recorded, both in the informed consent -document as well

as in the interview situation. It was also clearly indicated and told when the recording ended.

It is the researcher's responsibility to take into consideration the ethicality and also the issues regarding confidentiality and privacy. Ethically skilled qualitative researcher does not only respect "the integrity of the research subjects, but also takes into account the cultural context of their research" (Brinkmann & Kvale 2005, 162). Shaw (2003, 15) argues that in qualitative research the problems of confidentiality are sharper. In this study the confidentiality and privacy of the participants were taken into consideration at all times. First of all, the participation was voluntary. Second of all, no names are recorded or used anywhere; the interview data or the transcriptions are not named nor they included any names. The participants are pseudonymized. No real names, jobs, organisations are mentioned. The researcher concluded a data management plan prior to starting the interviews, the informed consent and privacy notice were both sent to the participants before the interview took place. One thing to notice is that the data skimming and the marking of the transcriptions were done manually. The researcher did not use any third-party offered data analysis devices. There is a clear plan of how the data was handled and what was to happen with it after the research is done.

In this study no help of artificial intelligence applications or tools were not used. All of the information search is done by the researcher with the help of the common databases and the literature as well as the newspaper articles are found and read by the researcher. Artificial intelligence programs or text generating programs or applications have not been used to generate text.

In the next chapter the research findings are analysed and compared to the prior literature.

4 Factors influencing integration

In this chapter the empirical part of the study is presented. The interviewees were asked the same questions, and the data collection is presented in more depth in the chapter three, where the data collection method is discussed. The goal of the research is to find answers to what the immigrants view as the possible challenges and enablers in the integration process in Finland and in Finnish organisations where they are, or have been, employed. The main emphasis is on the personal views and opinions that the interviewees have about the studied matter.

In this part the results from the interviewees will be analysed and reported. The section is divided into smaller sections for the reader to find it easier to understand under which category the interviewees' replies fell into. The categories are under the themes that the interviewees brought up during the interviews. The interviewees are referenced as Anna, Betty, Cecilia, Daphne, Emily, Felicia and Ginny. These are pseudonyms used to protect the privacy of the interviewees.

As a general view it was noted in the interview data that integration process is an ongoing social and psychological process, that is almost never-ending. Integration does not have a clear start or end, and in the organisation as well as in one's daily life, the process works as steps. Integration is a two-way process which requires action from both of the parties, the receiving country as well as the person who has immigrated. (Vaalavuo & Rask 2022, 1.) In general in Finland the interviewees respect the flexibility of worklife, the safety of the country and the social trust that can be seen in the public.

4.1 Enablers

4.1.1 Workplace actions

Workplace actions were seen highly important matter in many of the interviewees' opinions when it was asked from them. Different kind of actions have been taken in different organisations. Cultural integration workshops and supporting programs for spouse of the employee's were mentioned. Integration practices were supporting the onboarding and integration in the organization, and if the employer was offering any integration activities or assistance, it was well regulated and planned. As it was put in words about an intensive "course" about the cultural integration in the Finnish society, that the workplace provided for the foreign people working in the organisation:

“The person who was talking there the whole day. [...] she has a lot of more energy than the typical Finn. And she was explaining things about Finland in general, like the nature, the history, about the wars, and relationship with Russia and Sweden and Estonia and all the relevant points. And in the end of the day, I thought. Wow. I had to have this lecture or like introduction (in the beginning) [...] it was so much more, like, helping to see why people in my office are like what they are. So I had to have it in the very beginning. And they started it only now. Of course beginners in our company, gladly enjoy that, if they want, but it was also beneficial for not so much beginner anymore.” (Anna)

Kawi and Xu (2009, 181) suggest that practices that the workplace could foster are language and communication training, mentoring system, assertiveness training, emotional support, logistical support and assistance with different kinds of licenses and official registrations. These are presented as beneficial practices for the immigrants. Many of these practices were brought up by the interviewees of this study as well – the interviewees brought up mentoring, buddy system and language learning courses as beneficial factors supporting integration. Välimäki et al. (2023, 61) have also noted that it would be important for the firm to take into consideration the family of the employee. Support for the spouse was also brought up by one of the interviewees of this study.

Offering different kind of courses was seen as a workplace action that matters; Finnish courses were seen beneficial to learn the language and to gain courage to go and speak the language in social situations in the informants’ opinion. Often employers offer these courses for the non-Finnish speaking people.

One workplace action that is seen as a significant support, is the mindset that the workplace and the recruitment processes are based on. The interviewees raised that it is important for the employer to have the courage to hire an employee who is not natively Finnish. The mindset that encourages and fosters the willingness to overcome challenges that might be ahead when employing an immigrant, is seen as a factor that supports the overall integration process in the organisation. The mindset of being open and ready to “tackle” the possible challenges were seen in the managerial work as well. The interviewees’ views echo the prior literature findings, Nishii (2013, 1759) have found the climate for inclusion to have significant positive impact on the understanding of different

cultures and cultural differences. Managerial work was praised in some of the answers. Managers were seen as supporting and friendly characters who were helpful and courageous when employing an immigrant. The managerial work was seen flexible and the employees have a lot of freedom, but also responsibility. As it was brought up by one informant:

“I have been very lucky with my managers. I have had managers who have really supported me, who gave me opportunities and gave me chances that they didn't have to. So I truly believe that later on I proved to them that it was a good choice. But the thing is -- when I think of it logically, I don't know if I would make a risk as they did. It worked out very, very well. But, I'm just saying that that -- this has really been a thing for me. So I've really had also managers who accepted the fact that the company speaks a [Finnish] language and I don't. So it means that I will not get something or there might be some challenges and I'll start with this and they've been very supportive and it worked very well.” (Betty)

Managerial work was seen playing a significant role in one's integration process, and mostly a positive one, if the manager has the right attitude and the willingness to make it work. Managers' work was also seen as an enabler to one's integration, when the manager was found to be supportive and helpful. Concrete help that the managers were giving was for example help with the official paperwork, residence permit forms and the readiness to act as a referee if the employee was thinking about switching jobs or a fixed term contract was close to end. The literature supports the finding; highly skilled immigrants that feel supported by the company are likely to be more motivated to integrate (Cerdin et al. 2014).

The advancement opportunities were seen as a supporting and encouraging factor in the integration process in the interviewees' opinion. The possibilities to grow and advance in the organization is helpful and encouraging the individual to stay in the organization, while keeping them blissful and willing to advance their career in the current organization. Also different kind of courses provided by the employer were seen as beneficial and helpful.

“I think my career has proceeded to quickly here compared to [my home country], where I was always in the same position, for so many years. Here I changed quite many roles [...] One manager from US asked me to join a different team [...] My manager at the time was very supportive.” (Daphne)

“I would say that the first aid training that they provided, I was actually looking forward to it and when they provided me, or they actually selected me to have that training, I was very happy about it.” (Cecilia)

Workplaces that offered a buddy-system and a proper onboarding program or process, were seen supporting towards the integration process. This is also found in the prior literature, mentoring systems are found as beneficial in the integration process (Kawi and Xu 2009, 181). Also seating arrangements in the office could be seen as a positive factor in the integration process in the informants' opinions. Offices that have assigned seating were found to be more supporting to the integration, since when the seats were fixed and assigned, more in-depth communication was made by the employees. Employees could feel more bonding with their peers, when the seating was fixed, and connections felt stronger. Flexible seating was seen as an unsupportive thing for the integration. It was also brought up by the interviewees, that the social gatherings outside of work are important.

“Every twice a month, they actually try to arrange a comfort evening or like it's called tyhy-päivä. So it's like everybody can come and play board games, enjoy some snacks, so they also arrange those frequent meetings. So that's very nice of them to like, you know, we get to know about the other colleagues better from other units. So that's a nice cozy thing by (the employer).”
(Cecilia)

Social gatherings and possibilities to socialize with the colleagues were seen as a beneficial and helpful aspect. This kind of parties and social gatherings were seen entailing for team building and bonding, the practices that allowed free discussion and time outside of work-related matters could help to sense the feel of belonging in the workplace.

4.1.2 Personal characteristics

The personal characteristics that were described as an enabler in the interviews were patience, overall social skills and kindness. The outgoingness and having the patience were also factors that are seen as helpful while trying to integrate into the organisation. It was even noted by the interviewees that it was sometimes better not to “try too hard” when trying to make contacts with the other people in the workplace. As one informant discussed about the personal characteristics’ role in the Finnish organisation:

“- It takes time longer than in other countries because I've worked and lived in other countries also, to get into the integration right. You have to... Hold yourself from trying to get connected and give them time to understand you exist in this space. And by being silent and reserved, so not trying to make that contact with them. This, somehow, I don't know what the mechanism is but, built their comfort that I am not going to be very including about their life - -” (Anna)

Rajendran et al (2017, 450) suggest that positive attitude and working hard are some qualities that act as enablers in immigrants’ integration process. Thum-Thysen (2014, 32) has found that own initiative and strong belief in oneself has a positive effect on the integration outcomes. This was also noted by the interviewees of this study. Own initiative and being active was discovered to be an important character in the immigrant, which helped the integration. One informant raised that it is important for the immigrant to be proactive, rather than wait for the organisation, coworkers or manager, to come forward.

