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# **AFRICAN DIASPORA TO FINLAND:**

## **Barriers to a Successful Labor Market Integration**



## ABSTRACT

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African Diaspora to Finland: Barriers to a Successful Labor Market Integration

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In Finland, the number of African immigrants who have settled in has been significantly increasing in recent years. However, the argument that they are faced with barriers in integration and settlement, particularly labor market integration, has remained and in fact is more prominent. Drawing on the previous research findings conducted in different European countries including Finland, African immigrants experience more difficulties in finding employment than the native population and other immigrant groups.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the barriers faced by the African diaspora population in their labor market integration in Finland. In doing so, it also seeks to examine their responses to the challenges and how their mobility is impacted. Here, a qualitative strategy was used to allow for a thorough understanding and unpacking of the meanings of the participants' perceived experiences. Semi-structured individual interviews were utilized as a data collection method to obtain more in-depth information from the knowledge-producing dialogues with the participants.

The findings revealed repetitive barriers in labor market integration as perceived by the respondents, including language barriers, racial prejudices among employers, lack of local work experience, and limited integration support. Surprisingly, their responses to these challenges indicate their resilience and optimism. Drawing on the findings, there is a need for theoretical development to address the disadvantages faced by the African diaspora population. This thesis seeks to contribute to the qualitative data of the discussion and enhance the Think Africa Ry's, as a partner organization, resources through the development of a tool that will be beneficial for the community.

**Keywords:** African diaspora, Labor market integration, Finnish labor market, Barriers to labor market integration, immigrant integration, diaspora integration

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EU European Union

EU-FRA European Union Fundamental Rights Agency

SIRIUS Skills and Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Applicants in European Labor Markets

OECD Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

SLMT Segmented labor market theory

IMF International Monetary Fund

UAS University of Applied Sciences

UN United Nations

EO Ethnographic Observation

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis is in cooperation with Think Africa Ry, a non-profit organization that aims to engage, promote and empower the African diaspora and enhance the collaboration between Finland and African countries. The primary aim of the thesis is to fulfil the research need of the organization that is central to addressing the challenges faced by the members of the community.

African Union (2020) defines African diaspora as ‘peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union’. Traditionally, the concept of diaspora is understood based on the premises of forced displacement. Van Hear originally defined the term as ‘exile’ to those involved (Horst, 2013, 230), which implied forceful displacement. It focused on the refugees’ traumatic experiences pan-continently as they forcefully exit their country of origin to escape wars and conflict. Also, it implied the ‘uncomfortable state’ of the diasporas in their country of settlement. It was not before the mid-1990s until the evolution of the understanding of the diaspora concept. Particularly in migration and development studies, the diaspora concept is widely used in scholarly studies. The current discourse is not only focused on the exiled communities, but also the transnational migrant populations. As coined by Horst (2013, 230), this broadening of the concept coincided with a scholarly shift in the mid-1990s from refugee studies to forced migration studies, which has then increasingly become a subfield of migration studies.

Years ago, the concept of diaspora development was barely recognized. After 2002 when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank published figures on how the remittances from diasporas has outstripped the foreign development aid, the diaspora moved up to the political agenda (Wambu, 2019, 74). Now, focusing on the African context, it is estimated that the African diaspora generates over 35b US dollars of remittances annually. In the year 2100, the world’s population is estimated to be 11.2 b, and just under half of 5.5b will be Africans (Wambu, 2019, 74). Presumably, basing on these figures, Africa will remain to be an exporter of labor and its significant role in the world’s workforce and market will be of equal importance. African diaspora will remain to be an important economic, political, and social resource

of the continent. In this regard; their serious engagement in development, particularly in crafting migration policies, is critical.

The current diaspora discourse is however problematic, significantly when the mobility of labor diasporas is greatly influenced and dependent on the policies that regulate migration. For instance; in Finland setting, the role of labor diaspora to economy and society particularly to human resource flows is well-recognized. Nevertheless, scholars argue that the policies regulating migration make Finland an unattractive place to live, especially for the labor diaspora population. The concept of labor diaspora is constantly evolving. In diaspora research, contemporary understanding is related to brain gain, brain waste, and brain circulation. According to Florida (2005), the talent of highly skilled people generates for the economy and society. However, Cohen (2008) pointed out that labor diasporas can be characterized by the following: (a) strong retention of group ties sustained over an extended period with respect to language, religion, endogamy and cultural norms; (b) a myth of and connection to a homeland; (c) significant levels of social exclusion in the destination societies sources. (Heikkilä, 2017, 210-211).

This thesis seeks to highlight the integration challenges faced by the diasporas from West and East Africa, focusing on their labor market integration. There is a shortage of literature on the qualitative data of the African diaspora in Finland. There are numerous researches conducted on immigrants' integration. However, most are either quantitatively derived or focused on the diaspora community's role in economic development, mainly through the generation of remittances to the country of origin. Here, the researcher seeks to add a new perspective on the issue through a qualitative research strategy by examining the perceived challenges in migrants' integration and transition. This thesis attempts to contribute to the discussion by conducting in-depth interviews with the African diasporas.

From the introduction section onwards, Chapter 2 consists of key concepts definitions and a discussion of the findings from previous researches. Chapter 3 discusses the theories. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the methodology chosen. Chapter 5 provides the findings. Chapter 6 discusses the results and draws out the conclusion from the findings, and chapter 7 presents the developed propositions based on the findings, including the participants' emic views.

## 2 BACKGROUND

This chapter presents key concept definitions and shortly discusses the immigration in Finland concerning their position in the labor market. Also, it presents the previous research findings on the discussion (from and outside Finland). Lastly is a short description of the partner organization in this thesis.

### 2.1 Immigrants in the labor market

Section 3 of 1386/2010<sup>1</sup> defines an immigrant as a 'person who has moved to Finland, resides in the country with a permit issued for purposes other than tourism or similar residence of short duration, whose right of residence has been registered or who has been issued with a residence card'. Moreover, Statistics Finland defines an immigrant as a 'person who has moved to Finland and who intends to reside in Finland for more than twelve months or have resided in Finland over three months without interruption'. The term immigrant can be interpreted differently and, in fact, can be used interchangeably with the terms 'migrant' or 'foreign national'. There is no definite definition of the term. An immigrant can be characterized by the birth of origin, foreign nationality, and/or movement from a country of origin to another country.

From the perspective of different data sources though, there are distinctions between the terms, and various interpretations have significant consequences. However, in this thesis, the term 'immigrant' will be used generally and loosely. In this thesis, an immigrant is a person who has moved to Finland from a foreign country either for temporary or long-term settlement, however, with the exception of asylum seekers as she/he has not been granted a residence permit yet. Asylum seekers are not included since statistics sources draw their data from population statistics, only including people with residence permits.

Since the last decade, international migration has become a significant part of the era of globalization. In 2019, the United Nations reported that globally, the migrant stock was approximately 271 million people, which accounts for 3.5% of the world's

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<sup>1</sup> Act on the Promotion of immigrant Integration (1386/2010).

population (UN, 2019); and the figure was expected to increase year by year. Africa, which is significantly involved in this phenomenon- as Gnimassoun, B. & Anyanwu, J. (2019) pointed out, is characterized by high emigration rate, particularly from East and West Africa to OECD countries.

In Finland, almost 32,800 people immigrated in 2019. From 2009 to 2019, the number of immigrants fluctuated between around 26,000 and nearly 35,000 each year. The highest number in this period was recorded in 2016, with 34,905 registered immigrants (Statista, 2020). As of 31 December 2019, the total number of people in Finland with a close African background is 54,450, which is 1.0% of the Finnish population, and 44,529 (81.8%) of them are from Sub-Saharan Africa (Statistics, Finland).

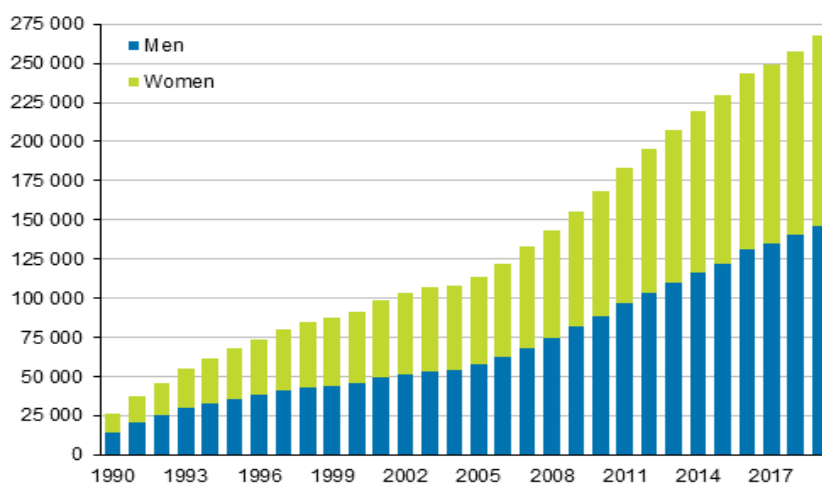


Figure 1. Foreign Nationals 1990-2019.(Statistics, Finland, 2020)

Finland is a relatively small country with a population of 5,532,333 at the end of August 2020 (Stat, 2020). However, despite being a small country, it is considered one of the most prosperous countries (Legatum Prosperity Index, 2018) and named by Fragile State Index (2018) the most stable country. Given this, a significant increase in the number of immigrants arriving in Finland has been observed in recent years. Furthermore, according to Heikkilä (2017, 132), Finland has had a long history as a country of emigration. However, after joining the EU in 1995, a shift in the dynamics happened. Finland has since become a country of immigration, a contemporary receiving country with a positive migration rate. The attractiveness of Finland as a receiving country is argued to be strongly related to the effects of EU membership in the era of globalization.



In this thesis, the central discussion will be the integration and settlement of newcomers in Finland, focusing on the skills and labor market integration of the African diaspora population. While the number of African immigrants who have successfully settled in Finland has been significantly increasing in recent years, the argument that they face challenges in labor market integration and finding satisfying employment have remained.

Given the circumstances, indeed, immigrants are faced with significant challenges in integrating into the receiving society, particularly in employment integration. In Finland, as in many other OECD countries, OECD (2017,6) revealed that employment disparities are most extensive among the highly educated, and labor force survey data suggests that employment rates among this group lag nearly ten percentage points behind their native-born peers. Also, among those who have found employment, many are in jobs requiring less than their formal education level.

## 2.2 Barriers in labor market integration

From the economist's point of view, the labor market is where workers and employees interact. It is a place where employers compete to hire the best, and the workers compete for the best satisfying job (Economic Times, 2020). There are different theories about the labor market. However, generally speaking, labor is a human resource, and the market is a determinant where the participants will work and get paid. The monetary compensation is the primary motivation in participating in it. The significant disparities in labor market opportunities and wage compensation are among the most important triggers of migrating to another country. Ryndyk (2020, 4) referred to Todaro(1980), wherein neoclassical microeconomics emphasizes the individual perspective and views migration exclusively as a strategy aiming at maximizing individual net benefits. Another perspective of migration decision-making is family migration and how family reunification shapes the migrants' socio-economic situation. Nonetheless, the thesis' primary interest is on the correlation between the labor market and immigration, particularly the labor diasporas' experiences in labor market entry and their transitions.

A barrier is defined as a natural formation or structure that prevents or hinders movement or action (Merriam-Webster, 2020). In employment, these are the obstacles that impede an applicant from getting a job or getting hired. In this thesis, the concept of barriers will be used to describe the perceived challenges of the labor diasporas in employment integration in Finland. Accordingly, the second question of this thesis aims to understand how these perceived obstacles impact their mobility. In doing so, their response to these challenges will also be outlined.

