Diversity and Inclusion in Finnish Workplaces: How the Finnish Language as job requirement has hindered foreign professionals' pursuit of desired career paths.

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Abstract

The research attempts to explore the extent to which Finnish language proficiency has hindered accessibility to employment opportunities for foreign labour residing in Finland. A significant increase in the workforce has been highlighted by the country's government as a necessary means to boost the country's economy and the solution that has been acknowledged the most is to increase the immigration of foreign labour into Finland. However, it seems Finland has yet to adjust to multicultural workplaces that would enable diverse and inclusive atmospheres for both Finnish nationals and foreign professionals. In this study, five participants, all with different foreign backgrounds are interviewed about their job search experiences following a narrative inquiry approach was utilized wherein an unstructured open interview was used as the method of data collection to investigate a diverse sample of participants on their experience of acquiring employment in Finland and how Finnish language as a job requirement is a barrier. The research finds suggest that the sample of participants have indeed faced difficulty in pursuing desired career paths due to the language barrier and this has made them consider alternative career options and shaped their perceptions of learning the Finnish language in order to acquire jobs that match their qualifications.

Keywords	Diversity, Inclusion, Finnish, Foreign, labour, language, workplaces.

Contents

1 Introduction

Diversity and Inclusion in the workforce is a topic that has been widely researched in the business sector today. Thanks to globalization, and other aspects such as events that forced certain groups of people to migrate from one place to another, the world is now a culturally diverse place. Trends have suggested that diversification in the workforce has proven significant economically for corporations to remain with a competitive advantage (Sihite, 2018). While diversity might be well-entrenched in many corporate parts of the world today and has certainly been a significant contributor to economic growth and development globally, it remains a vastly misunderstood concept to many other parts of the world that can clearly benefit from the implementation of diversity's principles to change corporate culture in these places. This research aims to explore this issue and further attempt to assess the willingness to implement the principles of the concept of diversity in Finnish Corporate workspaces.

According to Yle (2022), a union confederation report suggested that a vast number of the immigrant labour force are needed to boost Finland's economy. The need for an increased foreign labour force in Finland is to make up for the significant number of workers exiting the workforce, this is due to the impact of an ageing population of the country. Indeed, Finland has recognized and acknowledged the issue for a long time, however, the country faces an issue of anti-immigrant sentiment and an unwillingness to hire outsiders, an issue it shares with most homogeneous societies around Europe, Finland itself being one (DW,2021). This research shall especially focus on how Finnish workplaces have persisted in requiring fluent proficiency in the Finnish language, most job descriptions even emphasizing 'native' Finnish, and while there are roles where fluency may be necessary, in some roles the requirement ought to be reassessed (Finland Relocation, 2020).

Nevertheless, this research finds the concept of Diversity and Inclusion interesting and vital for society let alone corporate environments, it, therefore, intends to explore deeply how Finland perceives the increasing foreign labour force and how impactful this perception is towards the foreign labour force itself.

Research issues and questions.

According to the Finnish immigration service, Work and Studies are two of the most common reasons for moving to Finland, in 2020 a total of 8,508 first residence permits were granted based on work the number decreased due to the pandemic outbreak (Finnish Immigration Service, 2021). As Finland intends to significantly increase this number, this study's purpose is to investigate the extent to which foreign labour perceives the Finnish language to be a hindrance in pursuing their desired career paths.

Objectives of the research.

This research is expected to reach an audience that is looking to know about the extent of diversity and inclusivity in Finnish workplaces through experiences and understandings of both the foreign labour and Finnish recruiters. The aims of the study are as follows:

- To examine the role identity plays in shaping perceptions of a diverse and inclusive Finnish workplace.

- To examine the role language plays in shaping a diverse and inclusive workplace in Finland.

- To examine the perception of difference and unfamiliarity to the Finnish culture plays in shaping a diverse and inclusive workplace in Finland.

Methodology.