“Yes, I would say so, there is a certain level of proactiveness that is really needed and I also can imagine that this depends on the time of the year that you join and and kind of also how proactive your line manager is, right so, so, so in this way. There there is this element, I would say.” (Betty)

Flexible mindset, social skills and positiveness were some of the characteristics that were found as enablers by the interviewees. Flexibility in a sense of not finding it hard or challenging to move from one country to another and start building a life there, seemed to be self-evident for the interviewees. The mindset that cherished and found it easy and non-negotiable to leave one’s country was constantly brought up. Mingling, socializing

and taking part actively in different social gatherings was found significantly beneficial to support the integration process. Being able to connect with people easily and social networking were also raised as personal characteristics that are supporting one's integration. It is stated in the prior literature as well, that the openness and agreeability, strong mindset and own initiative are supportive factors in the integration process (Thum-Thysen 2014; Hudson & Inkson 2006; Rajendran et al. 2017).

Own mindset is seen as a key factor when thinking about one's integration and the mindset that one has, was many times raised in the interviews. Other important factors to mention were resilience, "sisu", patience, openness and courage. Optimism was also emphasized. Optimism was discovered as a mindset and the way of looking at life. The perspective one has in their mind. One informant described optimism in their interview:

"Optimism is very difficult. It's not about positivity because in any way you have positivity and negativity. But in any way you are in that situation; you are looking to this, you are carrying a sense of optimism [...] So if you have a positive list, you have negative list and you're like... What cheers you would be the optimism. So not the list themselves. But of course it's good to have those comparisons. It brings up your mind that you work more at, your brain works more rational, rational in terms of those changes, right. I feel that people who are really capable of coping with changes are people who can survive anywhere and that's also good with the Sisu -word." (Felicia)

The interviewee above talks about optimism. Also openness and open mindset was brought up many times with the interviewees. This has been recognized in the prior literature as well (Rajendran et al. 2017, 450). The interviewees found that open mind and own initiative plays a significant role in the integration process. There must be some sort of willingness to understand the host country's culture, in this study's case, Finnish culture. Ginny described their own initiative this way:

"Openness, I would say. It is important to keep the openness in mind. I am always thinking, why does the other person act like they do? Why did the person look at their own shoes when they are in the elevator with me? Why are they not looking at me in my eyes? And here comes the open mindset; I'm thinking, OK, I will investigate and read from the internet what could be the

reason, and find out that maybe it is the cultural character in Finland. And it is not about me, why they do not look at me in my eyes.” (Ginny)

A matter worth noticing, that was raised by almost all of the interviewees was the Finnish word “sisu”. A person who moves to another country to build a life there is seen as a resilient person who has a lot of “sisu” in them. Sisu is equal to willpower and resilience, the will to go through the hard times. Sisu was brought up many times, and it can be a describing factor when thinking about personal characteristics. Friendliness and positiveness were found to be enablers in the integration process, as one informant described:

“I think mainly it’s that I’m very passionate about my job. I’m very friendly and joyful, so you will rarely see me stressed out or moody. [...] I am also very appreciative about the opportunities I get.” (Emily)

One informant described themselves as an adaptive person, which has helped them to overcome challenges in the country.

“I can adapt very well. When I’m in a place I tend to start feeling it’s my home wherever I am. I want to learn the culture, like start to get into it” (Daphne)

Adaptiveness and being ready to overcome any challenges that come on the way, were seen as an important factor in one’s own mindset. The same kind of findings have been raised in the prior literature as well. Thum-Thysen (2014, 32) has also find it being a significant factor in person’s integration to have a strong belief in oneself and the employability possibilities. Openness and agreeability are two characteristics that support integration process and enhances positive career-related outcomes (Hudson & Inkson 2006).

4.1.3 Colleagues and family

Relations with colleagues were seen as as an enabler, coworkers can offer help and support that no one else can offer. Strong bonds with colleagues were found to be important part of how the integration was seen. Colleagues’ assistance and guidance is

important regarding the Finnish system, healthcare, sick leave, summer leave and the laws and policies the society works by. Colleagues can share information that is silent whether it's about the organisation or general policies in Finland.

Colleagues can help with official things considering laws and policies. This has also been recognised by Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewege (2017). They argue that coworkers provide practical information and insights into workplace's culture and company norms. In the interviews colleagues were seen as work friends to have conversations with at the lunch hour and at the workplace in general. Some interviewees had also taken the friendships outside of the office, but for many the work colleagues only remained as such. It was seen as a beneficial factor when in the organisations the employees do not have to compete against each other, so there is no conflicts of interest, but rather each one is appreciating each other and supporting each other at work. Riemsdijk and Basford (2022) have noted that coworkers play a significant role in the workplace integration with providing suggestions and help with insights to workplace culture.

Also spouse's and other people's social support was seen as an important factor in the integration process. The interviewees mentioned hobbies and other social life, among the time spent at work, being important when integrating.

Välimäki et al. (2023, 58) have also noted that forming friendships with locals seem to connect to successful integration. Friendships with locals have been found to be helpful with all kinds of things in Finland. Friendships and connections with locals help with understanding the culture but the locals are also a great help regarding the Finnish systems. An informant described the Finnish connections in the interview:

“My own hobbies have been important, when I have been in sauna, in a public sauna with ice swimming possibility. There I have made friends with Finnish people; from taxi drivers to bankers. I mean a big number of different kind of people. I have learnt a lot about how to act in different situations and spending my free time with Finnish people has been very beneficial.” (Ginny)

This kind of connections described above help the immigrants in forming relations with the locals and connecting with the country. Acculturation process takes place, when the immigrant learns and understands the society's systems better. This kind of connections and friendships are helpful and makes the immigrant feel more integrated and forms ties to Finland. Social support from colleagues is helpful in many ways.

“She was brainstorming with me what we can do like in order to get me a job wherever in Finland. [...] They also explained [that] you should reach out to people, you shouldn't wait for like others to actually connect. We should just like send your CV's and then like try to ask for a position [from companies] So those were the factors that were really helpful. Yeah, even the the director was asking me “Do you need a reference or something? How can I help you with that? If you want I can give you the reference.” So those are the things that helped me very much.” (Cecilia)

The informants found the help from colleagues and friends important and significant. Local people who know the language and understand how the systems work, or peers who have been through the same processes, can offer help and support in different kind of official and unofficial tasks.

4.1.4 Emerging themes

Language

Language was seen as an enabler, when the company had decided to have the internal communication in English. Apart from the organisational point of view, the respondents also found it beneficial that the official sites in the internet could all be accessible in English, which was the language that all the interviewees understood prior to coming to Finland. Common language that was used in the organisation was seen as a positive thing. Common language within the organisation was seen as a supporting factor. It is also noted that it is respected in the organisation, if one tries to speak Finnish, even if they cannot speak it fluently. As an interviewee told about their own experience:

“Also, there were some people in the company that didn't speak English at all, and then I would speak my very bad Finnish. And I really remembered this, especially a little bit elderly men, and, who I could see in their faces how they really want to laugh, but they don't, because they know they really respect that. You know, I come and I try, right? But they are really holding it in because my Finnish is so bad, -- but we tried.” (Betty)

Language was often an enabler of integration in general in Finland. It is found easy and effortless to communicate in English in the workplace, and in the organisations it was taken into consideration, if someone does not speak Finnish.

English skills were seen as a must in a Finnish organisation, and Finnish skills as a plus. As stated by some interviewees, it was easy to get used to speaking English in the organisation. Some had learnt Finnish, and persistently made the employer speak Finnish to them, just to learn the language. It was also noteworthy that if the interviewees knew Finnish language, it had helped them. One of the interviewees spoke Finnish. An informant described the language knowledge as a supporting factor:

“Language is very important and right when I knew I am going to stay in Finland, I decided that I have to learn the language. [...] Yeah, the language is important and even though I know I could manage only with English, it would limit my working opportunities.” (Ginny)

The above extract concludes some of the mindset and the adaptiveness that is needed from the immigrant. As the informant describes, for them it was self-evident to start learning the Finnish language, to find better work opportunities in the future and to be able to fully integrate in the organization and in the country. The informants found that even though English language skills are sufficient, it would be important to find the time and support to learn the Finnish language.