### 2.3 Literature review of previous researches

For labor diasporas, reasons for migrating to another country varies. It can be a family decision motivated. It can also be economically motivated. Some migrate to seek better studies and career opportunities, and some migrate to escape war and conflict. Nonetheless, a successful or at least satisfactory integration is the integral element of the process. In this regard, economic self-sufficiency and employment are the most critical factors in successful integration, with earning capacity influencing the ability to ‘purchase’ many of the other resources required to rebuild a life in a new country, among them, housing, health care, and education (Refugee Resettlement Handbook, 2011, 172). Importantly, success in the labor market can greatly influence the settlement and integration of immigrants into the wider society. Employment not only provides a source of financial independence, but also contributes to self-fulfilment, self-empowerment, self-esteem, and social standing and improves overall health and wellbeing for immigrants. (Udah, H., Singh, P., Hiruy, K. & Mwanri, L. 2019, 1160).

On these premises, it can be argued that satisfying employment is thus one of the foundations of successful integration of, particularly labor immigrants, in their receiving countries. Also, a successful employment integration is a determinant of stability, especially in countries where access to public services such as health and education, and benefits such as retirement and unemployment support are tied up with the participation in the labor market. Now, the argument is- according to Lemaitre (2007), African immigrants have less favorable outcomes in terms of labor market integration (Udah et al. 2019, 1161). Similarly, Cangiano (2012) argues that in most European countries,

African immigrants have significantly worse labor market outcomes (Udah et al. 2019, 1161).

To have a foundational knowledge of the main discussion, a review of the previous researches has been conducted. The literature search started in February 2020. In order to gain as relevant articles as possible, the author used academic databases using multiple resources (mainly online). The author searched for articles from databases Ebscohost, SAGE, ProQuest, and the research networking site ResearchGate. Google scholar and the library catalogue were also used. Key search engines and filters were used to narrow down the literature. The keywords used in the literature search were ‘African diaspora’, ‘diaspora immigrants’, ‘Finnish labor market’, labor diaspora, ‘Finland’, and ‘labor migrants’. The literature search included a combination of the systematic and focused method to capture relevant papers. The search process uncovered peer reviewed articles published from 2005- 2020. The articles were selected not only on the basis of inclusion and exclusion criteria (table 1), but implicitly on its relevance and appropriateness.

Table 1. Literature review: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

INCLUSION	EXCLUSION
Peer-reviewed/academic articles/journals	Non peer-reviewed/academic articles/journals
Full text available	Full text non-available
English language	Languages other than English
2005-2020 published literatures	Literatures published earlier than 2005

The next pages present several factors that impact the employment integration of immigrants in their country of destination. The literature review is based on different studies done outside Finland and some quantitative data drawn from Finland setting. Based on the previous researches, the following are the barriers that impact the labor market integration of the African diaspora.

### 2.3.1 Non recognition of overseas obtained professional degrees

In Finland and the European Union in general, the recognition of internationally obtained degrees and qualifications is not automatic. Therefore, a country-specific national procedure must be undertaken to get a diploma or academic degree recognized. In Finland, the Finnish National Agency for Education is the organizing body responsible for providing and issuing recognition of qualifications and foreign credentials. In most cases, albeit field-specific, an overseas obtained degree can be easily compared and recognized, provided that all the required documents are available. However, as Kyhä (2011) argues, employers tend not to value foreign qualifications despite the fact that they are officially recognized (Heikkilä, 2017, 149). In addition, Forsander (2003) noted that most employers devalue education obtained abroad, especially in countries considered to be less important in the global hierarchy (Heikkilä, 2017, 149).

A study conducted in Sweden revealed that immigrants from non-OECD countries were less likely to be employed upon arrival, which resulted in more dependency upon social assistance than any other immigrant groups. Significantly, this phenomenon can result in what scholars coined a 'brain waste'. As argued by Mattoo et al. (2008), a waste of human resources through the underutilization of immigrant skills in the host country's labor market (Elo, 2017, 214). In a study in Australia, the non-recognition of overseas diploma and qualifications represented a structural constraint as they sought to get a job (Udah et al. 2019, 1166). This is worth noting because as Colic-Reisker and Tilbury (2006) argued, the failure to recognize overseas qualifications can keep immigrants in unprivileged labor market segments and socially relegate them to disadvantaged and disempowered minority status (Udah et al. 2019, 1167).

### 2.3.2 Limited language proficiency

A proficiency in Finnish and/or Swedish language plays a vital role in successful skills and labor market integration for immigrant populations. In some international companies with a language other than Finnish as the working language, a knowledge of the country's official language/s may not be necessary. However, it is observed that proficiency in Finnish and/or Swedish is considered by employers as a reliability criterion and it also indicates a willingness to adapt to local working customs (Heikkilä, 2017, 150).

Reportedly, Ahmad (2005), Aaltonen, Joronen and Villa (2009), linguistic prejudice happens indirectly when employers demand excessive language competence even though the job tasks may not require a proficient command of the language (Heikkilä, 2017, 150). In a sample among Lapland immigrants, it was highlighted that based on an ethnographic observation done from 2015-2016, job seekers are most often faced with challenges of language barriers and employers' lack of knowledge about immigrants' skills. The findings from the literature highlight the importance of language proficiency for better employment outcomes. It is documented that highly skilled immigrant experts are frustrated because of the fact that the jobs being offered to them underutilize their skills and education. (Heikkilä, 2017, 201). This is critical as it might threaten not only the mobility of the diasporas but also can result in the development of brain waste.

A study by Heikkilä and Pikkarainen (2008) emphasized that foreign labor diasporas appreciate the working environment in Finland and the work itself. However, language and communication problems were identified; the language is complicated, and that Finns are non-talkative (Elo, 2017, 222). In a study conducted among Russian immigrants, it was revealed that respondents perceived the lack of language skills as a major barrier to recruitment, and also just being a foreigner (Heikkilä, 2017, 150). Employers' prejudice over language skills is persistent, and this can be triggered by various reasons. The Former Minister of Interior Petteri Orpo stated '*We cannot stay behind from other countries. This is also a question of competitiveness*'.<sup>2</sup> This suggests

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<sup>2</sup> Original title in Finnish: Sisäministeriö (2016). Suomi haluaa helpottaa oleskelulupien myöntämistä...

that the implementation of smart policies is crucial to address these concerns. For Finland to increase its attractiveness to labor migrants, as emphasized by Elo (2017, 223) policymaking is amongst the key issues. Specifically, smart policies are needed to be implemented to capture the needs not only of the highly skilled immigrants but of the labor migrants in general.

### 2.3.3 Lack of local networks and connections

Lack of employers' resources for recruitment outreach often results in reliance on informal networks (Heikkilä, 2017, 201). More importantly, since immigrant jobseekers lack the connections and networks, it is even more challenging to access the labor market. Such a phenomenon illustrates a case of an immigrant MBA graduate, who, (from her narratives) after sending almost 70 copies of CV every week and got zero callbacks, was able to land a job after contacting a friend who knows an influential person who might be able to help. In a sample among Lapland's immigrants, it was revealed that local networks or connections play an important role in successful employment. (Heikkilä, 2017, 166, 201). However, for immigrants who are not active participants in local networks, they are disadvantaged in job searches. This situation, where it is more about who you know than what you know, can be dangerous (Udah et al. 2019, 1169). This represents a barrier for immigrants to access the Finnish labor market. The lack of connections will further push the labor immigrants into the margins of the labor market.

### 2.3.4 Lack of Work Experience

Lack of, particularly Finnish work experience, is one of the significant barriers to a successful skills and labor market integration. In an ethnographic observation (2015) done in Lapland among immigrants, lack of professional experience is among the distinctive barriers to landing a job. Also, Kyhä (2011) reported that the success of employment is determined by language skills, quality and number of social relationships and network, education and work experience. (Heikkilä, 2017, 201). These findings suggest that the phenomenon will result in brain waste and over-education when immigrants take a job that does not correspond to their level of

education just to take the first step in labor-market integration. Having a local work experience is an important factor in a successful employment opportunity, such as in many cases. However, Turchick-Hakak et al. (2010) found out that in some cases, this requirement can be a mechanism for employers to rationally justify not hiring immigrants (Udah et al. 2019, 1168). Importantly, this critically suggests that prejudices among employers result in, amongst other things, the impediment of the mobility of job-seeker immigrants. Hence, the assessment of professional know-how should be emphasized in the recruitment process.

In the existing literature, several factors affecting employment integration are identified including non-recognition of overseas-obtained degrees, limited language proficiency, lack of local networks and lack of local work experience. The findings indicate evidence of discrimination against immigrant jobseekers in the recruitment process, which are aggravated by structural and social constraints. However, the literature fails to recognize the responses of the immigrants to these challenges and the impact on their mobility. In this thesis, the researcher attempts to examine the perceived challenges of the African diasporas through in-depth interviews and explore their responses to these challenges and how it impacts their mobility and transition. Furthermore, the existing literature is based on studies outside Finland and quantitative data done in Finland. There is sparse literature regarding qualitative data on immigrants' experiences in employment integration, and this thesis seeks to shed more light on the discussion.

#### 2.4 Partner Organization- Think Africa Ry

Think Africa Ry is a non-profit organization since 2014. More than an organization, it strives to develop, connect, and promote the African diaspora to make a social and economic impact. Through its services including training and membership, student support, event organization, market entry consultation, localization support, contacts provision, and promotional services and partners, it seeks to make a positive and lasting impact to the community, country of origin and host country. (Think Africa Ry, 2020).

The organization was started by a group of students and researchers interested in the development and African countries (Think Africa, 2020). The idea behind it was to inform people about Africa and to merge people from different backgrounds for learning purposes. In 2013, the first Think Africa week was launched. With its success and interest, the organization was formally registered as a non-profit. Until today, the organization continues to be a place where different stakeholders and interest groups, with a mutual interest in seeing African countries thrive, meet. (Think Africa Ry, 2020). The thesis seeks to enhance the organization's resources through the development of a material or framework that will have a sustainable impact on the community.



### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents theoretical explanations from different perspectives of labor migration. Firstly, I present the conceptualization of immigrant's integration and settlement by various scholars concerning the achievement of successful or at least satisfactory employment. Secondly, is a theory appraisal from the classical approach with respect to the various causative agents of migration. Lastly, I briefly discuss the labor market's dimensions in mainstream society, focusing on a segmented labor market theory and the impacts of these divisions or segments to immigrant job seekers.

#### 3.1 Conceptualizing Immigrant Integration and Settlement

Several scholars have attempted to conceptualize the 'integration of immigrants' in terms of settlement in the host country. According to Udah, H., Singh, P. & Chamberlain S. (2019, 59), immigrant integration refers to the process by which settling immigrants become part of the social, institutional, and cultural fabric of their adopted society. Also, Valtonen (2004) states that for an immigrant to have a successful integration, she or he should be able to participate fully in economic, social, cultural, and political activities without having to give up her/his distinct ethnocultural identity and culture (Udah et al. 2019, 59).

Similarly, Henderson (2004, 8) argues that integration implies diversity in policies where immigrants are able to retain aspects of their own culture, rather than the assimilation model, which expects only one party (the immigrant) to adapt. This is worth noting because it suggests collaboration between the immigrant population and the different structures in the host country. Traditionally, integration of immigrants was perceived to be their adaptation into the host society, of which, is a one-sided argument, undermining his or her contribution into various elements. Research has asserted developments in the area. In its present form, however, the questions of the reciprocal relationship between an immigrant and the wider society have still remained.

Scholars argue that a successful or at least a satisfactory immigrant integration is defined by elements such as participation in the labor market, social interactions and

relations, cultural adaption and encounter, involvement in civil society and political activity (e.g. Valtonen, 2004). In this line of thought, several scholars have emphasized the role of ‘participation in the labor market’ plays in immigrants’ integration. According to Cheung and Phillimore (2014), employment is an important aspect of structural integration because it facilitates access to new social networks and provides opportunities to regain confidence and economic independence. (Udah et al. 2019, 15, 16).

On a similar vein, Heikkilä (2017, 5) noted that the position of immigrants in the labor market is a major indicator of their social status. Thus, employment constitutes the foundation for successful integration for immigrants. Furthermore, Henderson (2004, 2) defined labor market participation as ‘a critical indicator of successful settlement for immigrants of working age, and the early engagement of immigrants in employment should be a central goal of most immigration policies’.