In this section, the researcher illustrates the development of the thesis and the steps that have been and intend to be taken to carry out and complete the research. The research commenced with a preliminary literature review where the researcher sought up-to-date literature sources to reflect current thoughts and works, the literature was obtained from a variety of sources to develop a perspective on the topic. Once the literature review is complete the researcher goes to develop a

research plan where the further discussion and analysis of relevant literature was done and a timeframe for the research is drawn. The description below briefly illustrates the researcher's thesis development process:

- Theoretical Framework - Concepts: Diversity, Unconscious Bias, Privilege, Identity and Language.

- Exploration of research problem and questions - Examining topic issues, and obstacles and generating questions and objectives of the research.

- Defining research methods - Reviewing the literature, Qualitative research, Data Collection, Narrative Inquiry,

- Data Collection method - Interviewing Individuals

- Data analysis and interpretation - Analysing research results and discussion.

Figure 1
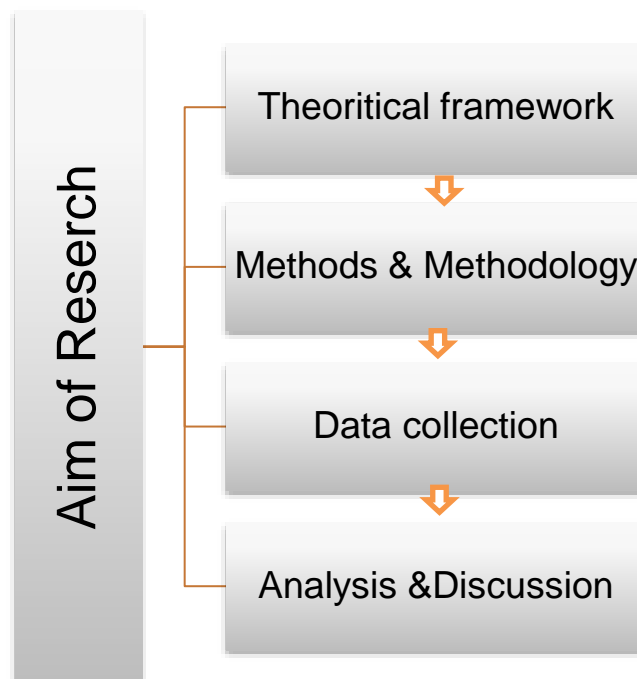
2 Diversity

Background and Definition

The term workforce diversity was coined in the 1990s to define the differences that exist between people at work, labour statistics and other data show that workforces have been, and continue to become, more heterogeneous (Mor Barak & Travis 2013). Diversity should be understood as varied perspectives and approaches to work that members of different identity groups bring (Thomas & Ely 1996).

Separation diversity- which considers the differences in values, beliefs, and attitudes, and signals perceptual disagreement between group members. Variety diversity- which considers differences in the knowledge, networks, and experiences of unit members, which are reflective of unique or distinctive sources of information within the group. And disparity, or differences in access to, or ownership of, valued resources such as privilege, status positions, and pay (Roberson, 2019).

3 Unconscious Bias

According to the University of California San Francisco (USCF) Office of Diversity and Outreach in its initiative to address unconscious bias, Unconscious Bias is a social stereotype about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their conscious awareness. Unconscious bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner (USCF, 2022).
It is also sometimes referred to as implicit bias, often stemming from stereotypes that arise from our backgrounds, cultures, and personal experiences.
This research found the explanation of Unconscious Bias by the university of Edinburgh sufficiently elaborate, that it is 'the tendency of us as humans to act in ways that are prompted by a range of assumptions and biases that we are aware of. this can include decisions or actions that we are not consciously aware of, as well as hidden influences on decisions and actions that we believe, are rational and based on objective unbiased evidence and experience.' (University of Edinburgh, 2020).