Unofficial support

Many of the interviewees found it very helpful to have social media groups that could offer help and guidance. Since many of immigrants are facing the same kind of challenges, the peer support was found helpful and could work with the work-related issues or questions. Peer support and unofficial groups; such as Facebook groups, could help with challenges and offer important support to the immigrants. As one informant described about their peers being helpful:

“They know the loopholes in the system and then they'll try to inform me beforehand like “Ohh have you done this or not? Because by law we have to do this, [...] the first three days of the sick leaves are paid.” So those are the

[...] informations [...] they actually tried to share and keep me posted about. So the whole journey has been quite helpful for me to know the Finnish system and [...] what I should do as an immigrant and what are the expectations from me so that I can fulfill my responsibility.” (Cecilia)

The kind of support Cecilia received from their friend, can be a significant help with the bureaucratic systems. It could be said that if one person has successfully proceeded with the officials and system, they can help the others with any questions or worries they may have. Facebook groups and other social groups are found helpful, when there is a possibility to ask for help or guidance, that is not found from anywhere else.

“To find these things out, you need to be on the social groups somewhere, because officially it's not written anywhere, not on migri or maistraatti's website. And it's like a missing piece of information, that will complicate the process. So you don't know what's your to do list; point 1, point 2 and 3... Like there is no right sequence, so people are like: “I have this problem. Who do I ask? Let me ask on Facebook and people tell me; you have to do it that way.” (Anna)

Unofficial support is found helpful in situations when it is difficult to find correct information elsewhere or the peers can help and support the individual with providing assistance to find answers to questions or challenges they are facing. As Anna describes in the above extract, the social media groups offer help, when the difficult matters arise.

Flexibility

The flexibility of Finnish worklife was considered a positive thing, and something special compared to other countries. The flexibility to decide whether to go to the office for the workday or stay at home was considered a showing of trust from the employer. As an informant described their own experiences:

“Everyone was just trusting you that you do your work right and without checking like are you online or anything [...]. And also flexibility, [...] I had to go back to [my home country] for a week and it was totally flexible. You just go and work from there, it was no issue” (Daphne)

The flexibility of the workplace offers a possibility for the employee the day and makes the day even more productive – sometimes workdays at the office were seen to be hindering one’s concentration and remote work possibility made it easier to concentrate on one’s work fully. The flexibility of the workplace also made it easier to adjust in the local climate and the amount of daylight, when the flexible work schedule made it easier to decide when to wake up in the morning, for example. One interviewee even mentioned that it is easier in their position to demand their subordinates better work performance, since they could form their message better and more nicely in a chat, in a written form, than to say it face-to-face in the office environment, where they could be perceived as demanding. Remote work possibility and hybrid work is seen as a modern way of working and almost all of the interviewees had the possibility to work both from home or from office. Finnish individualistic culture is something very different, yet positive compared to many other countries. As interviewees told in their interview:

“Sometimes in Finland they give you a lot of power to define your own schedules. There is a lot of independent work. Not everyone is used to this kind of individual culture, many are from collective cultures, where there is a certain hierarchy [...]. I have always got help and I have noticed that I have to be patient. I noticed that the knowledge about Finnish culture was not enough, I just learn it after experiencing it by myself, and then I could slowly grow my own belief in myself.” (Ginny)

“The flexibility that the company gives. Like it's quite hard to adjust to the local climate and amount of daylight and the type of food that is available in the supermarket. So there is some like physical body adjustment and sometimes, I don't know, let's say lack of some vitamins is causing being more tired than regular or than before. So this flexibility that they give (in the workplace), [...] this is not happening most likely anywhere else in the world.[...] Having the flexibility to wake up a little bit later or to leave the office a little bit earlier was very, very supportive.” (Anna)

Finnish worklife and managerial work is offering individuals responsibilities and flexibility that is considered unique compared to other countries. Finnish workplace culture offers flexibility that is helpful in many situations, and the informants were surprised to find how relaxed or flexible it is to work in a Finnish organisation. Sometimes

it took some time for the informants to get used to the individualistic and self-directedness that are characteristics of Finnish workplace cultures, if they came from different kind of work culture. Remote working, hybrid working and flexibility to choose when to work are seen as a beneficial factors enabling the integration in the Finnish working life.

4.2 Challenges

4.2.1 Language

As much as the language knowledge was seen as a supporting factor in the integration process, not knowing the language was seen as a challenge to the integration. Some of the respondents thought it has made it harder for them to get integrated, since it is comfortable to live their everyday life with solely knowing English in Finland. The comfortability does not encourage one to study or learn Finnish – since it is easy to do everything in English. Some practical things regarding language are also seen as possible hindering factors, as an interviewee states:

“-- but there are things that have been, for example, certain challenge and words in the software, all the software was in Finnish, right... -- so with Google (translator) and things like this, you can change the language, but uh, I work in R&D, which means that we have had for example equipment, laboratory equipment and all the equipment, all the software was in Finnish, all the instructions were in Finnish. And all the, kind of, also the data very often was in Finnish. -- we were getting data from other companies and they're like, of course, everything was in Finnish -- so in this way, for example, in the former company I worked, the software was in Finnish and we couldn't change it because the people who are operating it, they didn't speak English. So this definitely was a challenge.” (Betty)

In this particular case the language created a challenge, since even though the interviewee had all the necessary skills to do the work on paper, and theoretically, in practice both the software was in Finnish as well as the data that the employee was supposed to be working with.

Language, especially not knowing the Finnish language, sometimes made the interviewees feel bad, since there was a feeling of guilt that the interviewees felt when

they felt like the language was switched to English because of them. The guilty feeling rose especially if someone else did not find it comfortable to speak English, and then the role was for the local, non-English speaker, to feel uncomfortable. Peltokorpi and Clausen (2011) have found in their study that largest challenge to communication in the firm is the lack of shared language. Even if the common corporate language was English, in daily conversations other languages were used as well, the writers argue. Individuals with poor skills of the host country's language may unintentionally be excluded from the daily conversation with locals and it may hinder their ways of showing professionalism (Piekkari et al. 2005, 338) Language barriers were often tackled easily, interviewees thought. A third person was brought to the conversation, if the conversation was not flowing or there was no common language between the two people.

Finnish language is found difficult to learn, based on the interviewees' opinions. The comfortability of speaking English is a positive thing in many cases, but it may hinder the Finnish language learning among immigrants. Finnish people tend to switch straight to English, if or when they find out that the opposing side does not speak Finnish, the informants explained. This is seen as a matter of politeness and inclusiveness, but it does not support the Finnish language learning of foreigners.

Kawi and Xu (2009, 181) suggest that language and communication training is a supporting factor in immigrants' integration process, if the workplace is offering them. European Commission (2023, 16) has stated that one barrier related to integration to the host country is lack of skills of the host country language(s). It was also brought up by the interviewees that there is a lack of providing the language courses by the employing companies. Some found that the employer is not encouraging the language learning, where as some felt like it was encouraged by the employer. If the job itself does not require Finnish, the employer would not provide Finnish courses for the employees, since the provided opportunities and courses would have to bring some additional skills related to the role. And in case Finnish language was not needed, the employer would not have the need to provide Finnish language courses. As Felicia told in the interview:

"We have this tuition support program, yeah. But I think the criteria is like you need to find something to study or your current job that has to be related, right? So this is quite challenging because my job doesn't require Finnish speaking thing, and if I'm asking, "I want to learn Finnish.", that is not supported." (Felicia)

Language skills, or in particular, the lack of Finnish language skills, was often a hindering factor in the hiring process by the interviewees' opinions. This has also been noted in the prior literature and the interviewees' points support this outcome. Välimäki et al (2023, 57) have found out that the many of the immigrants in Finland have stated that the lack of language skills is affecting their integration process. European Council and European Union have stated that language is central to many of the issues connected with immigration. Linguistic and communicational skills are seen as a key factor when training in a profession, and also for social inclusion and employment (Beacco et al. 2017, 283). Van Riemsdijk and Basford (2022) have acknowledged that one of the key factors in workplace integration is language proficiency. Based on the interviewees' statements, in the integration process the matter of language skills had usually been taken into consideration already, since language competency had already been discussed before hiring a person. But when looking for new positions, in some fields the most significant challenge had been that the person does not know Finnish well enough, to be considered to the position. This is the matter that should be raised, even though it does not necessarily belong to the integration process inside the organisation, but it does affect the immigrants' chances and possibilities to find new positions and feel the belonging in Finland. So in a larger scope, the matter of language skills is still found a significant challenge in the process of hiring and employing immigrants. As Emily described in their interview:

“...if I want a better salary I will need to speak Finnish, even though there are some companies and I have heard from good sources that they don't even use Finnish inside the office work. But they usually disregard you if they see that you do not speak Finnish fluently, that you are learning, that you know only the basics. It's definitely a obstacle to access better jobs or more qualified positions and better salaries.” (Emily)

As Emily describes, they have found that the lack of Finnish language skills have affected their process of finding employment within their qualifications. This kind of challenge hinders the integration process significantly, since the immigrants may even find themselves feeling hopeless or not wanted in the job market, with their skills, because they cannot speak Finnish.