Indeed, participation of immigrants in labor market, specifically, I would argue an employment commensurate with their qualifications and skills is critical to a successful integration into the host society. As emphasized by Hebbani & Colic-Peisker (2012) and Jamrozik (2009), employment not only provides a source of financial independence, but also contributes to self-fulfilment, self-empowerment, self-esteem, and social standing and improves overall health and wellbeing for immigrants (Udah et al. 2019, 1162). In line with this thought, the UNHCR on Refugee settlement states that;

*Economic self-sufficiency is one of the most important factors in successful integration, with earning capacity influencing the ability to ‘purchase’ many of the other resources required to rebuild life in a new country, among them, housing, health care and education (UNHCR, 2002, Chapter 2.9).*

*As well as providing the means for economic stability, employment has a powerful influence on one’s capacity to participate equally in the receiving society. Without employment, refugees (and migrants) risk becoming trapped in a cycle of social and economic marginalisation affecting not only them but possibly future generations (UNHCR, 2002, Chapter 2.9).*

Another critical dimension in conceptualizing immigrants’ integration is the social and cultural aspects. According to Kempainen, T., Kempainen, L., Kuusio, H., Rask, S. & Saukkonen, P. (2020, 785), to better understand immigrants’ lived realities including key possibilities, tensions and problems, a multidimensional approach of

integration is needed. This means that the focus shouldn't be only on the labor market participation and other structural aspects but also on social, cultural, and identificational elements. Empirical evidence revealed that immigrants with Kurdish background that have lived in Finland for a short time, an older age with weak digital skills were associated with a higher risk of marginalization. In line with this, Fask (2018) found out that Kurdish immigrants are more prevalent in having mental health problems (Kemppainen et al. 2020, 798). The evidence supports Tsuda's (2012) argument of negative reinforcement, wherein the decreased engagement in the wider society causes disengagement with the others as well (786). This process is alarming as it can lead to a decrease in self-esteem and belongingness.

Kemppainen et al. (2020) have theorized the concept of multifocal marginalization. When an immigrant, as noted by Esser (2004) loses contact and a sense of belonging to all integrational foci, eventually, is left without a source of physical well-being and social approval. In the worst-case scenario, Castel (2000) stated that the process advances along all integrational dimensions, including work and income, attitudes, social contacts as well as identification. (Kemppainen et al. 2020, 786). On the contrary, it was found out that the Somali immigrants had a markedly stronger attachment to their co-ethnic community communities than the Kurdish immigrants. This phenomenon can be, as Jaakkola (2009) argued, a reaction to the discrimination and prejudice the Somali community faces in Finland. This case is compensatory in nature. Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo (2005, 2006) argued that difficulties with a specific focus are coped with by a compensatory or reactive integration to other foci. (Kemppainen et al. 2020, 798). In the case of Somali immigrants, the challenges in structural integration have pushed them to seek support from their social and cultural sphere.

### 3.2 Theory of Immigrant Integration

In his discussion toward a theory of immigrant integration, Neuwirth(1999) used T.H. Marshall's concept of citizenship rights that is divided into three: civil rights, political rights, and social rights. He argues that in investigating immigrants' integration into their host countries, findings revealed the concerns of denial or lack of political citizenship, as well as civil, social, and economic access of immigrants. Further, immigrants' access to economic rights enables them to enter and compete in the labor market and access of social rights on the other hand enables them to be eligible for government programs, such as education in public schools, health benefits, and welfare and social insurance schemes. (Neuwirth, 1999, 52). However, studies revealed that Marshall's conception of political citizenship is less significant to post-war immigrants. In this line of thought, Hammar (1990) has coined the term 'denizens', which means permanent residents, who, with the exception of political citizenship, enjoy the same civic, social, and economic rights as the citizens of the country.

However, contrary to the principle of 'denizens', research revealed that compared to citizens, immigrants do not have the same opportunities in the labor market (Neuwirth,1999, 53). In welfare states such as the US, Canada, and some EU countries, non-citizens are overrepresented in jobs that are dirty, dangerous, exhausting, menial, unpleasant, strenuous, monotonous, insecure, badly paid, low status or low skill. Further, referring to Faist (1995), Neuwirth argued that this argument is supported by a vast literature on racism in Europe, wherein, in addition to class, ethnicity plays a significant role. In addition, compared to other immigrant groups, black and Asian immigrants are faced with greater obstacles in labor market integration. (Neuwirth, 1999, 57, 61). Racial definitions, which was originally defined by Weber(1968), still linger in our modern world as a pretext for excluding groups with different phenotypical or somatic characteristics from competing for economic and social opportunities (Neuwirth, 1999, 63).

In the new era of globalization, the increase in industrial production has led to the relocation of labor to developing countries. To maintain its competitiveness, wealthier states restructure their production strategies (e.g. outsourcing with agencies in non-OECD states to ensure the accumulation of capital). Sassen (1996) argued that the globalization of the economy has led to an increase in demand by all firms in all

industries; high business services have generated not only high skilled jobs but also low-waged unskilled jobs to maintain their infrastructure. The result of this disproportionate grouping of services has contributed to the polarization in the organization. More significantly, the low-paying jobs in the technology and consumer service sectors are primarily staffed by immigrants. (Neuwirth, 1999, 60).

Neuwirth, referring to (Simmons, 1994), argued that the extent to which immigrants are being marginalized or integrated into the labor market is dependent on the structural changes that are brought about by the transformation of the international economy. Theoretically, the engagement of immigrants to the labor market results in a wider economic contribution. However, the chance of participating in the economic opportunity structure is impeded by the discriminatory practices that prevent them from obtaining employment that matches their qualifications. (Neuwirth, 1999, 63).

Table 2. Immigration settlement principles (Neuwirth, 1999)

Key elements of integration	
Principle 1	Integration is a two-way process which involves commitment on the part of the newcomers to adapt to life in the host society, and the part of the receiving country to adapt to new people and cultures
Principle 2	The ability of the newcomers to community in one of the Finland's official languages is key to integration.
Principle 3	Newcomers' contribution to the economic and social fabric of the host country are valued. It is important for the newcomers to become economically and socially self-sufficient, and it is important for members of the communities to help ensure that newcomers have opportunities to participate in and contribute to the economic and social life in the receiving country.
Principle 4	It is important to share to the newcomers the principles, traditions and values that are inherent in the wider society, such as freedom, equality, and participatory democracy.
Principle 5	Settlement and integration services will be aimed at helping the newcomers become self-sufficient as soon as possible.

Table 2 shows a summary of the key principles of immigrant integration as theorized by Neuwirth(1999). Toward a better understanding of the immigrants' integration, Neuwirth(1999, 65) proposed two elements: (a) social integration, which he defined as the 'participation in the social, institutional sphere of the society' and (b) the economic integration that the immigrants are able to achieve will be the primary factor

influencing their participation in the social-institutional sphere, although other factors are needed to be considered. Further, he emphasized that the theory of immigrant integration must consider the relationship between economic and social integration with respect to the components of cultural integration, that is, the sphere of privacy and social life, of which sphere refers to the 'domestic and social life'. Also, the theory needs to incorporate the impacts of racialization and marginalization on immigrants' family life, e.g., changes in family roles, parents may exercise over their children's choice of peers, leisure-time activities, and future plans. (Neuwirth, 1999, 66). Contrary to Neuwirth's argument, Zhou and Banston III (1994) argued that as far as recent immigrants from non-traditional sources are concerned, it would appear that the adherence to the original culture, if adjusted to fit the demands of an industrialized labor market is an important resource, rather than a disadvantage (Neuwirth, 1999, 67).

Neuwirth's approach to immigrant integration is a relevant framework that focuses on the relationships of social and economic dimensions in conjunction with cultural components, that is the life of immigrants outside work and institutions. Also, the impacts of these racial definitions on families are taken into considerations, albeit from different perspectives. The discourse on immigrant integration, indeed, does not only revolve around their participation and adaption into the wider society. Of equal importance is the reciprocal adaptation process that includes the role of the government and the wider society in recognizing the contributions of the immigrants. According to Henderson (2004, 4), successful settlement involves social, economic, and political participation in the wider society on merit without preference or discrimination.

### 3.3 Neoclassical theory of migration

According to Massey et al. (1993), there are two approaches to the neoclassical theory. Firstly, the macroeconomic approach. Harris & Todaro(1970) suggests that international migration is a consequence of differences in wages and employment opportunities among countries. Secondly, the microeconomic approach emphasizes migrants' behaviors towards migration- potential migrants decide based on a rational calculation of the potential costs and benefits linked to migration. Borjas (1990) argues that migrants calculate their expected earnings over a period of time in the destination

country, and as for the expected costs and returns, migration can be perceived as an investment. (Heikkilä, 2017, 15, 16).

The concept of the neoclassical theory mirrors that of the push and pull theory, wherein low domestic wages push potential migrants to move to countries of higher wages and vice versa, the demand of labor from more developed countries act as the pull factor for migrants to move. The neoclassical approach tends to focus on the economic role of international migration. However, as argued by Heikkilä (2017, 16), on an individual context, the costs of migration do not only include the financial costs but more importantly, it is also necessary to consider the social and psychological consequences and many other related factors.

### 3.4 Segmented labor market theory

Hebbani & Colic- Peisker (2012) define that the Segmented Labor Market Theory (SLMT) specifies that the capitalist labor market is divided into (a) the market is 'primary' mainstream where jobs are not only higher status and better paid, but also more visible to the public and more networked, and (b) segmented labor market (SLM) where low-status and socially isolating jobs are located. The segmented labor market theory was developed by political economists in the 1970s and 1980s and eventually has been widely used by migration scholars, although often without reference to it. (Hebbani, A. & Colic- Peisker, V. 2012, 531). Flatau & Lewis (1991) argued that according to SLMT, social and institutional forces reduce labor market opportunities to certain groups such as immigrants and women, relegating them to the secondary segment or the margins of the labor market (Hebbani, A. & Colic- Peisker, V. 2012, 531). More significantly, the segments are divided, trapping those in the margins. As a result, mobility is adversely affected, making it more difficult to make a transition to a better job. Findings from overseas (e.g. Bauder 2006, Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2006, 2007) suggest that the concept of SLMT is a representation of what happened to black African immigrants to western countries. Being trapped in the SLM makes it difficult to develop bridging local networks that will gradually connect immigrants with the local society and therefore opening pathways to better labor market integration. (Hebbani, A. & Colic- Peisker, V. 2012, 531).

The rest of the paper will utilize the different appraisals on immigrant integration to examine the barriers faced by the African diaspora in integration into Finnish society, mainly focusing on the skills and labor market integration.



## 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology utilized in the research study to gather data with regard to the barriers faced by the African diaspora in employment integration in Finland. First, the research statement will be briefly presented followed by the research aims. Next will be the discussion on research design and data collection methods, including sample collection and the description of the participants. Also, a brief discussion of the data analysis will be included. Lastly, is a short ethical appraisal.

### 4.1 Research Statement

The thesis seeks to explore the barriers faced by the diaspora population of East and West Africa in Finnish labor market integration. Particularly, it does so by examining the current diaspora discourse that echoes the findings of ( Heikkilä, 2017, 134-145) that they are faced with more difficulties than the native population and other immigrant groups in finding employment, especially a job that corresponds with their educational background, resulting to higher unemployment and underemployment rates. Furthermore, it seeks to investigate how they respond to these barriers and how it impacts their mobility. Also, it aims to explore the current policies on migration, particularly considering that smart policymaking is needed to enhance the mobility of the diaspora communities.

Realistically, this is a master's thesis, and it will not be published in any academic journals. However, the evidence from this research study can contribute to the discussion on the labor market integration of immigrants, specifically of African background, in Finland. This paper will help us understand the barriers faced by the African diaspora in labor market integration in Finland. Particularly for the researchers and practitioners in the field of migration studies, the results can be used in further investigation of the different aspects of migration. For the Think Africa organization, it can serve as a material in developing tool/s that will be beneficial for the community. The results of the inquiry can play a role in defining problems in migration policies and in triggering responses.