To summarize the definition of Unconscious Bias with an understanding derived from the ones given above is whether we as humans make instant judgments about people around us every single day. And while it is a normal experience, it can be extremely invasive and damaging in various processes such as recruitment, medical attention and treatment, and interpretation among others.

Types and Manifestations of Unconscious Bias.

Gender Bias.

Gender bias is displayed when someone associates certain stereotypes with a different gender. In this case, people can receive different treatment basing on the sex they are. It is basically like preferring a particular sex over the other and it can also be termed sexism.

For example, various cultures including my own consider men to be the superior sex and they are usually attributed to qualities such as strength and power while women are attributed to sympathy, care and even weak. Growing up in an environment such as this, it is quite inevitable to develop an unconscious bias towards the different sexes or genders to the point that even when educated about gender equality, the implicit attitude still manifests unknowingly.

Halo effect.

The term was coined by psychologist Edward Thorndike (1920), and his primary goal was to determine how one quality in someone could affect the assessment of other qualities in that same person and he found that for example, attractive people are easily likeable because they could be perceived as intelligent or successful or are associated with other positive qualities while their negative qualities are likely to be overlooked (Iresearchnet.com, 2016)

The opposite of the halo effect is the horns effect, this is a cognitive bias where a negative trait in someone can obscure their positive qualities. This perception or generalization of someone's character basing on one negative trait clouds our judgment and therefore determines our attitudes towards this person.

An example of this bias and the generalization that can come of is assuming or thinking that all ¨obese people are lazy or eat unhealthily. It can also be associating someone's appearance, in this case, if it is not very pleasant to you, it can be that your assumption of this person is that they are unkind or dumb.

Some other types and manifestations of Bias include:

Affinity Bias- where natural connections or similarities we have with other people can affect our judgment of who they are, and their qualities and skills. Confirmation bias which is when we try to confirm our opinions and pre-established ideas towards certain social groups of people. And several other biases among them, ageism nonverbal bias, and appearance bias.

Effects of Unconscious Bias.

The effects of Unconscious Bias are quite significant. It impacts the hiring and evaluation process contributing to a lack of workplace diversity.

With Unconscious Bias, our judgements and decisions are inaccurate and if these are linked to gender, ethnicity or other characteristics in people, there can be unfair and can have negative consequences for the people as they are subjected to this bias.

Exploring Unconscious Biases and ways to overcome them.

Awareness- Being aware of one's own unconscious bias is the first step in preventing it or trying to overcome it, when one is aware of their UB one has to acknowledge it and critically think about how this can affect their judgment and decisions regarding certain groups of people.

Seeking mentorship and pieces of training regarding Unconscious Bias, through these we can access tools that can help address our biases and hold ourselves accountable from time to time. Through training, we can access tools that can help us change our behaviours and understand other people's experiences in order to judge them fairly.

Through helpful models of training overcoming bias can be taught through a combination of approaches which include calling out stereotyped views, reflecting on counterstereotypes examples, increasing interactions with different kinds of people, and adopting others' perspectives.

Some other aspects of successful UB training and measures we can take to emphasize its goals -

Emphasizing that you possess the Power, to overcome denials and focusing on growth in defeating Unconscious Bias.

Creating empathy, by offering opportunities to take the perspectives of others and holding small group discussions to learn about others' views and experiences.

Encouraging Interactions among people from different groups, expanding inner circles, and nurturing curiosity to acquire new knowledge and information (Leon, 2022).

3.1 Identity.

Identity is defined as who we are, the way we think about ourselves, the way we are viewed by the world and the characteristics that define us. Identity is also defined as an individual's sense of self-establishment by their unique characteristics, associations, and social functions (Yilmaz, 2022)

How do construct our self-concepts?
Self-concept is our perception of our behaviour, abilities, and unique attributes. Self-concept is also called self-construction, self-perspective, or self-structure. (Epstein,1973) defines self-concept to be a theory that a person holds about themselves as they experience and interact with the world. According to Epstein self-concept includes-

Material Self- which considers, our bodies, and possessions among other things in our own lives. Material self-according to research can also pertain to things we consider as our such as our homes but also certain aspects of our personalities and bodies.