4.2.2 Cultural differences

The interviewees agreed about the cultural differences playing a significant role in the workplace integration. This was seen during the lunch time, when it could be a shock to some of the interviewees that some Finnish people were enjoying their lunch in front of their own tray and plate, looking at their own plate and not socially interacting with others. This kind of lunchtime quietness was difficult to some interviewees. Some of the interviewees had noticed the difference, but did not mind it or thought about it as a bad thing. Lunch time is seen differently in other cultures, and as it was brought up by an interviewee, you should always know who you are going to lunch with, rather than just sitting in a table with strangers or coworkers you do not know yet. Different views and opinions, perhaps differing from culture to culture, about how to spend the lunchtime has been noted by the interviewees, as Betty described:

“When I look back, I really remembered the time that, you know, I would go for lunch with people and they would not say a word. Like there was not a single word exchange. And for the first year, when people were not so familiar with speaking English, no one talked to me except my boss. But it never bothered me.” (Betty)

Cultural differences can act as a hindering factor in the communication. Peltokorpi and Clausen (2011, 520) discuss that there are multiple differences in people’s behaviour resulting from culture. Fitzpatrick (2016, 279) argues that inability to adjust to a new culture is one of the reasons for the failure of the integration. The writer also suggests that cultural differences make it harder to for friendships with the locals. The lunch time activeness and the way to spend the lunch time in Finland is different than in other countries, as an interviewee described:

“I noticed that people don't mind having lunch in front of their tray and plate and just looking into the plate and having their lunch and going back to office doing their work tasks. Versus as in other countries, if you did not find anyone of your friends or colleagues, to have lunch with, you go there alone. You will force yourself on into someone else, table and group and say I don't have anyone, can I join you? I want to meet you guys and let's have lunch together.”

So lunchtime is not only for consuming food but also socializing (in other countries.)” (Anna)

Finnish people were viewed as quiet and reserved, but also helpful and friendly. When one comes from different background, Finnish way of socializing had to be learnt. As it is described in Välimäki et al. (2023, 58) study, where they found out that “if you want to be polite, you leave people alone.”. Cultural differences include as well different attitudes towards work (Rajendran 2017, 447). It was also noted that even though government can help and can actively try to do their best with policies and the laws that, the person themselves has a responsibility to be active As an interviewee discussed:

“Being very quiet. Enjoy the quiet. Like, you don't have to always like to bring up conversation. It can be just very quiet. Everyone is watching TV quietly and that's fine. That's perfectly fine. And so the same thing in the office, that will be the same. So supporting factors. I know the government's trying their best. But they cannot do all the way through. No, Because they're not living with you. No. So it must be the person, the environment, that the circle around the immigrant, is the most support.” (Felicia)

The interviewees shared the same experiences about Finnish people and Finnish worklife. One informant explained their views this way:

“Main cultural difference is that the Finnish job relationship is very much straightforward and cold. [...] Cold in the matter that we are not here to be friends, we are here to work and be professionals [...] That's good because it allows you to perform your job, to be straightforward with the complaints or questions you may have in a circular communication, without the need to be careful of hurting anyone's feelings.” (Emily)

Above the interviewee described the Finnish work relationships cold, compared to their home country's workplaces. Cultural differences were not only noted during the lunch time, the interviewees thought, but also during the socializing. The ways of showing affection differ; the interviewees talked about for example them bringing in souvenirs from their trips; candy or some other small things, but the Finnish colleagues never

returning the favor. Other examples included for example the ways of helping each other. And these could really hinder the social integration in the workplace. The interviewees often had noted that in a Finnish workplace it is expected for one to ask for help or assistance, if it is needed, but no one would actively come to offer help. But when a local person in the office was asked to help, they would gladly help however they could. Proactiveness was expected from the beginning, but it was not necessarily shown by the locals, or the people who were already working in the firm, in general.

“-- comparing that as a cultural difference where I come from, if we have someone [new] and [...] people would be very actively trying to ask this person [...] if the person needs help [...] So I must say, as a bit of a cultural difference, I had to learn also to ask for help because I didn't have, sort of, it was not a part of me. It took me time. This was done in Denmark, not here, where I really understood that no one will actively [...] care if I have something [to ask] or not, but if I ask, they will happily help me. So, so it's just more, maybe, that other people are not proactive trying to help me.”(Betty)

Cultural differences were also noted between other countries and people from different cultural backgrounds than Finnish. Finnish people are seen as humble people with some difficulties to receive compliments or positive feedback. This is seen as a difference to other cultures, where one's success is praised and noticed. Felicia described it this way:

"We have this recognition program, when you have a colleague who helps you a lot or who did something really good, fantastic, [and] you want to recognize that person. [...] and eventually this person will be given award or certificate with function points. And then I was [...] shocked that the culture here is [...] you have to give it privately and say thank you, and then also copy the File Manager. And that's it..." (Felicia)

As Felicia shares above, they feel like Finnish people are modest. They are willing to be recognized, but not necessarily as loudly as in other cultures. This may cause confusion to some individuals. This has been noted in the prior literature as well. Cultural differences also include the different norms in socializing, but also in different attitudes towards

work between the home country and host country (Rajendran 2017, 447). According to Balante et al. (2021, 2) a number of workplace and integration issues can arise from dissimilarities of the cultures in the working place.

One cultural difference that has been noted by interviewees is also the background they come from. The way one has been educated, in which kind of system they have been in, what kind of upbringing they have got may make a significant difference in the intergration process. In some countries the system is based on testing and comparison since the early childhood, so the Finnish system can feel different and weird. Some countries are more collective and not as individualistic as in Finland. Finnish working life is viewed as individualistic and trustworthy, Finnish managers are giving responsibility and expecting the employee to manage themselves. This is seen as a cultural difference that can be difficult at first. If one's whole life has been based on testing and comparison, racing against other employees, it may be difficult to get adjusted to the Finnish, more relaxed system.

4.2.3 Personal characteristics

Some personal characteristics were also noted by the interviewees to be acting as a hindering factor. Sometimes being too friendly, or too active, could cause the opposite reaction from the locals, but sometimes even the locals would surprise. Some interviewees felt like their ways to approach people in the office were found as somehow too social. Interviewee described this carefully:

“-- Luckily I met some locals who were more open minded to build connections with the foreigner who has nothing to offer back, just talking to them and that's it. Spending time, so they were like, OK, I have a car, I'm bored at home. Let's go randomly on the left this point, let's go see what's there. Like, yeah, let's join, I'll join them in. Let's go. Because the corona and there is nothing else to do. --” (Anna)

Sometimes one's personal characteristics that made them social, were found as a challenge. Finnish people's reservedness sometimes was brought into action and for some it could even feel like their own being is “too much” for the locals. This kind of experiences hindered the integration process in some cases. One informant described it this way:

“Well sure, one obstacle would be, since I'm like always reaching out to people, sometimes I don't know where to actually put my boundaries because some Finnish people might not like it, right?” (Cecilia)

If a person was coming from completely different culture than Finnish one, the competitiveness of themselves may have been seen as a negative character. Competitiveness is not usual in Finnish organisations, the interviewee stated.

“The line manager had to talk to them [people from interviewees' cultural background] that you don't have to complete the task so quickly. If today you can do 100%, I will ask you to do 75%. Because the other people, they are jealous or they don't feel comfortable because you are giving them pressure. [...] And it makes sense to me because I told them also that, well, yeah, I know you feel difficult because you want to do 100%, you want to do perfect, right? Perfectionist. I would say, yeah, you want to do it perfectly and you don't want to be criticized, but the problem is you are creating a huge stress to the others [in the workplace].” (Felicia)

It was noted by the interviewees that sometimes coming from a very different kind of culture could make it difficult at first to adjust to the Finnish worklife and the culture of working. Finnish employees are not as competitive, as in other countries and the environment of competitiveness is rarely found in the informants' workplaces. Dumas, Phillips and Rothbar (2013, 1396) suggest that demographically dissimilar people can find integrating into the organisation harder. Holopainen and Björkman (2005, 47) suggest that communicational abilities make it more likely for the immigrants to perform well in the organisations.