## 4.2 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the barriers faced by the African diasporas in labor market integration in Finland?
2. How do the African diasporas respond to these challenges, and how it impacts their mobility?
3. How do the current migration policies impact the integration of the diaspora communities? What kinds of developmental frameworks are needed to address the barriers to a successful labor market integration?

## 4.3 Research process

The research process started in January 2020. I had a preliminary meeting with two coordinators of the Think Africa Ry. In our discussion, it was mentioned that the community members claim their struggles in integration and settlement in Finland, particularly in labor market integration. In this regard, the organization aims to develop a tool or framework central to addressing the challenges. However, the lack of supporting research/es creates a gap. Henceforth, to fulfil this need, research will be conducted through a qualitative strategy.

For the purpose of the thesis, a qualitative research methodology was utilized to collect and analyze the data. For the following reasons, a qualitative methodology has been chosen: Firstly, it allows for an in-depth understanding from a small sample. Secondly, as pointed out by Leavy (2017, 124), qualitative approaches allow us to build a robust understanding of the topic, unpacking the meanings people ascribe to their lives. Lastly, the study involves an understanding of racial and cultural diversities. Hence, a qualitative approach is suitable because the contexts of values, beliefs, feelings, or emotions are hardly captured in a quantitative manner.

Hereafter, an interview is an effective method to gather data. An interview guide was formulated to serve as an outline of the questions. Also, it is an important tool to

maintain consistency and direction during an interview. Individual interviews were conducted over a two-month period from July 2 to September 3, 2020, with eight participants of east and west African background. The participants consisted of six males and two females, between the ages of 24 to 42. Most of the respondents came with temporary visa (student visa), some came with working visa, and one came with a permanent residence visa through family sponsorship. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among the participants. Parker (2005) pointed out that there really is no such thing as a completely structured interview “because people always say things that spill beyond the structure, before the interview starts and when the recorder has been turned off” (Leavy, 2014, 285). On a contrary to Parker’s argument, Leavy (2014, 286) argued that there is also no such thing as a completely unstructured interview because the interviewer always has an idea about what should take place in the conversation, and all questions lead the interviewee in certain directions. Therefore, to provide a structure that is flexible enough, a semi-structured approach was utilized. Semi-structured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee, and the interviewer has a greater say in focusing the conversation on issues that he or she deems important in relation to the research project ( Leavy, 2014, 286).

An individual interview was favorable over group interviews. Individual interview was utilized for the following reasons: (1) the study involves aspects that are personal and sensitive, thus echoing Leavy’s (2014, 289) argument that this approach allows for more confidentiality and often makes it easier for the interviewer to create an atmosphere of trust and discretion. (2) An individual interview is easier to manage and is thus beneficial, more significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, (3) the researcher is more interested in people’s narratives of their experiences as in how participants discuss, argue, and justify their opinions and attitudes, a dynamic that group interviews tend not to focus on. Five interviews were conducted face to face in a quiet coffee shop, and three interviews were conducted via skype. The length of each interview was three hours at the maximum. It was carried out in English language by the researcher herself. Consent was sought from the participants, and the interviews were audio-recorded. The interview questions covered the participants’ preparation pre-migration and settlement experiences post-arrival in Finland, socio-economic and cultural integration, employment experiences, and subjective well-being. In order to gain

rich narratives from the participants, the following elements were considered particularly important (See **Appendix A**).

#### 4.4 Collecting the research material

The participants were selected through professional and community contacts of Think Africa Ry. In accordance with the sampling plan, purposeful sampling was utilized. Morse (2010) & Patton (2015) pointed out that in this approach, “information-rich cases” are sought out in order to best address the research purpose and questions (Leavy, 2017, 148). In this regard, the approach will allow the researcher to yield in-depth understanding and insights from the information-rich cases sought. The participants were selected based on their level of English proficiency. The participants are of working age and have lived in Finland for at least more than three years. This was to gain rich narratives of the lived experiences in the country over a significant period of time. In this thesis, the participants were invited to participate in an individual interview through several channels, including e-mail, messaging platforms, and LinkedIn. Initially, they were given a short introduction about the topic under investigation. They were asked to contact the researcher if willing to participate in the study. The potential participants responded through messages stating their interest in participating in the interview. Hereafter, the selection of the participants took place. The choice of participants has met the particular criteria that were presented earlier. Further, they sufficiently represent the objective of the study and the aim to examine the barriers faced by the marginalized groups in labor market integration in Finland, as earlier findings have revealed.

Furthermore, all participants had tertiary education. Some of them have permanent residence permits, and the others are Finnish citizens. As mentioned earlier, one of the eligibility criteria of the participants is the length of stay in Finland. All had lived in Finland for more than three years. This is particularly important because, as pointed out by Djajić (2003), those who intend to stay temporarily in a foreign country may have less incentive to assimilate and to invest in human capital specific to the host country than those who choose to stay longer or permanently. In addition, referring to Uдах & Singh (2018), it is reasonable for new arrivals to perceive that they are being

treated differently because of several factors, including limited language skills, limited or lack of participation in the workforce, and limited educational and social activities. (Udah et al. 2019, 1163) The important characteristics of the participants were the diversity of the industries they represent, values and beliefs, cultural backgrounds, mode of entry to Finland, and they claim to be strong African diasporas. In the discussion of the findings, the participants will be given aliases to protect their identity.

#### 4.5 Profile of the Informants

The participants were given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

*Lizbon* is in her early thirties. She moved from Kenya to Finland in 2010 for further studies. Lizbon obtained her undergraduate studies and master's degree in Finland. She is currently employed in a job within the field of her studies and speaks Finnish at work.

*Ki* moved to Finland from Kenya in 2000 for work and further studies. He is in his early forties. He finished his bachelor's and master's degree in Finland. His family including his wife and children migrated to Finland soon after him. Ki is currently working in two different jobs below his expertise and speaks Finnish at work.

*Nicky* moved to Finland in 2005 from China for work and study purposes. He is originally from Cameroon. He is in his early forties. He claims that he rarely speaks Finnish at work. He obtained his graduate studies in Finland. Currently, Nicky is an entrepreneur.

*Sue* moved to Finland from Kenya in 2009 for study purposes. She is in her early thirties. She finished her bachelor's degree in Finland, and a master's degree in Sweden. Sue speaks Finnish at work. She is currently working within her field of studies and hopeful of acquiring employment in line with her graduate studies in the future.

*Manny* moved to Finland from Ghana in 2007 through his Finnish wife. He is in his early thirties. He finished his high school and undergraduate studies in Finland. He is currently employed in a position that matches his educational background, and speaks Finnish at work and sometimes at home.

*Luke* moved to Finland from Ghana in 2008 for further studies. He is in his early thirties. According to him, he did not have the chance to work within his field of studies. Currently, he is in the taxi business but hopeful of acquiring a future job that matches his educational background. Luke speaks some Finnish.

*Tom* moved to Finland from Somalia in 2010 through a family sponsorship. He is in his early twenties. Tom is pursuing a medical degree. Tom considers Finnish as his second language since he moved here at a young age and speaks Finnish fluently.

*Bill* is in his late twenties. He moved to Finland from Ghana in 2013 for further studies. Bill speaks some Finnish. He claimed that he had not done any job yet within his field of studies.

#### 4.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data started soon after the data collection. According to Leavy(2014, 582), data begins even before the data collection in a way that as you design your research study in your mind and on a word page, you already consider what types of data are needed to help answer the research questions. In this thesis, interview transcripts have been the foundation of the data analysis. All of the relevant information has been transcribed verbatim. This process of transcription is crucial as it allows the raw data to be processed.

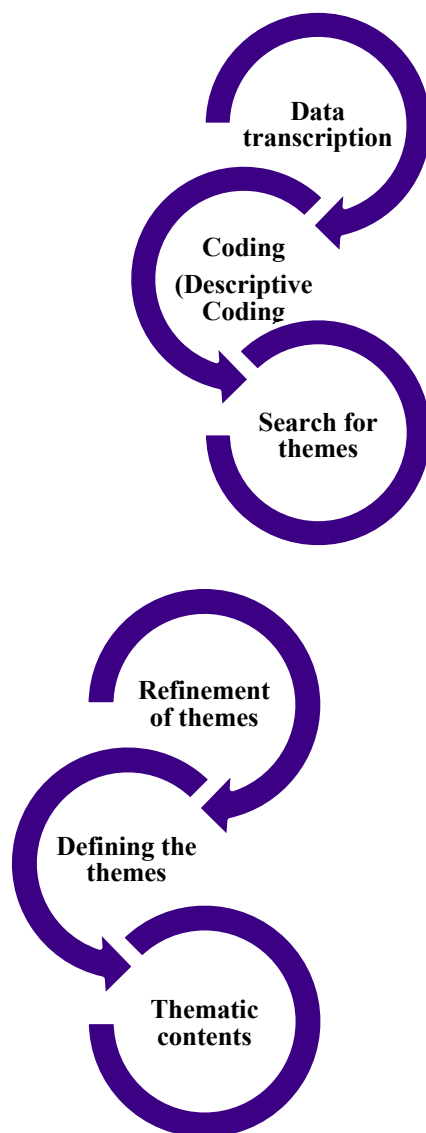


Figure 4. Thematic content analysis (Nowell, L., Norris, J., White, D. & Moules, N. 2017, 4-5 ).

The figure above shows a summary of the steps undertaken in the actual analysis process. A thematic content analysis method is adopted to examine the elements from the transcribed data. This method of analysis is chosen because of the following reasons: (a) since this is a small qualitative study, the data can be summarized simply (b) according to Braun & Clarke (2006) & King (2004), thematic analysis provides a highly flexible approach that can be modified for the needs of many studies, providing a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data. In addition, Clarke (2006) & King (2004) argued that this method is useful in examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights. (Nowell et al. 2017,11).

In the actual process, as stated earlier, the data was transcribed verbatim. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher took the opportunity to read the compilation of data thoroughly, making preliminary notes by italicizing significant sections and adding comments directly on the data. Also, referring to Leavy(2017, 582), the researcher composed supplemental analytic memos that include first impressions, reminders for follow-up, preliminary connections, and other thinking matters about the phenomena at work. Hereafter, the researcher organized the corpus by prioritizing the categories, themes, and concepts central to answering the research purpose and questions.

The next phase was coding. The process started with dividing the selected transcripts into shorter stanzas. This is to facilitate more manageable paragraph-like units for coding assignments and analysis. Then, the stanzas were categorized according to similarity elements. Categorizing is considered important because as Leavy points out, it reorganizes and reorders the vast array of data from a study because it is from these smaller, larger, and meaning-rich units that we can better grasp the particular features of each one and the categories' possible interrelationships with one another. Subsequently, each classification was labeled a category name. (Leavy, 2014, 585-587).

As stated earlier, a descriptive coding method was utilized. As noted by Leavy, descriptive codes not only help categorize but also index the data corpus' basic contents for further analytic work. Descriptive codes are primarily nouns that simply summarize the topic of a datum. For initial analysis, descriptive codes are clustered into similar categories to detect such patterns. (Leavy, 2014, 593, 594). In this paper, repetitiveness and interrelationship were the patterns.

The next phase is the search for themes. (Nowell et al. 2017, 8), referring to Braun & Clarke (2006), point out that this phase involves sorting and collating all the potentially relevant coded data extracts into themes. Furthermore, they referred to DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000), who defined the concept of theme as 'an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations'. A theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question. According to DeSantis & Ugarriza (2000), once identified, themes appear to be significant concepts that link substantial portions of the data together (Nowell et al. 2017, 8).