The interpersonal self which considers the views others have/hold of us. The interpersonal self has clear presuppositions of its own, including the possession of a first-person perspective and a capacity for empathy. (Zahavi, 2015)

Intrapersonal self – which considers our emotions, needs, values and wants.

The construction of our self-concepts consists of processes such as defining the self-concept, assessing the self-concept, operating a self-concept, building a self-concept, developing a self-concept, constructing the self and finally having and being a self. (Oyserman, 2012).

Let's explore some of the processes deeper-

Defining the self-concept- the self-concept operates as a holder of our life's memories, organizing our experiences and functions as an emotional buffer and motivational resource (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Some research suggests that self-concept means the persistently salient aspects, which are most likely to be continually recalled given

the everyday contexts in which a person is embedded. What a person remembers, how they remember it and the sense made of their own experiences are all importantly shaped by their self-concept.

Assessing the self-concept- this can be a difficult goal to attain as the self-concept consists of such abstract information that makes it hard for all of one's self-concept to be noticeable at any given point in time. Therefore, when asked to report on the self, individuals can only report on that subset of all the self-relevant information that is salient and therefore seems important or central at that point in time. (Oyserman, 2012). Furthermore, with exploration or various examples of experiments researchers have found through assessing the self-concept that though it is important in guiding motivation and behaviour, it is highly influenced by social and situational structuring.

Operating a Self-Concept- this considers the self-concept in action. Because the self-concept supports experience and inspires action, it has been described as a 'theory' about oneself that represents and organizes current self-knowledge and guides how new self-knowledge is perceived (Epstein, 1973). The self is considered to be in action when it moderates outcomes. Examples of the self-concept in action include self-positive thinking, emotion regulation and motivation among others.

Constructing the Self- this considers the Self-concept as a social product. Theorists have always conceptualized the self-concept as a social product that is developed through the social interaction and formation of relationships with others and what they see in one's self. However, the influence of social contexts is not limited to self-relevant information obtained from interacting with others, we strive for a certain level of uniqueness.

The Structure of Identity.

As we have seen in earlier explorations, the formation of identity or self-concept is not easily attained and isn't always straightforward and therefore at certain stages like the adolescent stage, which is a vital stage for identity formation, some social circumstances can hinder the ability to explore various identities and roles, and this can be a cause of role confusion.

Identity can be classified into types such as racial, ethnic, geographical, family, body, generational, religious, and career among many classifications of identity.

We can try to explore some of the above-listed classifications in depth-

Racial Identity- this considers the racial group a person belongs to. Racial identity is defined as a dynamic sociopolitical construction and assists in the understanding of within-group differences of people of different races. According to Belgrave et al (2000) assimilation into a racial identity involves two components which are considered to be group identification and racial group consciousness. The racial identity of an individual remains constant over a lifetime.

Ethnic identity – is considered to be a multidimensional concept that includes self-categorization, commitment to a group, certain values and beliefs shared by the group and an evaluation of the group. An individual's affiliation with a specific ethnic group such as Ugandan, Finnish etc.

Geographical Identity- this type of identity indicates the location an individual is affiliated to, this can be a country, region, city, or village they originate from or reside. In many ways, our large and small surroundings shape our lives and therefore what we identify as and then with time what makes up a place is the culture of those that live in it. Often, we associate our well-being or feelings and emotions with locations/places.

Generational identity- this refers to a person's awareness of their membership or belonging to a generational group and how the group is significant to this person.

Religious identity- this of a person considers an individual's spiritual beliefs. Some people are born into families that have adopted particular religions and yet others adopt different spiritual beliefs and religions as they get older. Religious identity can be a strong form of identity for certain individuals.

Career identity- this identity is formed when an individual chooses a particular career path and this evolves with the changes to the individual's titles they adopt, interests or responsibilities they adjust to.