4.2.4 Workplace actions

Managerial work was both praised and criticized. The Finnish managerial work was viewed as a very individualistic, where the supervisor would not proactively try to help the employee in the onboarding process, but rather wait for the employee to come forward in case they have any questions. This was seen as a hindering factor for some

interviewees, when the employee had to have the courage from the beginning to be very independent and self-directed. Finnish worklife is viewed as individualistic and for people coming from different background and different work culture, it can be overwhelming at first, to get used to the managerial work and the individualistic, yet flexible, culture.

4.2.5 Laws and policies

For non-EU citizens, fixed term contracts at workplaces may hinder the integration. If a person is a third country national, they may experience the stressfulness that comes from the fixed term contracts, since the future is not clear. Constant worrying about the residence permits and whether they will be renewed, or if the work contract will be renewed or not, can cause anxiousness and worry about the future. As Cecilia stated in the interview:

“First of all I have to constantly think about my residence permit, renewing it. -- But when I got the work contract. And I tried to switch my residence permit. So they gave me until my contract was (ending) [...] until June [...] In Finland, [...] some of the organizations have this culture to lay over people in July and then renew the contract [...] from August, so that's what will be happening to me as well. [...] Meanwhile I cannot apply for my -- new residence permit until I get my (work) contract. So I have to wait my for my contract, renew my residence permit and I have to constantly think about it like “Ohh when I will get the contract or not next year.” So that's one of the issues that is [...] a big obstacle because if I'm constantly thinking about my residence permit, will I be able to stay in Finland or not, then, you know, it's a bit stressful situation. So that's one thing the the other Europeans don't have to think about it. So non-Europeans like us, they have to think about it constantly.” (Cecilia)

Here, the interviewee raises the issue of fixed-term work contracts and how they have affect to non-EU citizens' residence permit process. Aaskoven (2020, 1009) suggests that country's political atmosphere and system may have effect on the immigrants' intergration into the labour market. The latest changes that the Finnish government has been pushing forward are affecting people who are working in Finland currently (Iltalehti

2023.) The Finnish system was also criticised to lack transparency, based on the interviews. It was said that the Finnish system is efficient compared to other EU countries, but some of the decision-making lacks transparency. The access to all information is sometimes seen as a hindering factor, it may be hard to find suitable information from different websites and the websites may be confusing, or the links are not working, or there are too many different kind of instances.

Finland is criticised for the heavy system and bureaucratic ways. It can be difficult to find the correct person or instance to contact, or even impossible to find the right information from the websites. The system's heaviness can create issues since it can be unclear to some people how to access the information. Emily described this in their interview this way:

“The information in the official pages, both in English and Finnish, it's not clear. It's difficult to understand. When you call and try to speak with a human being, they give you different explanation of the same matters; some people can tell you an (another) answer, and another person can tell you something completely different. And it's been like that with immigration, with taxes, with Kela, health system. So I find it extremely difficult for a person who doesn't know about the Finnish job market or the system.” (Emily)

The interviewee found the system and the employees not helpful, or the information that was told was not clear. This kind of obstacles were found by many of the interviewees, especially when calling some public institution. The information found on the websites were defined as unclear, misleading, misleading and sometimes outdated.

Sometimes the language courses provided by employment office in Finland are seen beneficial but hard to reach or obtain, since if the employment offices are only offering language courses during the daytime, and the immigrant is employed, it is impossible to take part in the language courses provided.

4.2.6 Emerging themes

Stereotypes

The interviewees described that sometimes it was them, who had the stereotypes and that was limiting their own interaction with the locals. It was the initial thought that they had, that the Finnish people do not want to interact outside of work; they already have enough friends and they are not interested in making any new connections.

Sometimes the mindset was seen as a challenge, when the Finnish companies had the stereotypical mindset that hiring someone who is not natively Finnish is too difficult or brings too much work for the employer. It was noted in the interviews that there is a significant lack of knowledge in some of the employer's side and their views. There is a lack of the common knowledge of the factual information when it comes to the hiring process of immigrants. It is common that the employer does not possess the practical knowledge about, for example, what it means to hire an EU citizen. Hiring an EU citizen brings no more paperwork for the Finnish employer, than hiring a local Finnish person. This is often forgotten, based on the interviewees responses.

The stereotypical mindset of the hiring process was highlighted by the interviewees in many cases. Sometimes the closed mindset and not being welcoming in the hiring process was viewed as a negative factor.

“I would say open mindedness from that side, because of course people from my background or like me, they have been trying to actually get the job or get a position here. But if the company that hires the people doesn't have open mindedness to immigrants or people from other than Finnish. So that might not work actually because they need to have the open mindedness to accepting to different people different kinds of people from different backgrounds. [...] So it should come from, I felt like it should come more from the organizations because they have more to do (than us), because it's not like we're not trying to reach. We are actually trying to apply to different positions, trying to get a living here and we want to stay here. I'm sure whoever is trying to find a job, they want to stay here. So. It's just the organizations. They should have maybe more policies and be more integrating, more welcoming to the people.”
(Cecilia)

Sometimes the stereotypes hindered the immigrants' own initiative. Viewing Finnish people as reserved or impolite, quiet and mute made it hard to initiate conversation. And sometimes the stereotype was broken, and Finnish people opened up. In this case the stereotypes of Finnish people were hindering the process of integration, if the stereotypes acted as challenge to initiate contacts with the nationals.

Lack of correct information or service

Many of the interviewees stated that the official pages and websites, the official information is unclear or not sufficient. The pages are seen to be outdated, the policies change and the customer service is lacking empathy, and sometimes even correct information. The interviewees found themselves frustrated and confused. The situations are always different, and the processes may change between individuals. As Emily concluded in the interview:

“Because with all of these instances I had spoken with more than three different human beings and countless emails and they are called the most “I don’t know, I cannot confirm, I cannot give you that information, I cannot say for sure.” Then my question is, who can say for sure? I understand that maybe as a customer service agents or very similar positions, they would not want to risk their own position saying affirming, organizing something with certainty. But I think it should be someone, if it’s not them, who can give you strict guidance?” (Emily)

The interview data revealed issues in the customer service and the Finnish service's possible defects in the system. The service is sometimes seen as rude, and the attitudes of employees of agencies and public services were largely viewed as unpleasant.

“And this is being said, everywhere I went, everyone was extremely rude. It was like the rudeness of people, how I was registering in Helsinki and how rude everyone was. [...] It really amazed me. I've never felt treated so much like a child ever. [...] But the process as such wasn't difficult, but people involved in it made it difficult and unpleasant.” (Betty)

The complete lack of information, or the difficulties in finding the correct information were found to be hindering factors of integration. The rudeness or inpoliteness could be overwhelming. Some interviewees raised the question of unclear or incorrect information, that is extremely difficult to find or it is scattered. This emerging theme of scattered or incorrect information ties the discussion to the enabler that has been raised in 4.2.6, where the support of the peers and other unofficial support has been noted as a significant supportive factor in the integration process. The rude service or incorrect information that is not found easily, can hinder one's integration process, since it is making the person feel helpless or not welcome to the country.

“Some of the information in migri's website or in Kela's website. It's confusing. So maybe for the integration process, like what kind of permit they should apply for, or [...] how Kela is going to help people integrate. Those information [...] need to be more specific and more straightforward, not just providing you link, [...] the link doesn't provide any more information. Just maybe they can add more information. They can update the English version of it, maybe in the Finnish one they have everything, but in the English version they need to update it.” (Cecilia)

As the informant describes above, the official sources had been found confusing at times and it was difficult for them to find the correct information from the official sources, such as webpages or links that were provided. The incorrect information, or lack of information could act as a challenge to integration process in general, and get in the way of integration both in and outside of workplace. The incorrect information may cause stress and uncomfortability to the immigrants.

5 Conclusion

The section concludes the thesis and presents first the theoretical contribution and ties the prior literature introduced in the literature review to the empirical findings of the study. Practical implications gives recommendations regarding the immigrants' integration process and if there are any possible findings that could be enhanced in Finnish working life regarding highly skilled immigrants and their integration in the organisations.

In conclusion, the interviews and the information the interviews revealed, is connected and follows the prior literature, in many aspects the enablers of the integration as well as the challenges are well recognized in the prior literature. What was new and original for this study are the experiences of the individuals regarding Finnish worklife and their own views about the support and challenges that are connected to organisations in Finland.