Boyatzis (1998) notes that a theme may be initially generated inductively from the raw data or generated deductively from theory and prior research. (Nowell et al. 2017, 8). In this study, the analysis is deductively derived. In this sense, the analysis is driven by the existing literature's theories with a detailed analysis of some aspects of the data. The data were analyzed manually; since it is a small-scale study, no software has been used. This allows the researcher to concentrate on the data (and not on controlling the software).

The next phase is the refinement of themes. During this phase, the researcher reviews the coded data extracts for each theme to consider whether they appear to form a coherent pattern. Referring to Braun & Clarke (2006), Nowell et al. (2017, 9) point out that the validity of themes was considered carefully to determine whether the themes accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole. In this particular phase, insufficiencies and discrepancies were noted, and modifications and supplementations were made. The need for recoding from the data set was to be expected, as coding is an ongoing organic process. After various changes have been made, the researcher was able to grasp how they fit together and describe how each theme was derived from the data.

The last phase is defining the themes. In this course of phase, the researcher conducted a detailed analysis by writing the story that each theme represents. Revisions and modifications were still made at this stage. King (2004) advised that it is possible to go on modifying and refining definitions of themes forever, and one of the most difficult decisions to make is where to stop the process of development (Nowell et al. 2017, 10). To determine whether the themes are sufficiently clear and comprehensive, a process of 'thesis debriefing' was conducted with research supervisors. At the end of this phase, the researcher was able to clearly define the content of each theme. The findings chapter will discuss in detail the final analysis and write up of the thematic contents.

#### 4.7 Quality Assurance

This subchapter will briefly discuss how trustworthiness and credibility were maintained in the process of data analysis. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), credibility and trustworthiness are two factors to consider when collecting and analyzing the data, and presenting your findings. (Leavy, 2017, 603). In qualitative researches, Leavy emphasized that the researcher needs to present a convincing story to the audience, which means that the amount of time spent, the number of participants interviewed, the analytic methods used, the thinking processes evident to reach conclusions, and so on should be “just right” to persuade the reader that the jobs have been conducted soundly. However, she also asserted that we can never conclusively “prove” something; we can only, at best, convincingly suggest. (Leavy, 2014, 603).

In this thesis, credibility is established through the following ways: (a) citation of key writers, (b) several process were conducted before the development of key themes, and (c) inclusion of interview transcripts and participant observation notes in the data. The last one is considered particularly important because, as Leavy(2014, 604) pointed out, these serve both as illustrative examples for readers and to present more credible testimony of what happened in the field.

Trustworthiness or providing credibility to the writing is when we inform the reader of research processes (Leavy, 2014, 604). In this paper, as stated earlier, the interview process was conducted over a two-month period, with each interview lasting for not more than three hours. The interviews were digitally recorded, obviously, with consent from the participants. Field notes and observations were also gathered to support the learnings. Furthermore, another critical element to ensure trustworthiness is maintaining real objectivity. In this regard, Shenton (2004, 72) argues that the intrusion of the researcher’s biases is inevitable. Particularly in this case that the researcher herself is an immigrant, steps were taken to ensure as far as possible that the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Miles and Huberman note that a key criterion for objectivity is the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions. (Shenton, 2004, 72). In this regard, particularly in the execution of research processes and interpretation of the data results, I, the researcher, have acknowledged my personal beliefs and values, which might have influence on the research process.

As a labor migrant, my experience in the Finnish labor market has led to certain presumptions concerning the employment integration of the immigrant population. However, since I am the research instrument, it was critical to be aware of my personal biases. That said, recognition of own beliefs and assumptions reduces the effect of biases. Lastly, the thorough description of the study's methodology enables the reader to scrutinize the data and the constructs.

#### 4.8 Ethical Considerations

National Advisory Board on Research Ethics (Helsinki 2009) states that the ethical principles of research in the humanities and social and behavioral sciences are divided into three areas: (1) respecting the autonomy of research subjects, (2) avoiding harm, and (3) privacy and data protection. During the whole research process, ethical guidelines are being followed to produce a credible, trustworthy, and ethical research. All the literature used are referenced accordingly, and the researcher is aware that any manipulation of materials and/or literature is considered a fabrication. The study was written in accordance with Diak's guidelines. In addition, as a researcher, it was essential to evaluate my values and belief system to ensure that I behave in accordance with ethical standards, and to protect my participants, school and supervisors/teachers from any potential harm.

In any research study, the protection of the informants is critical. Specifically, in qualitative studies, ethical considerations have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the study process. (Arifin, 2018, 31-32). In such a case as face to face interview with a vulnerable group, the concern of ethical consideration is more prominent. In this study, informed consent and voluntary participation were obtained. This means that participants were adequately informed about the study, and they were able to comprehend the information given. The participants were approached individually and given an explanation of the purpose of the study and the data collection process. They were given an appropriate time to ask questions and address any concerns. (Arifin, 2018, 31). They were also given an explanation that they had the right to withdraw if they desire to, even after the consent. Also, consent to digitally record the interviews was asked from them.

Another important ethical issue is anonymity and confidentiality. Each of the interviews was conducted individually, both face-to-face and skype interviews, without access of any outsider. As stated earlier, the participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. However, they were informed that their actual age and country of origin would be revealed for the purpose of reporting the data. The data transcription was conducted in a private room using headphones to eliminate the possibility of being heard by other people. The researcher transcribed the data independently. The written and electronic data from the study will be stored for a duration of time. The interview recording, however, were deleted after they were no longer needed.

Considering that the process involves interviewing participants from different cultures, I was aware that I had to be flexible and that an understanding of their backgrounds was also considered important. In any area of research, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure participants to have a power of freedom of choice to involve in the study, protect the participants' identity throughout the recruitment and dissemination process, and promote clear and honest research reporting without deception to readers (Arifin, 2018, 31-32).

## 5 FINDINGS

The participants were asked to describe their integration and employment experiences in Finland. Although the participants came with different types of visas, the perceived barriers to skills and labor market integration did not differ much. However, a slight variation is noted around the integration differences between immigrant groups, concerning the mode of entry. It is also worth noting that all of the participants have obtained educational degrees in Finland; six out of eight hold a bachelor's degree from a Finnish university/University of Applied Sciences (UAS), four out of eight have finished masteral studies, and one out of eight is pursuing a medical degree. The next pages discuss the repetitive barriers in finding employment in Finland as perceived by the participants.

### 5.1 Barriers to Labor Market Integration

The main barriers to labor market integration identified by the participants are limited language skills, employers' attitudes towards immigrants, lack of local work experience, and limited integration support.

#### 5.1.1 Limited language skills

In many countries, particularly such as Finland, having good language skills is a prerequisite to finding employment. In fact, previous findings regarding this discussion have continuously brought up the question of the language barrier as a severe impediment to labor market integration. All of the participants in this study have acknowledged the vital role of having good language skills in employment integration. They stressed out that the lack of fluency in Finnish is a significant barrier to a better employment outcomes. As Lizbon noted:

*“I have an experience from the one year I was without a job. I was so afraid of so many job applications. You call them, they turn down your call because I do not speak good Finnish.”(Lizbon)*

On a similar vein, Ki has been looking for a job within his field of studies for a very long time. According to him, the language barrier has been his main challenge.

*“I have applied to few jobs like youth work, or family related, but most of them require fluency in Finnish language. There’s one in (certain municipality). I was called for an interview, but then I was not picked. They sent a letter saying they picked someone else, and that my language skill was not enough.”(Ki)*

For Sue, particularly during her first years in Finland, it was challenging to find employment because of the language barrier.

*“During the first year, it was really challenging. It was hard to find a job because of the lack of language skills.”(Sue)*

After finishing her bachelor’s degree, Sue claimed that she was not yet confident to apply as a fully licensed nurse because of her limited language skills. For this reason, she decided to apply for another internship.

*“I still had to go back to do some more internships. I had to work first as a practical nurse, even though I was already a registered nurse.”(Sue)*

Similarly, Luke claimed that even in his applications for internships, he recognized that the language barrier is a major problem.

*“In Finnish companies, they really require fluency in Finnish. In some (like) American based companies, they still require excellent Finnish skills, even if it’s not needed.”(Luke)*

Luke’s argument supports the presumption that certain employers tend to not hire some immigrant groups on the pretext of limited language skills, even though the job does not require proficiency in Finnish language. In the existing literature, however, employers argue that they hire applicants based on a professional know how (e.g. Heikkilä, 2017). Nonetheless, findings revealed the accounts of immigrant job seekers not being hired because of the limited Finnish and just because of the immigrant status.

Nicky, on the other hand, has chosen the path of entrepreneurship. After finishing his Master’s degree in biochemistry, he applied for a Ph.D. program at a university.

However, for some reasons (the participant did not want to talk about it), Nicky did not pursue the program and focused on doing business instead. For him, as an immigrant entrepreneur in Finland;

*“The language barrier is one of the main challenges, especially around marketing. And I did not ask for any help. I did it all alone. I did not approach the local departments that could help with these matters. Because the mentorship costs a lot of money.”(Nicky)*

As an immigrant entrepreneur, Nicky recognized the critical role of language proficiency for better outcomes, particularly in the marketing area. However, he argues that challenges are inevitable. While certain industries and job positions require fluent Finnish language skills, a good command should be sufficient enough in many other sectors. Given their limited command of Finnish, most of the participants are mindful that the job positions they have applied for do not require fluency in Finnish. That said, it is discriminatory to deny a job applicant a position that he/she qualifies for on the pretext of not having enough language skills, if it does not require fluency in Finnish.

Indeed, the language barrier has been diagnosed by several scholars as a major impediment to the labor market integration of immigrants in Finland (e.g. Heikkilä, 2017). In response to this, the discussion that language training should be improved has been continuously brought up. Suggestions include ‘language training should be more flexible and available’, ‘language learning opportunities for employed individuals should be enhanced, and more advanced courses should be offered’ (Botenbal, I., Pekkarinen A-G., & Lillie, N. 2019, 6). The importance of learning Finnish is especially emphasized by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the need to strengthen the Finnish language skills of international students is also noted by many actors.

However, a contrary argument by Ministry of economic affairs and employment states that although language skills are important, language requirements for certain jobs should be re-evaluated and that no unnecessary language requirement should be demanded. As a remedy for the language barrier, the Ministry even suggests that more public services should be offered in English. ( Bontenbal et al. 2019, 7). Accordingly, several actors stress that improving language skills while being employed should be beneficial, rather than entirely before entering the labor market.

### 5.1.2 Prejudice from employers/employers' attitude toward immigrants

Racial biases and discrimination are condemned in the discussion. A good atmosphere and openness are framed as advantages for all, whereas equality is framed as a fundamental part of the Finnish society and labor markets (Bontenbal et al. 2019, 7). However, evidence in this study suggests that there is discrimination in recruitment processes and that racialization can predominate in recruitment processes. For most of the participants, the employer's racial prejudice/s impede their integration into the labor market. For them, the status of particularly, being minority immigrants constituted a problem in employment integration. Some talked about the discouragement and how it negatively impacted their mobility. Lizbon talked about an incident when she was struggling to find employment.

*“Actually, the last place that I went before I had my first job. It was a cleaning company. I went there straight. Then she saw me, and she was like we don't have job for you. The job we have if for Finnish, Finnish, Finnish, to Finnish speaking people! And I told her, its cleaning job, I don't need to speak Finnish to clean the floor. Just give me the job and see how it goes. And she said If you're not going away, I am calling the 'vartija'. Then she banged the door.” (Lizbon)*

After the incident, Lizbon stated she was truly discouraged, but she wanted to be optimistic. Tom also talked about one of his experiences in dealing with employers' prejudices towards immigrants.

*“And there was this one time. It was the person who was hiring the medical students. I went to talk to her a year ago for a job. And we have agreed on something. I sent her an e-mail, no replies. Later I saw her, and she just completely ignored me. I tried to talk to her, she said she was busy and all that. I don't know if it's a racial thing. But I just ignored it. I don't know what her intentions are, but it was really unprofessional.”(Tom)*

Ki's story mirrors that of Tom's. Ki has been working in a kindergarten as a nanny. He stressed that the medium of instruction of the preschool is English. He applied for the position of a preschool teacher because he has a degree in Social Services, so he should qualify for the position. However, he was denied the job for the reason that a specialization in early childhood education is needed. Henceforth, he decided to go back to school to take the specialization units. But, then after finishing the specialization, he was still denied the position.



In Manny's case, experience of racial discrimination was from his peers and colleagues.

*“In the football team, I think there were some racism issues as which I think was normal. I was playing for football in a Finland team.” (Manny)*

*“ I experienced some sort of racism from co-workers. It was personal, I think. They did not like me. It's because of my skin color”. (Manny)*

Manny expressed his concerns about racial discrimination emphasizing that it is a normal phenomenon. When asked to elaborate on the context of a 'normal phenomenon', he stated that he is used to racial biases because of his experiences after migrating to Europe. Manny had moved to the EU when he was 18 and has lived in different European countries with his Finnish wife. Manny's narrative is an illustration of how society tolerates and normalizes racial biases and bigotry. In many cases, the cultural identity of an immigrant plays a big role on how he or she is being treated by the wider society. The attitude of the local people towards immigrants is based on, in many cases, the immigrant's background, the perception of the society of the immigrant's culture, the encounter with them, and so on. Racial discrimination, in general, is a major obstacle that does not only impede the participation of immigrants in the labor market but adversely impact their mobility. According to Colic-Peisker (2009) and Colic-Peisker & Tilbury (2007a, 2007b), systemic racism still lingers in the economic, political, and cultural structures of society (Udah et al. 2019, 1164). The findings suggest that cultural identity is being racialized and that the power differentials based on ethnicity remain to be a problem. The integration of migrants is framed only a few times in the discourse as a security issue, related to, e.g., radicalization and terrorism. (Bontenbal et al. 2019, 7). However, the actors clearly do not emphasize this topic in the context of labor market integration.

### 5.1.3 Lack of Local Work Experience

Another significant barrier that the participants have reported is the lack of local work experience. The demand for local work experience has a negative impact on their employment outcomes. If the employers demand local work experience, it is more likely that Africans and other vulnerable labor migrant groups have difficulties securing

employment in Finland. According to Ki, after finishing his studies, he applied to different sectors, but most employers demanded local work experience.

*“Most of them, they call and they say they need someone with experience. I don’t have any experience. How can I have any experience if I’m not even getting there. So, it has been a challenge.” (Ki)*

Most of the participants shared similar sentiments. As Bill stated:

*“I did not have the chance to work in my chosen field. It was difficult to get into Finnish labor market. Even for internships, wherein I am not even being paid. It was tough. They need someone who speaks the language fluently, and with experience”. (Bill)*

Bill came to Finland with a temporary visa (student visa) and he finished his Bachelor’s degree in Electronic Engineering in Helsinki. Having a local work experience can be beneficial for faster access to the labor market. However, considering that most of the participants obtained their education in Finland (undergraduate and graduate studies), in these particular cases, the demand for a Finnish work experience/s from employers might not be a legitimate reason not to consider their job applications. According to the participants, obtaining a degree in Finland as an immigrant does not ensure successful employment. Most of the participants have also shared the difficulties of their friends finding employment despite having a good educational background. According to Turchick-Hakak et al. (2010), the requirement of local work experience can be a mechanism for employers to rationally justify not hiring immigrants (Udah et al. 2019, 1168). This suggests that immigrant status can negatively affect employment outcomes. Many of them expressed that their professional skills and values are not appreciated resulting in diminished self-esteem and, at worst, losing their motivation.

#### 5.1.4 Limited Integration support

Another perceived barrier by the participants is limited integration support, particularly for immigrants who came with student and work permits. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is primarily responsible for the integration of newly-arrived immigrants, under which the Centre of Expertise in Integration compiles and distributes research, statistics, and data, as the basis for the planning and

implementation of integration policy. Alongside this is the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), which is in charge of issuing residence permits and answering asylum seekers' entries. The Ministry of Education and Culture – as well as stakeholders such as the Finnish National Board of Education, are paramount to the efficiency with which the skills of migrants are recognized, developed, and put to effective use. (OECD, 2017, 8).

Section 6 of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration(1386/2010) states that: *measures and services promoting integration are provided to immigrants as part of basic municipal services and the services of the employment and economic administration and as other measures promoting integration.* The current integration plan services include, amongst other things, initial assessment with an immigrant advisor, language training, and education and/or professional training. Subsequently, integration training is available. The training includes further professional training/s that will help immigrants acquire skills needed for higher education and working life.

Nonetheless, the participants argue that the integration plan is primarily focused on immigrants who came through family sponsorship and immigrants with unemployed status. For student immigrants and labor migrants, they are left out. According to Lizbon, who came with a student permit;

*“You see, its problematic when you go apply for a job, and they compare you to someone who has different kind of integration. There are immigrants who are highly integrated. They know how to use the system. And for those who are poorly integrated, they will get discouraged, depressed, and self-esteem will be affected.”(Lizbon)*

Further, Lizbon pronounced that coming to Finland with a student permit was a ‘learning by doing’ experience and figuring out all by herself. In her undergraduate studies, the program included a Finnish language course once a week, which, she recognized to be problematic. She stated that once a week is not enough. Therefore, she approached the TE office.

*“Actually, when I went to TE office and they told me that I cannot have the intensive Finnish language course, I decided to pay an extra just to have language course in ‘ammattikoulu’.”(Lizbon)*

Particularly in Finland, the language prerequisites are crucial for a successful integration. For immigrants who are poorly integrated when it comes to language training, it impedes their skills and professional advancements. Similarly, Sue shared the same sentiments. She also came to Finland through a student visa.

*“At school, we had a limited language lesson. It’s not enough. Once a week is not enough. I had to go back to do more internships after I graduated because I was not confident of my language skills.”(Sue)*

Conversely, in the case of Tom who came to Finland through family sponsorship, it was different. As he noted;

*“Coming here at a young age, the benefit is that you can get things at a quick pace. There is also a big difference between migrating at a very young age and migrating as an adult. People migrate for so many reasons. In my case, I think it was so much easier since I came here through my father. I did not have to go through the struggles that many others have experienced.”(Tom)*

Tom pronounced that he had a well-structured integration plan. When he arrived in 2010, he has undergone intensive language training. Thereafter, he went to high school, and now is pursuing a medical degree. Tom’s statement supports the assumption that there are great disparities in the integration between different groups of immigrants, concerning the mode of entry. This is problematic because poorly integrated immigrants will be further pushed into the margins of the labor market. Studies revealed that while there are integration services available to new arrivals in Finland, the integration plan and training do not concern all migrants. Those that had not received an integration plan were mostly ineligible to receive it because they came to Finland to work or to study. (Bontenbal et al. 2019, 18). This means that the integration services are provided to those who come to Finland, not for work or study. Those employed or studying are largely responsible for their own integration, and there are no official services available for them, and they are dependent on finding language courses and other services from the free market or from NGOs (Bontenbal et al. 2019.

The integration plan is central to a successful settlement of immigrants in Finland. The problems in this particular discussion have been acknowledged by policymakers and even emphasized that further improvements should be made. However, according to some observers, the challenge lies within the communication and coordination of

different enterprises and institutions. Nevertheless, this question of integration support should be brought to the center table for further developments.

## 5.2 Response to the challenges

Indeed, work migrants are faced with numerous barriers in labor market integration. The implication of the African diaspora's barriers in labor market integration to immigration is developing targeted policies and further improvements on integration plan and training. Of equal importance, that said, is to examine their responses to these challenges and how their mobility is impacted. Recognition of their responses helps the actors and policymakers navigate the needed frameworks to address the problems. On an individual level, their responses can also suggest either effort done to improve their opportunities or threats to self-improvement. Basing on the participants' narratives, repetitive responses include (a) further training/education, (b) acceptance of underemployment/occupational downgrading, and (c) shift to self-employment/entrepreneurship. Although the impact on their mobility varies, their responses revealed resilience and optimism.



Figure 5. Responses to barriers in labor market integration

### 5.2.1 Further training/education

Participants with limited language skills recognized that it is a significant impediment to their employment success and have therefore decided to take further language lessons. For example, Lizbon, who came to Finland with a student visa, approached the TE office to ask for assistance regarding language courses. According to her, the TE office could not provide her further language lessons for free since it is included in her degree program. She then decided to pay extra to acquire further lessons. On a similar vein, Sue, after finishing her bachelor's degree in nursing, decided to return for an internship for a year or so to gain more confidence in terms of speaking the language. She claimed that the language course included in her degree program was not enough. As reported, the language course in the program during that time was 1-2 hours a week, which she recognized it to be problematic.

In the case of Ki, after being denied a job on the pretext of not having enough qualifications, he took the challenge and applied for specialization studies within his field. After obtaining the specialization he needed, he applied again. In spite of that, he did not qualify. After that, he decided to take master studies to improve his opportunities. Nicky, on the other hand, recognized that the challenges are exacerbated by the language barrier. Therefore, he left for the UK for mentorship training. At that time, he planned to upscale his start-up to acquire international clients, which will be unchallenging for him in terms of communication.

In Finland, language skills are essential prerequisite to social interaction with the native-born population and finding employment. Many participants stressed the importance of language for good employment outcomes, and insufficient knowledge of the language has significant negative impacts. The current policy governing language training in Finland includes two paths: (a) through labor market training, (b) 'self-motivated educational study'. Since most of the participants came with student visas, they have undergone the latter process. The key challenges in this language integration path include: (a) the question of efficacy since it is concentrated on individual motivation, and (b) referring to a survey, it is too theoretical in terms of grammar and might not meet early integration needs. (OECD, 2017, 11).

### 5.2.2 Acceptance of Underemployment/Occupational Downgrading

According to Henderson (2004, 18), underemployment often goes unnoticed among immigrants, and there is a danger that settlement programs may contribute to underemployment by providing only survival-level, general courses where the success rate is measured in terms of employment, be it suitable or not, leading to economic and social self-sufficiency in dead-end jobs. An example of this is the account of one of the participants who have obtained his undergraduate and graduate studies in Finland. However, is working menial jobs (cleaning during daytime and mail delivery at night time) to make ends meet.

This particular case of Ki, I argue, is not a question of professional know-how, but rather the underlying social and institutional constraints that limit the success in employment integration of an immigrant. Ki has been trying his luck to acquire a job within his field of studies for years. But sadly, job hunting has been challenging for him. He revealed that 'lack of local Finnish work experience' and 'poor Finnish language command' are the employers' reasons for not hiring him. The discriminatory process in recruitment negatively affects immigrants' various aspects of lives and a waste of human resources through the underutilization of immigrant skills in the host country's labor market. Moreover, Henderson(2004, 18), referring to Neuwirth's (1999:55), notes that the conceptualization of immigrant integration and settlement, addressed the concern of immigration's policy regarding the need for immigrants to become self-sufficient "as soon as possible". She argued that this phenomenon results not only in underemployment, dead-end jobs, and frustration for immigrants but also in an under-utilization of their ethnic-related social problems for the host society.

### 5.2.3 Shift to Self-employment/Entrepreneurship

Drawing from the participants' accounts, shifting to self-employment and/or entrepreneurship is one of the alternative responses to employment challenges. One of the participants, Bill, has been looking for employment as an engineer after finishing his degree in Electronic Engineering. He revealed that he was not really hopeful about it and even shared his friends' accounts in similar situations. Henceforth, he decided to shift

to self-employment. Currently, he is in the taxi business, and although it is not the job that he has studied for, he described his employment status to be 'comfortable'.

According to Henderson(2004, 18), basing on a sample from New Zealand, almost all of those who have turned to self-employment had suffered severe downward mobility to the bottom of the occupational ladder or 'humiliating' underemployment in their occupational fields. In this discussion, it is emphasized that self-employment is an important pathway into labor market participation. (Botenbal et al. 2019, 7). However, shifting to self-employment is not a straightforward process. Entrepreneurs are faced with challenges, and for migrant entrepreneurs, these are exacerbated by specific problems, including a lack of networks, language skills, information, and knowledge on where to find information, cultural knowledge, as well as inflexible bureaucratic practices.