Integration is a large topic, and it can act as an umbrella-term for many smaller sections of integration. Workplace integration is connected to the larger integration process, and often the integration in the workplace compliments the integration as a whole. The data collected for this thesis reveals that often it is almost impossible to talk about only workplace integration, because the individual does not only integrate into the organisation; while doing so, there is the integration and acculturation happening, that tightens the person's relations to the host country.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

The thesis found many connections to the prior literature. The challenges and enablers affecting the immigrants' integration to organisations are often universal – immigrants are found to have some of the same challenges or enablers affecting their integration anywhere. There are some specialties that are tied to Finnish working life and the integration into Finnish organisation, that are found in this study. Support was found for the language barrier and cultural differences acting as possible hindering factors or challenges, as has been noted in the prior literature as well and supported by Van Riemsdijk and Basford (2022) and Peltokorpi and Clausen (2011, 520). Interviewees were recognizing language both as an enabler, considering that in Finland the overall language proficiency level is high and in the workplaces it is easy to communicate in English, and as the interviewees' working language mostly was English, it is recognized that in Finland there are organisations which work solely in English as a working language. This, on the other hand, could cause the interviewees to find it difficult to learn

the Finnish language, when daily conversations were held in English and no possibilities of using Finnish were found. Not knowing the Finnish language could then act as a challenge, when many of the workplaces require Finnish knowledge.

Interviewees confirmed and strengthened the points already found in the prior literature but they were able to expand this by their own very specific experiences and stories about Finnish organisations and working life integration. The interview material is broad and specific, taking part in a very limited, yet specific, part of the field. Interviewees were able to point out some concerns that they have found; there were many positive sides of the Finnish systems, but also many hindering ones. This was tied to the background of the interviewees as well, when EU citizens found the systems and working in Finland relatively easy, for non-EU citizens the process and the systems could cause stress.

Policies and laws, political atmosphere and the whole system may have affect on the immigrants' integration. The policy area of immigration has been recognized to be multi-dimensional and that has been seen to possible being harder to facilitate the integration process of immigrants. (Aaskoven 2020, 1009.) In this study, the focus was on the immigrants' own personal views as "customers" or "users" of the system. In this study the findings were that often Finnish system is seen as a transparent, relatively quick, yet very complex and sometimes confusing. The interviewees raised as a challenge to integration the complexity of information and a practical example that is raised is the difficulty in obtaining information from official sources.

As Kawi and Xu (2009, 181) have found, there are internal and external hindering factors that can be found when studying the integration of immigrants in an organisation. External factors are those which are beyond the control of the person. Internal factors are those that can be controlled by the immigrant themselves. This was also found in the interviewees answers, it is noteworthy that some of the support can be given by the organisation, and some of it the immigrant can create or find by themselves. It is the same with the challenges that have an effect on the integration.

Non-recognition of skills has been found to be a hindering factor to integration in the literature. According to Riemsdijk and Axelsson (2021) the difficulties in re-entering the field of expertise for highly skilled immigrants may be attributed to the non-recognition of skills. Rajendran et al. (2017) echo this; at the organisational level because of the lack of recognition of skills an immigrant may not be employed. This was not supported as much by the data collected for this study. One theme that the interviewees did not raise

in the interviews was the non-recognition of skills. The interviewees had mostly good experiences about the skill recognition, and most of the interviewees had found employment from the field they were initially educated for.

There are some emerging themes, that were not studied in the prior literature or not that much emphasis was put on those. These themes include unofficial support, language and flexibility in the workplace. Often the Finnish managerial work was praised, but seen as different than in the immigrants' home countries. Finnish worklife was seen as flexible and trusting, meaning that the managers trust in their employees. Self-direction was often named in the interviews; Finnish worklife was seen as independent and a high level of self-reliance is expected.

This study mainly supports the findings in the prior literature. It does not outline or disprove completely any of the findings in the theoretical section, but rather expands and enriches the subject and specifies in one smaller section of the large topic. In this study the main focus was in the experiences of the immigrants and the experiences of the people in Finnish organisations. The point of view of theirs is bringing new insights into the ongoing discussion of the immigration, from one narrow point of view. Table 2 presented the factors that the literature had found to be affecting integration. In the below table, the table is updated.

Enablers	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace actions • Personal characteristics • Colleagues and family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Cultural differences • Personal characteristics • Lack of workplace actions • Laws and policies
<p>Emerging themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unofficial support • Language • Flexibility 	<p>Emerging themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypes • Lack of correct information or service

Table 7 Revised factors affecting integration

In the table 3, which is presented above, the table is revised. The emerging themes are added on the table, to show the new information obtained from the data. The data revealed

new themes regarding integration. In the enablers, the new factors that emerged from the data are unofficial support, language and flexibility. In the emerging themes considering the challenges hindering integration, the data revealed two new themes, which are presented in the Table 6. The emerged enablers in the Finnish organisations' context are unofficial support, language and flexibility. Below these themes are processed more in depth.

Unofficial support can be concluded as all the informal information that the immigrant can find without it being received from official authorities or services. This kind of information can include social media groups, support and help from individuals from same background or nationality. Also spouse's support is counted here; many of the interviewees had their most important support coming from spouse or spouse's family, especially if the spouse is from Finland.

Language skills in Finnish organisations are seen as a beneficial factor since Finnish people are very good in English and that supports the communication in Finnish organisations. The interviewees found that the Finnish people are mostly ready to speak English and the communication is easy. The wide knowledge of English as a common language is beneficial both for the support of the integration as well as getting to socialize with people. It also helps when contacting different government agencies or sorting out official things considering employment.

Flexibility of the worklife is seen as an enabler of integration. Finnish managerial work and work culture enhances one's independence and possibilities to live flexibly. Companies often offer a possibility to work hybrid or remotely, which adds flexibility. Employees are also trusted and responsibility is given to them.

Emerging themes that hindered integration are recognised as stereotypes and lack of correct information or service. Stereotypes refer to the stereotypes that both the immigrants themselves have about Finnish people, as well as the stereotypes organisations have about hiring an immigrant. This kind of stereotypical mindset and negative expectations hinder the integration process. Stereotypes may cause the immigrant to not interact with locals and therefore stop them from creating new friendships or ties to host country.

Lack of correct information or service acts as a challenge to integration, when the correct information cannot be easily found or obtained from the official sources. This brings stress and hinders the integration, when it can be difficult to search and find the important information regarding the official processes or systems. Customer service in

some official instances contributes to this finding. The service that was provided was sometimes found to be rude or it seemed to be unclear even to the employees to guide and give correct instructions.

Emerging themes act as suggestions and new findings regarding the topic. These new themes were often brought up by the interviewees when they discussed about the integration process. Many of the new, emerged themes both hindering or supporting the integration had a strong, national aspect to them. For example “lack of correct information” raised the question of the official instances or systems that cannot provide correct information through their official websites or the information is hard to find, confusing or unclear. This would suggest that Finnish systems are confusing to immigrants, lacking the clear and consistent information and servicescape.

5.2 Practical implications

This study introduces the integration process in a Finnish organisation from the perspective of the highly skilled immigrants who are experiencing the integration process in their own daily life. The findings suggest that there are multiple internal and external factors both supporting and hindering the integration process. The data shows that Finnish working life also has some specialties to it, when it comes to immigrants in working life and within organisations. The conducted interviews tell a story of view interviewed persons told by themselves. Every individual’s view is different and experiences are highly personal.

Highly skilled immigrants are highly valued in Finnish working life. It is noticeable that many people decide to leave the country after obtaining an education in Finland, or even after working in Finland. There are reasons as many as there are people, so it is almost impossible to find only one explanation to this. Integration in the organisations is important, since this could help people to stay in the country. Participants in this study have all stayed in Finland 2-13 years, so some things have been done right in their cases, since they are still in Finland and they mostly feel like the integration process has been positive on their side. In addition it is to be noted that there are still some challenges affecting integration as well, and usually these challenges could be tackled either by the government and system or the organisation where the immigrant works.

This thesis highlights the importance of small things that can be done in organisations to help the integration. These include buddy / mentoring systems, seating arrangements

in the offices, flexible working life, managerial work which is understanding and high quality, language courses, especially in Finnish, offered to immigrants. Also, internal reasons affect the integration as well. Some characteristics that have been seen to be positive regarding the integration is positivity, flexible mindset, “sisu”, patience and courage in decision making.

Challenges seen as a hindering factors are language barrier, cultural difference, personal characteristics, lack of workplace actions, some laws and policies. New, emerging themes that were brought up in the interviews are stereotypes that either the immigrants or employers have and lack of correct information or service provided by the official sources. As this thesis had the focus on the interviewees’ own personal experiences and their own individualistic views, person’s mindset and personality has effect on how different things are viewed, positively or negatively.

The implications in organisations are practical daily life activities, that could help the integration. This means systems that would have the possibility of modifying language settings. From Finnish colleagues, who are fluent in Finnish, it would be wished for to use the language with the immigrants, especially if the person who does not speak the language, wishes so. Finnish people are often fluent in English, so it is common to start speaking English in all situations. A practical implication could be for the native Finnish colleagues to start listening carefully, whether the non-native colleague would like to speak Finnish and slowly adjust to that.