On the other hand, Nicky had a different approach. He started doing small electronic businesses a few years after settling in Finland. As an immigrant entrepreneur, Nicky recognized the challenges. So, he decided to go to the UK for mentorship training and return to Finland to scale up his business. According to him, for immigrants, it is tough getting into the Finnish business market.

*“I think some immigrants are expecting too much from the Finnish government. You see you cannot just wait for the government to drag you up from your feet. It would be also good to leverage each other's skills. We cannot wait for the Finnish people to spoon feed us. If we want our integration pace to be faster, we should do more.”(Nicky)*

Nicky noted that he did not engage with any government sector that would support his start-up. However, he claimed that against all odds, he is satisfied with the turnout. Drawing on the participants' narratives, their responses to the barriers in labor market integration demonstrate their optimism and resilience. Some had expressed their discouragements at first, but eventually have chosen to be optimistic. Some of them are still underemployed but are hopeful for positive outcomes in the future.



## 6 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this thesis, the researcher has identified some of the main barriers faced by the African diasporas in their skills and labor market integration in Finland. The findings that emerged from the interviews are significant. However, it may not represent the experiences of the whole African diaspora community. The accounts are, however, chosen because these are the important experiences of the participants, and the perceived challenges impact not only their integration into the wider society but also their whole well-being. The integration and settlement challenges faced by immigrants in Finland have been brought up in several discussions. In the case of African immigrants, these can be aggravated by several assumptions and stereotypes. Based on the findings, there are reasons to conclude that racial biases, particularly against Africans, have still remained. Few accounts have considered racialized ethnicity as an impediment to labor market integration. These racial biases are associated with skin color, ethnic origin, religion, and beliefs. These elements, such as religion and race, often make them minorities in the host society. In a report from the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency, in Finland, the people of African descent are faced with the highest level of discrimination, with a figure of 63% from almost 6000 participants (European Union-Agency for fundamental rights, 2018, 15). According to the European Pillar of Social Rights, the 1st principle underpins equal opportunities and access to the labor market;

*Regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services available to the public. Equal opportunities of under-represented groups shall be fostered (European Commission).*

However, findings from this thesis are significantly alarming. Six out of eight participants are working in jobs below their expertise. A survey finding from several European countries, including Finland, reported that people of African descent are often engaged in low quality employment that does not correspond to their level of education, and the paid work rate among those with a tertiary degree is generally lower than that of the general population (EU-FRA, 2018, 12). This phenomenon is particularly worth noting as it can lead to occupational downgrading and 'brain-waste' when an immigrant's skills and qualifications are underutilized. More importantly, underemployment does not give them fulfillment on an individual level. Most of the repetitive

challenges perceived by the participants stem from structural constraints as manifested by occupational downgrading, racial discrimination in the recruitment process, and lack of integration support. This suggests that their integration into Finland's wider society is negatively affected, and in some cases, their mobility is also threatened.

Furthermore, albeit based on a small sample, there are reasons to conclude that there are segments in the labor market in Finland. Each of the participants affirmed that their immigrant status posed a negative impact on their labor market participation. Some participants have pronounced their discouragements from their negative experience/s in employment search, which they believed were exacerbated by being minority immigrants. According to Heikkila (2005), the immigrants who have succeeded in finding employment in Finland are college graduate Westerners, while those who have not usually are coming from developing countries. Furthermore, a survey revealed that some 84% of immigrants reported that they struggled to find employment, which resulted to high levels of unemployment among them (Heikkila, 2005).

According to the segmented labor market theory (SLMT); immigrants, particularly those coming from non-OECD countries, are trapped in the margins of the labor market. Some accounts from the participants confirm that social and institutional constraints limit minority immigrants' opportunities in employment integration as manifested by representation in menial jobs such as cleaning and mail delivery despite having good qualifications. Furthermore, empirical evidence revealed that certain immigrant groups are labeled to work within the secondary labor market. This mechanism is what Heikkilä (2005) notes as hierarchization in the occupational integration of migrants on the basis of their nationality. In a survey by the Institute of Migration, Turku, it confirmed that Westerners fare better in employment as compared to immigrants from developing countries as manifested by their lowest employment rate amongst the other immigrant groups (Heikkilä, 2005).

The existence of employment discrimination on the basis of nationality is further aggravated by employers' lack of knowledge about the immigrants' cultural background. In a survey of state-run recruitment and employment agencies, it was revealed that in terms of getting a workplace, the immigrants from outside Europe are the most difficult to place. Amongst employers, it was reported that only 20% have admitted to having enough understanding of immigration issues, and nearly 90% of them have

claimed that they have no immigrants employed in the management positions. (Heikkilä, 2005, 492). Prejudice among employers is considered to be one of the major barriers in immigrants' labor market integration. This argument is recognized in the existing literature; however, in a pragmatic way. Nevertheless, I strongly argue that it is one of the most problematic areas in this discussion. Basing on several empirical findings, factors including ethnicity, age, skin color, the hierarchy of the country of origin in the global economy play a significant role in employment and recruitment processes. For instance, Heikkilä (2017, 196), referring to Chang, C. & Holm, G. (2017), reported that Western immigrants in Finland fare better in terms of integration outcomes; and also referring to Jaakkola & Reuter (2007), Leinonen (2012) and Tiilikainen (2008), she notes that western immigrants are more likely to find jobs that match their foreign qualifications and immigrants from developing countries are on the margins on the labor market. This is worth noting as it suggests that cultural background and country of origin are severe impediments to employment for certain immigrant groups. In a sample from Lapland, the findings revealed that immigrants from the Middle East and Africa are more vulnerable to being excluded than other immigrants (Heikkilä, 2017).

Some scholars believed that Finland's short history in hosting migrants contributes to the challenges in engaging them because of the limited contacts. In the Finnish labor market, Heikkilä (2017, 150) argues that there is the tendency of labelling- Finnish recruiters and employers feel closer to the immigrants who have close proximity to Finnish culture such as Ingrian Finns, Estonians and Russians and those immigrants that are considered distant from Finnish culture are often disadvantaged. In addition to this, Bustamante (2002) noted that there is a tendency among certain employers to label a person from a different culture as 'deviant' (Heikkilä, 2017, 150). Nonetheless, this 'labeling' system in the recruitment process significantly contributes to the barriers faced by work migrants in employment integration. Discrimination in recruitment is against the law in many countries, including Finland. However, it does not guarantee that it does not happen in employment search both in direct and indirect ways. The findings suggest that among other things, awareness of employers on immigrants' cultural and ethnic background is crucial. Furthermore, successful employment outcomes of immigrants should be the focus of immigration policies. More importantly, strategic efforts are needed to eradicate the barriers, including racism in employment and recruitment search.

This thesis' findings imply that policies central to supporting immigrants' employment integration and settlement into the wider society are needed, and the development of measures to counter discrimination in the recruitment process are required. Furthermore, according to Neuwirth's theory of immigrant integration, the reciprocal relationship between the wider society and the newcomers is critical. This suggests that the receiving country must also adapt to new people and cultures. Also, the relationship between economic and social integration in conjunction with cultural components, must also be considered. Neuwirth's holistic approach is a relevant framework that focuses not only on the economic role of integration but rather considers the other important related aspects. Neuwirth's concept supports that of Henderson's (2004) and Kemppainen et al. (2020), wherein integration implies a multidimensional approach and diversity in policies where immigrants are able to retain aspects of their own culture, rather than the assimilation model, which expects only one party (the immigrant) to adapt. Similarly, referring to the classical theory of migration, Heikkilä (2017) argues that although the economic role is important, the other related costs, such as the physical and social aspects, are also of equal significance.

Furthermore, targeted policies to address the specific barriers faced by the diaspora population are necessary. Referring to European Pillars of Social Rights, such measures include the promotion of diversity audits in public and private enterprises and the collection of data disaggregated by racial and ethnic origin and actions encouraging the recruitment of under-represented groups in the public sector (OECD, 2017). In the Refugee settlement handbook, it is emphasized that; *'As well as providing the means for economic stability, employment has a powerful influence on one's capacity to participate equally in the receiving society.* In addition to this, Udah et al. (2019, 1174) referring to Colic-Peisker (2009) and Henderson (2004), emphasized that employment is not only the primary source of immigrants' material and social well-being, but also one of the most significant and fundamental parts of successful settlement and integration in the wider society. Commenting on this, the 'employment' in this discussion is the one that commensurates their skills and qualifications.

In the next years, more and more African diasporas will settle in Finland, and employment is critical for them to be fully integrated and settled into the wider society. Drawing on the findings of this thesis, the response of the participants to the disadvantages they face demonstrated their optimism and resilience. It indicated further efforts to

better their opportunities and chances. However, it is problematic when resiliency is romanticized as it masks the need for policy changes. The position of the African diasporas in the Finnish labor market defines the success of their integration and settlement. The significant disadvantages they face in integration and settlement will continue unless optimal integration support is provided, and targeted policies are implemented. Immigrants' access to employment will significantly determine their level of life, satisfaction, sense of belonging, and overall wellbeing (Udah et al. 2019, 1171). The critical role of good employment integration for the African diaspora community and the work migrants in general calls the policymakers' attention to address the issues and concerns impeding a successful labor market integration. Fundamental measures, including the development of policies central to engaging them, are crucial. Also, the role of the African diaspora in economic development should be further emphasized. The findings of this thesis suggest that their expertise and contributions are undermined. In the Finnish labor market, particularly in the aging society, labor supply will be adversely affected, and the country is predicted to rely on foreign immigration labor. It is also a question of competitiveness. Considering the aging population, the country needs talents of different educational backgrounds.

In section 8 of the Finnish Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014), it is stated that *'no one may be discriminated against on the basis of age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics'*. Discrimination is prohibited, regardless of whether it is based on a fact or assumption concerning the person him/herself or another. In this regard, the monitoring of compliance with the mandate is critical. The supervision of compliance with non-discrimination provisions is a primary responsibility of the health and safety authorities, but the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman is also responsible for a number of more general promotion, monitoring, and reconciliation tasks. (Ministry of economic and foreign affairs, 2020)<sup>3</sup>. However, given the evidence that employment discrimination in Finland has remained, new monitoring mechanisms should be considered, such as close monitoring and strict sanction mechanisms. Often, most of the discrimination problems take place during the recruitment process. Therefore, training recruitment agencies and employers on diversity can also be beneficial. Nevertheless, the barriers experienced by immigrants in employment integration should be recognized by the wider

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<sup>3</sup> Original title in Finnish: Työ ja Elinkeinoministeriö (TEM).

society, and significantly should be brought to the center table by the policymakers for a critical discussion of policy development and improvement.

### 6.1 Limitations of the research

Studies have limitations. Study limitations can result from a flaw in research design or methodology and can have an impact on the findings. Similarly, Price, J. & Murnan, J (2004, 66-67) state that a limitation of a study design or instrument is the systematic bias that the researcher did not or could not control and which could inappropriately affect the results. In spite of that, it is critical to acknowledge these flaws to inform the readers how the results might have been affected. Also, detailing the limitations implies that the researcher has an in-depth understanding of the topic, which will, in turn, strengthens the study by identifying the problems.

In this thesis, one of the limitations recognized is the sample size. In qualitative researches, sample sizes are typically smaller. However, the perceived experiences of eight persons might not represent the whole African diaspora population. Having a larger sample might have generated more diverse responses and generalizability. But then, again, acquiring more data does not necessarily lead to new information. In the interviews, the saturation point was reached when no new information was generated from the dialogues.

Secondly, is the gap in the existing literature. Generally, previous studies regarding challenges experienced by immigrants in labor market integration are available. However, most of the researches are quantitatively derived and mainly drawn from the whole EU context. Qualitative strategies, such as in-depth interviews and case studies are sparse. Although there is existing literature on the barriers faced by the African diaspora in the Finland context, they failed to mention their responses to these challenges and how their mobility has been impacted. Although this flaw is considered to be of little bearing, the availability of previous studies might have provided a more focused theoretical framework.

Lastly, as a novice researcher and considering the time constraints, the depth and scope of discussions might have been flawed compared to the work of experienced scholars. However, a thorough discussion of the research design and methods is presented in the earlier chapter for the readers to scrutinize the extent of scope and constructs.

## 6.2 Suggestions for future research

As stated earlier, there is sparse literature on qualitative data regarding the labor market integration of the African diaspora population in Finland. Through this research study, some interesting topics have been revealed, and suggestions for future research have also been determined. Focusing on the labor market integration, more extensive qualitative research strategies such as in-depth interviews and case studies could help shed more light on the discussion. Since one of the main arguments in this discussion is the discrimination in recruitment processes, research focused on these areas will not only give voice to the underrepresented groups, but more importantly, to analyze data from the perceived experiences of the respondents.

Furthermore, the findings from this study revealed a significant disparity in the integration planning and training between different immigrant groups, with regard to their entry paths. The evidence suggests that immigrants who came to Finland with student and work residence permits are more disadvantaged in the integration system, since the current integration system is primarily focused on the assessment of immigrants who came through family sponsorship and/or with unemployed status. In addition to this, the lack of coordination between enterprises and stakeholders further threatens the chances of the more disadvantaged groups, because it is argued that there is no available support provided to them. Nevertheless, this is also an interesting future research area. The integration system is integral to the settlement of the new arrivals in Finland, and further analyses of the disparities of integration between different immigrant groups are essential to address the disadvantages experienced by the immigrant population.

Furthermore, the movement of the African diaspora is a global phenomenon. In the future, their voluntary and involuntary migration to various parts of the world,

including Finland, is expected to increase. In this regard, there is a need for theoretical development to conceptualize better the role they play in the country of origin and the receiving country's economic development. The diaspora population promotes trade and investments, creates businesses, and transfers knowledge and skills. The reciprocal relationship between them and the host society needs to be empowered, and their contributions both ways need to be emphasized.



## 7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants were asked about their recommendations concerning the immigration policies to keep Finland as an attractive place for diaspora communities and immigrants in general.

### 7.1 Recommendations from the participants

“If the language is made a bit compulsory for all immigrants(no matter how he/she came) and help in job security, that would be great unless there are reasons why most foreigners can’t get jobs. It is a waste of human resource neglecting the years of educated accumulated. It almost makes going to school a waste of time.”(Bill)

“Finland can be a tough place for immigrants, as far as weather and social life are concerns. But Finland can’t do anything about the weather, but social life can be improved and racism can be diminished.”(Manny)

“Organizing language courses is beneficial”(Sue)

“Introduction of services that support integration. Like in terms of language courses, housing services, skills and employment support. There are a lot of migrants out there with good qualifications but are unemployed. Also, services that help migrants to fit into the wider society.”(Sue)

“Improvement in integration process, for example by coming up with a single integration system that serves all migrants regardless of their reasons for coming to Finland. This can help to end the integration disparities.”(Lizbon)

“Giving migrants who have already integrated a chance to integrate others.”(Lizbon)

“Intensive language courses can be beneficial. Because there’s different integration for different groups of immigrants. Some might be highly integrated, and some are poorly integrated.”(Tom)

*“For immigrants, it is tough getting into Finnish business market. On the other hand, I think some immigrants are expecting too much from the Finnish government. You see you cannot just wait for the government to drag you from your feet. It would be also good to leverage each other’s skills. We cannot wait for the Finnish people to spoon feed us. If we want our integration pace to be faster, we should do more.”(Nicky)*

*“I think one of the problems lies within the employers. The system is doing good, they’re being fair. So, the challenge can be within the employers, the communication between them and stakeholders. I don’t know, is it a cultural thing? Or maybe something personal? There are individuals who don’t want to employ immigrants. But I do also realize that there are certain jobs that really require fluent Finnish. To be fair also.”(Ki)*

## 7.2 Propositions drawn from the findings

This part of the paper presents some propositions developed from the findings of the thesis. The formulated propositions include the participation of different actors, enterprises and stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. These proposals aim to address the problems in the integration and settlement of the diaspora population in Finland.

1. More aimful and intensive language courses. Most of the participants recognize the critical role of adequate language skills for better integration outcomes. For student migrants, the frequency of language courses at school should be re-evaluated and re-designed according to the needs of the respondents. For work migrants, the inclusion of continuous language courses at the workplace should be considered.
2. Forum schemes between employers and immigrant job seekers and/or immigrant employees. In this discussion, it was stated earlier that one of the underlying factors that aggravate the employer’s racial prejudices is the lack of knowledge of the immigrant’s cultural background. Also, Finnish society has a short history of contact with immigrants considering its long history as a

country of emigration. That said, such a forum scheme will promote social contact and networking between parties. This proposition is considered an important step to promote social interactions between migrants and native Finns and employers.

3. In connection to one of the participants' propositions, the involvement of people who have migrated to Finland a longer time in planning the integration system should also be considered. These people had experienced first-hand the integration challenges, and their knowledge is substantial in planning and implementing integration services. Furthermore, through their community contacts and networks, the information can reach the marginalized groups who have limited access to such services.
4. Incorporating information about immigrant entrepreneurship/self-employment into integration training. Entrepreneurship is a positive alternative that can benefit both the immigrant and the wider society. On a micro level, it is also a question of competitiveness. Finland is a relatively small country without hotspots like Silicon Valley and developmental frameworks, as such, are needed to acquire and maintain talents in Finland.
5. Furthermore, on a theoretical basis, targeted policies to address the specific problems are needed, such as coordination between different actors, institutions, and enterprises. In this regard, measures such as the promotion of under-represented groups to the recruitment agencies and diversity audit in different sectors should be considered.
6. In the case of discrimination in the recruitment process and the workplace, measures such as monitoring mechanisms should be implemented. In doing so, introduction of (e.g., monitoring bodies ) might help to assess the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation. Also, the analysis of these problems through different data sources is critical, such as qualitative research strategies (e.g., in-depth interviews, case studies). The findings from these analyses could be beneficial in compensating for these challenges or introducing specific measures to counter the disadvantages.

## 8 DISSEMINATION

In pursuant to Diak guidelines of Master's degree thesis work, the research paper will be a public document. The findings of the study will be disseminated to the Think Africa Ry, the partner organization. An evaluation from the thesis supervisors and a representative from the Think Africa Ry was sought, and the research work was presented in the thesis seminar. The thesis work will then be published in Theseus, or alternatively, an article from the paper will be published in Diak publications or other publications.(Diak guidelines, 2020).

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## APPENDIX A. Interview guide

### African diasporas to Finland: Barriers to labor market integration

1. Basic demographics (age, gender, education, language/s, reasons for migration...)
2. Pre-migration experiences(preparation, employment history in the country of origin...)
3. Orientation post arrival(information and guidance, settlement processes, housing...)
4. Employment experiences(application, training/s, professional networks, education in Finland, job interviews, work related experiences...)
5. Challenges in employment integration/entrepreneurship(what are the responses to these challenges?)
6. Well-being (socio-economic status, family situation, community engagement, social networks and support, positive and negative settlement experiences, impact of settlement experiences to wellbeing...)
7. Suggestions for future settlement processes of immigrants (policy recommendations on the integration system, how to keep Finland an attractive place for labor migrants?)

## APPENDIX B. Informed consent form

Diaconia University of Applied Sciences  
Helsinki, Finland

African diaspora to Finland: Barriers to labor market integration  
Michelle Laguinday  
Researcher, Master's in Community Development and Conflict Resolution

Supervisors: Marja Katisko, PhD & Jouko Porkka, PhD

### A PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Michelle Laguinday, a master's student at the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, is conducting a research on the barriers faced by the African diaspora in their labor market integration in Finland. The purpose of your participation in this study is to help the researcher examine the African diaspora population's perceived experiences in integration and settlement into the wider Finnish society. You were chosen as a potential participant because you sufficiently represent the objective of the study.

### B PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, the following will occur. An interview will be conducted on an agreed date. The interview will take place in a quiet place that is convenient for both. You will be provided an interview guide beforehand, and the interview will not last for more than three hours. The interview will be digitally recorded, and field notes will also be taken.

### C RISKS

Some of the interview questions involve some aspects that are personal and sensitive, which might lead you to an uncomfortable position.

## D CONFIDENTIALITY

The records from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. However, your age and country of origin will be revealed for the purpose of reporting the data. The data transcription will be conducted in a private room using headphones to eliminate the possibility of being heard by other people. The researcher will transcribe the data independently. The written and electronic data from the study will be stored for a duration of time. The interview recording will be deleted after they are no longer needed.

## E BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

Apart from a small incentive you receive after the interview, no direct benefit will be given to you from participating in this study. However, your participation's anticipated benefit is that your narratives will help define the barriers faced by the African diaspora in the labor market integration in Finland. Also, your participation will be beneficial in analyzing the causative agents of these challenges and in developing frameworks to address the problems.

## F VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your decision whether or not to participate in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time.

## G QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about the study, you can contact the researcher by sending an e-mail at [michelle.laguinday@student.diak.fi](mailto:michelle.laguinday@student.diak.fi). You can also e-mail my supervisors Jouko Porkka at ([Jouko.Porkka@diak.fi](mailto:Jouko.Porkka@diak.fi)) and Marja Katisko at ([Marja.Katisko@diak.fi](mailto:Marja.Katisko@diak.fi)).

## CONSENT

Your signature below will indicate that you have read and understood the foregoing information. Your questions were answered and you have decided to participate in this research study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Research Participant Signature

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer

## APPENDIX C. Sample of theme categorization

Principal statements	Barriers	Responses
<i>“I think there is some kind of lack of trust from employers. Like they don’t trust the immigrant employees if they find it first-hand”</i>	Employer’s attitude towards immigrants	
<i>“It was a cleaning company. I went there straight. Then she saw me, and she was like we don’t have job for you. The job we have if for Finnish, Finnish, Finnish, to Finnish speaking people!”</i>	Language barrier Employer’s prejudice towards immigrants	
<i>“Actually, when I went to TE office and they told me that I cannot have the intensive Finnish language course, I decided to pay an extra just to have language course in ‘ammattikoulu’</i>	Language barrier	Further education/Language courses
<i>“I was studying, I was working and I had to make time for the language courses. It was so tough”</i>		Language courses
<i>“After I finished my bachelor’s degree, I wasn’t getting any job related to it. That time, I was working in a kindergarten. I talked to the management because I wanted to be a ‘lastenopettaja’. That time I was a nanny.”</i>	Occupational downgrading	
<i>“Then they encouraged me to take the 60 credits course that is</i>		Further education

<p><i>related to teaching the kids. So, I took the challenge and applied to the course. I liked it there. It was an English kindergarten.”</i></p>		
<p><i>“I have applied to few like youth work, or family related, but most of them require good fluency in Finnish language.”</i></p>	<p>Language barrier</p>	
<p><i>“I think the main barriers are language skills and Finnish experience. That’s why I’m going to a mentorship course. It is free. It is like an internship.”</i></p>	<p>Language barrier</p>	<p>Further training</p>
<p><i>“I am a diaspora. I am. I send a lot of money back home. I am doing two jobs now actually. I have another job at night. I deliver mails.”</i></p>		<p>Optimism Underemployment</p>
<p><i>“I started working even before I finished my master’s During holiday season, I came to Helsinki to do some cleaning jobs.”</i></p>		<p>Underemployment</p>
<p><i>“I did not have the chance to work in my chosen field. They need someone with experience, and fluent in Finnish.”</i></p>	<p>Language barrier Lack of local work experience</p>	
<p><i>“It was tough. I did cleaning jobs before. But now, I am into taxi business”</i></p>		<p>Self-employment</p>