Successful integration practices help the immigrants and can enhance the chances of them staying in the country. Finnish organisations are seen as fair and flexible, and modern. Especially the flexible hours of working and hybrid work possibilities are seen as a positive factor supporting integration and willingness to stay in the country.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This thesis answers the research questions that were presented in the start. The interviews acted as a suitable data collection method in this kind of research and the data was able to find answers to the narrowed down research questions and sub-questions about the integration of immigrants and the enablers as well as the challenges that individuals face in Finnish organisations. There are limitations that are to be made clear. Seven interviews give a glimpse and are able to show and represent these individuals’ thoughts and experiences from their own personal point of view, coming from their own background and their own past experiences. This limits generalizability

of this study. These seven interviews were analysed in more depth. It is still noteworthy to point out, that this limitation is well recognized in qualitative research methods in general. Small sample of data, in this case seven interviews, cannot represent all of the highly skilled immigrants in Finland, let alone in the whole world. Saturation was however achieved, since by the end of interviewing the participants, often the answers started repeating.

In this study the limitation of what and who will be studied, and with which scope, was made in the very beginning. This thesis focuses on highly skilled immigrants and their experiences in Finland and Finnish workplaces, therefore there is a narrowed down view to the whole subject of integration; highly skilled immigrants in Finnish organisations. Even though some factors can be universal and are recognized in the studies all around the world, when studying integration in workplaces, it is fair to say that the cultural aspects and for examples policies or laws, are things that are characteristic only to Finland and Finnish workplaces.

Since this study is focusing on the highly skilled immigrants and their perspectives, leaving out a wide range of individuals working in lower skilled workplaces, perhaps there is a need for a larger study taking into consideration all skill levels. Also one point of view could next be to start studying how to retain the talent in Finland, and ask the people who have lived and integrated into Finland for example 15-25 years or more, what were the supporting factors that made these people stay, and are there something we could learn from those experiences. Often the people in this study raised the importance of family and social support system created in Finland. It would be interesting, and perhaps beneficial, to study how the social ties are created effectively in Finland and is there something in the Finnish culture, that is acting as a challenge to creating friendships with Finnish people.

6 Summary

Immigration is a topical subject in the daily discussions in Finland, as well as in other places including Europe. Immigration and the mobility of highly skilled immigrants are seen as an answer to many obstacles in the country's future. The discussion is ongoing in political field, raising large questions regarding employment, integration, brain-drain and possible threats of immigration just to name a few. Finland is one of the countries taking part in the "war for talent". It can be seen that by looking at the country's political decisions and policies, even laws, that highly skilled immigration is widely wished for and encouraged. The country level decisions affect the organizational level and the organizational level affects the individuals. In this thesis the focus is on individual level.

This thesis focuses on highly skilled immigration and the integration process, the factors both hindering it and supporting it. This topical subject and the questions around it were the motivation for this study. This study's main aim was to understand, how individuals view and experience the Finnish working life and the integration process in Finnish organizations. The sub-objectives were to find answers to how the immigrants view the possible challenges and enablers in the integration process. The focus is on the individual level and the personal experiences and views.

Empirical part of the study consists of the data that was collected through semi-structured interviews. The research method was qualitative, and the data collection was made with seven individuals taking part in individual interviews. Seven interviewees were picked out for the interviews and all of the seven interviews were carried out online, on a Zoom-platform. Interviews were recorded and this allowed the in-depth analysis of the following transcripts of the records. Later the data was analysed.

Theoretical and empirical parts of the study complimented each other and there were clear links between the prior literature and the empirical contributions. Empirical research part supported the prior literature findings and but also found some new perspectives and is able to give some new insights regarding especially the Finnish worklife integration. It was concluded that there are enablers helping in the integration process as well as challenges that can hinder the integration process. Challenges included language barrier, cultural differences, lack of workplace actions, laws and policies and overall complexity of the system. It is not always clear whether something is clearly a challenge or an enabler; one example of this is the language question. Integration is a process that does not have

a clear beginning or ending, but it can be defined as a long process that can even be a life-long journey.

The findings of this study help the organisations to realize some issues that the highly skilled immigrants may face when starting in a Finnish organisation. This study is a guide to anyone who is interested to read the personal experiences of people from different backgrounds and is able to show the actual feelings and thoughts these people, who have firsthand experience about immigration and integration in a Finnish organisation. This study can help identifying the possible obstacles the organisations may have in their integration policies or practices.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Guide for the semi-structured interviews

Interview questions

Background:

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your background and yourself? / Voisitko kertoa hieman itsestäsi ja taustastasi?
2. How long have you been in Finland? / Kuinka pitkään olet ollut Suomessa?
3. What is your level of education? / Mikä on koulutustasosi?

Theme 1: Integration:

1. What do you think about the integration process in general in a Finnish organisation? Mitä ajattelet integraatioprosessista yleisesti suomalaisessa organisaatiossa?
 - 1.1 Could you name some general examples of the process of integration in Finnish organisation? Voisitko nimetä joitain yleisiä esimerkkejä integraatioprosessista suomalaisessa organisaatiossa?

Theme 2: Obstacles

2. What are the obstacles affecting your integration in Finland? Voitko nimetä joitain esteitä, jotka vaikuttavat negatiivisesti integraatioosi?
 - 2.1 What has been the role of language in the integration process? Onko kielellä ollut roolia integraatioprosessissa?
 - 2.2 What has been the role of cultural differences in the integration process? Mikä on ollut kulttuurierojen rooli integraatioprosessissa?
 - 2.3 Have you found any personal characteristics that have effect on the integration? Miten henkilökohtaiset piirteet ovat vaikuttaneet integraatioosi?
 - 2.4 Are there any official policies or laws that have had negative effect on the integration process? Ovatko viralliset lait tai käytännöt vaikuttaneet negatiivisesti integraatioosi?

Theme 3: Supporting factors

3. What are the supporting factors affecting your integration in Finland? Mitkä tekijät ovat tukeneet integraatiotasi Suomessa?

3.1 What has been the role of coworkers in your integration? Mikä on ollut työkavereiden tai kollegoiden rooli integraatiossasi?

3.2 What has been the role of workplace actions in your integration? Mikä on ollut työpaikan toimien tai aktiviteettien rooli integraatioon?

3.3 Have there been any personal characteristics you could name that are supporting your integration? Oletko huomannut henkilökohtaisten ominaisuuksien tai piirteiden vaikuttavan positiivisesti integraatioon?

3.4 Are there anything else you would like to add about the factors supporting your integration? Onko muita asioita, joita haluaisit lisätä, jotka ovat tukeneet integraatiotasi?

Concluding questions

1.2 Are there any suggestions you could give, or you have in your mind about easing the integration process? Haluaisitko antaa mitään suosituksia integraatioprosessin helpottamiseksi?

1.3. Could you describe the ways that the integration could have been better on your point of view? Haluaisitko tai voisitko kuvailla, kuinka integraatioprosessi olisi voinut olla helpompi omalta osaltasi?

Appendix 2 Privacy notice

Privacy notice

(The Privacy Notice includes the information required under the Articles 13 and 14 of the EU GDPR):

1. Name of the register:

Highly skilled immigrants' views and experiences on integration in Finnish organization, obstacles and supporting factors

2. Data Controller:

Siiri Silvasti, phone number, email address
University of Turku, Turku School of Economics, Rehtoripellonkatu 3, 20500 Turku

3. Contact information of the responsible person:

Siiri Silvasti (phone number) (email address)

4. Purpose and legal basis for the processing of personal data:

The research collects participants' views and experiences about the integration in a Finnish organisation with interviews. Email addresses are used when sending out invitations to interviews, as well as sending the privacy notice and consent form. The interviews involve collecting information on the participants' experiences and views on e.g. individual experiences about the integration, obstacles and supporting factors that hinder or help the integration process, their own thoughts and views about the said topic.

The legal basis for processing personal data in the Article 6 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation is:

- Processing is necessary for scientific research (public interest, Point 1a of the Article 6)
- Data subject has given their consent to processing personal data (consent, Point 1e of the

Article 6)

5. Processed personal data:

The following information of the data subjects is stored in the register: Email address, name, years of living in Finland.

In the interviews the topics that will be covered: background information of the participant (e.g. name, education level, years of living and/or working in Finland), interviewee's own views and perspectives about working and

integrating into Finnish organisation, own personal views about the obstacles and supporting factors of workplace integration.

6. Recipients and recipient groups of personal data:

The data will not be transferred or disclosed to parties outside the research group.

7. Information on transferring data to third countries:

Personal data will not be disclosed to parties outside the EU or the European Economic Area.

8. Retention period of personal data or criteria for its determination:

The recorded interviews will be transcribed into text files and the recordings will be destroyed.

Simultaneously, the research data will be anonymised by erasing identifiable personal data. Personal data is stored until the Master's thesis has been graded.

9. Rights of the data subject:

The data subject has the right to access their personal data retained by the the Data Controller, the right to rectification or erasure of data, and the right to restrict or object the processing of data. The right to erasure is not applied in scientific or historic research purposes in so far as the right to erasure is likely to render impossible or seriously impair the achievement of the objectives of that processing.

The realisation of the right to erasure is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The data subject has the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority.

10. Information on the source of personal data:

In order to send the invitations to the interview, email addresses requested from the participants. The other data is as well collected directly from those who participate in the interviews for the study.

11. Information on the existence of automatic decision-making, including profiling:

The data will not be used for automatic decision-making or profiling.

Appendix 3 Data management plan

Plan Overview

A Data Management Plan created using DMPTuuli

Title: Integrating highly skilled immigrants into Finnish organisation

Creator: Siiri Silvasti

Principal Investigator: Siiri Silvasti

Data Manager: Siiri Silvasti

Project Administrator: Siiri Silvasti

Affiliation: University of Turku

Template: Opiskelijan aineistonhallintasunnitelmapohja

Project abstract:

Integrating highly skilled immigrants into Finnish organizations -study forms a Master's thesis. The aim is to gain knowledge of the individual experiences that highly skilled immigrants have of working and integrating into Finnish organization. ID: 23896

Start date: 01-09-2023

End date: 30-06-2024

Last modified: 02-06-2024

Integrating highly skilled immigrants into Finnish organisation

Tutkimusaineisto

Taulukko aineistostani

Data type	Includes personal information	I produce / collect the data by myself	Someone else has produced / collected the data	Other
Interviews		x		Collected data is recorded, anonymized, no participant can be recognized from the end results. Only essential personal information is collected for background information; name, email address, gender, the years of work experience in Finland.

Henkilötietojen käsittely tutkimuksessa

Sisältääkö aineistosi henkilötietoja?

Aineistoni sisältää henkilötietoja

Name and email address are collected in order to send the invitations to the interviews. Privacy notice has been sent to participants. Privacy notice includes all the necessary information and it is made following a model.

Kuka toimii tutkimuksen rekisterintäijänä?

Rekisterintäijänä toimii opiskelija

Register is a document that is saved in the UTU Onedrive cloud service. No one except the register manager has the access to the document.

Aineiston käyttöön liittyvät luvat ja oikeudet

Kuka aineiston on tuottanut?

Olen tuottanut aineiston itse

I collect the data by myself by interviewing the participants.

Jos käytät itse tuotettua aineistoa saatat tarvita erillisiä lupia keräämisä tai tuottamasi aineiston käyttöön sekä tutkimuksessa että tulosten julkaisemisessa. Mikäli olet arkistoimassa aineistoasi, pyydä tutkittavilta tarvittavat luvat aineiston arkistointiin ja jatkokäyttöön. Selvitä myös, vaatikko valitsemasi arkisto kirjallisia lupia tutkittavilta.

Interview data: The participants of the interview have been sent and they must sign an "informed consent" document that is expressing the use of the data.

Jos käytät jonkun muun tuottamaa aineistoa kerro:

Oinko sinulla tarvittavat luvat aineiston käyttöön tutkimuksessa ja tulosten julkaisemiseen?

Liittyykö aineistoon tekijänoikeuksia tai käyttölisenssejä? Huomioi, että esimerkiksi julkaisujen kuvien ja kaavioiden käyttö saattaa edellyttää lupaa.

Aineiston säilyttäminen tutkimuksen aikana

Missä säilytät aineistoasi tutkimuksen aikana?

Säilytän aineistoa yliopiston verkkokansiossa

The data is handled with University of Turku cloud services.

Jos et aio säilyttää aineistoasi yliopiston tarjoamissa tallennusratkaisuissa kerro, missä aiot säilyttää aineistoasi? Kuvaa myös, miten huolehdit tietoturvasta ja vammauskopiinnista?

Question not answered.

Aineiston dokumentointi ja metadata

Aineiston dokumentointi on keskeisessä osassa aineistoon tehtyjen muutosten jäljittämisessä.

Käytän aineiston dokumentointiin erillistä dokumenttia, johon kirjaan aineiston pääasiat, kuten tehdyt muutokset, analyysin vaiheet sekä esim. muuttujien merkitykset

The data includes interviews and the data will be destroyed at the latest when the Master's thesis has been graded. I am using an external document that will act as a diary and contains the main points of the data. This does not contain any personal information of any kind and it does not contain any information that any of the participants can be recognized.

Jos et käytä aineiston dokumentointiin mitään ylimainituista: kerro, miten aiot dokumentoida tutkimusprosessiasi?

Miten pidät aineistosi järjestyksessä ja ehyenä, ja välität sen tahattomat muutokset?

Versionhallinta: mietin jo ennen tutkimuksenteon alkua, miten tulen nimeämään eri aineistoversiot ja noudan sitä systemaattisesti

Metadata on kuvaus aineistostasi. Metadatan perusteella henkilö, joka ei tunne aineistoasi, ymmärtää, millaista aineistosi on. Metadattaa voi olla mm. tiedoston nimi, sijainti, koko ja tieto aineiston tuottajasta. Tarvitsetko metadattaa?

En tallenna aineistoani julkiseen arkistoon, enkä tarvitse metadattaa

Aineisto tutkimuksen valmistuttua

Mitä aineistollesi tapahtuu, kun tutkimus valmistuu?

All the personal information will be destroyed and not kept in any form after it is not needed anymore. All the other data will be as well destroyed at the latest when the Master's thesis has been graded. The data will be destroyed since the researcher will not have the possibility to keep the data saved in the services provided by UTU longer than they are a student in the university

Jos säilytät dataa, kuvaa, missä ja miten kauan:

The data is stored only until the Master's thesis has been graded. It will be saved in the cloud services provided by University of Turku.

Appendix 4 Informed consent



INFORMED CONSENT

17.2.2024

“Integration of highly skilled immigrants – barriers and supporting factors” -study forms the Master’s thesis of student (name of the researcher) at the University of Turku, Turku School of Economics. To gather the data for the study, (name of the researcher) conducts interviews with the aim of hearing the experiences of the interview participants, who are highly skilled immigrants living in Finland. This information is important to gain knowledge about the individual views and experiences of the participants about integration in the Finnish organisations.

The interviews will be conducted and carried out in February and March 2024 and about 8 participants will be invited. The interview lasts about an hour and is recorded with the interviewee's permission. Participation in the interview is completely voluntary and the interviewee can withdraw from the study if they wish and cancel the participation in the middle of the research process, without having to give a reason. There is no harm in refusing or withdrawing in the middle of the research process, and any material already collected will be destroyed within a week.

Individual persons are not identified in research reports. The researcher handles the data confidentially and uses pseudonyms, so individual persons or companies cannot be identified. The code key for name data is in the possession of the researcher. The interview material is stored pseudonymized (using pseudonyms) in the online database of the University of Turku, where only the researcher has access. She undertakes not to disclose confidential, personal information to outsiders. The student destroys the pseudonymized (non-identifiable), transcribed interview material when the Master's thesis has been graded.

The results obtained from the data are used for the Master’s thesis. If the material is used for scientific publications more widely than this, permission will be asked separately from the interviewees. The participants may experience the sharing of personal information with the researchers as a risk. The researcher emphasizes that the safety, identity, privacy, health and well-being of the participants are considered and protected in all stages of the research and that the researcher commits to follow good scientific practices (Guidelines for ethical pre-assessment in the humanities | Research ethics advisory board (tenk.fi) and high-quality research ethics.

Name of the researcher
Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business Administration, International Business
Turku School of Economics
email address of the researcher

Lisätietoja Turun yliopiston tietosuojasta: tietosuoja@utu.fi.





I have been asked to participate in an interview for the “*Integration of highly skilled immigrants – barriers and supporting factors*” -study. I have familiarized myself with the above report and have received sufficient information about the study and the data collection, processing and storage performed in connection with it. I have received sufficient answers to all my questions regarding the research. The report was given by (name of the researcher). I have had enough time to consider participating in the study.

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. I have the right to suspend and cancel participation in the study at any time and without giving a reason.

With my signature, I confirm that I participate in the study described in this document.

Signature of the researcher

Date

Name

The document was received

Signature of the consent recipient

Date

Name

Two identical copies have been made of the document, one of which remains in the researchers' archive and the other is given to the participant.