From the above explorations and illustrations, we derive that identity structure is not exactly hierarchical nor is it organized in a particular order. Individuals choose to identify themselves basing different categories whereas in other instances they do not choose but find themselves as already belonging to certain groups whose values and beliefs they can identify as natural.

Functions of identity.

Identity is our self-image, which is created and shaped by different experiences and aspects as we explored in the earlier sections. Our identities are important when we

interact with each other and communicate internationally. It is important for one to under one's identity in order to thrive in society. Furthermore, on the point of communicating with others, when one has the ability to describe one's self-identity in a way that is clear and meaningful, this gives a foundation on which one can easily interact with the surroundings around them.

Because identity and self-esteem are closely related to one another, a strong sense of self leads to a healthy connection between self-identity and self-esteem. As humans when perceived differently from what we identify as or think of ourselves we might often feel misjudged or misunderstood which results in irritation or even becoming upset. In this case, knowing oneself and understanding our identities enables us to present ourselves to our surroundings in the way that would like to be perceived and we are able to do this confidently.

Identity enables us to express the difference between us, and when we do so, we are able to appreciate those differences and even explore them. In settings such as a diverse workplace, it is vital that one has a strong sense of identity and is able to distinguish themselves from others in order for their self-esteem to stay high and at the same time, one should be able to appreciate the different identities of one's colleagues in order to work with them harmoniously.

Identity plays an important role in empowering individuals to exercise their rights and responsibilities fairly and equitably in a modern society. It is important for social, economic, and digital inclusion as it provides access to basic human rights such as healthcare, pensions, social benefits, the ability to exercise our right to vote, and beyond. And the accessibility of those rights requires proof of what one claims to be.

We each have a part of our identity that we consider most important, this could be sex, race, ethnicity, nationality, political beliefs, or religious affiliation among other forms of identity. We each have a part of our identity that stands out from the rest of our identities, or it might be that we change our identity depending on who we are with and what we are involved in. Part of understanding our identity, therefore, means understanding how we fit in (or don't) with other groups of people.

Understanding our identities not only aids us in understanding our surroundings but also the world in general, we are able to perceive certain experiences in ways that shape the outcomes whether they be opportunities or challenges. It also helps us appreciate the other various identities in the world at large and learn more about them,

we may even adopt values of other identities that interest us, ultimately making it easier to live in the world itself.

Our different identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, age religion play a very vital role in enabling us to understand the inequalities within our societies, that some people experience obstacles, discrimination, and oppression simply because they identify as a particular thing or a certain way. While it is perceived as if one works hard or has the ability and talent one will succeed and thrive in society, it should be acknowledged that historically certain structures, policies, and institutions have been established to limit the levels of success or achievement of certain people simply because what they I identify as. Therefore, the importance of understanding identity is crucial to be able to live harmoniously with others regardless of differences in our identities without inflicting harm or danger and without oppressing ourselves or each other.

The development of identity.

Sense of self initially involves simply sensing that one's body is separate from others, so that identity begins with a physical sense of the boundaries of one's body and where it is in space (Lewis, 1990). The development of identity commences right from when we are infants when we actualize that we are separate beings from our mothers or caregivers. Then through interactions with our caregivers, there are different developmental processes such as the realization of dependency on certain needs and this creates an attachment that sets up the basic sense of worth, esteem and efficacy (Oyserman, 2012).

The stages of identity development can be outlined as becoming aware of self as a separate individual, recognizing familiarity with other beings and showing of fear to beings that are strange or unfamiliar, and noticing differences in appearances such as colour.

As we grow, we develop a sense of shame through experiences that involve interacting with others and how they perceive our actions, we also tend to adopt how other beings such as adults respond to different forms of diversity or differences, we imitate behaviour and therefore develop habits.

We then go on to classify others around us based on their genders or biological sexes, we recognize physical characteristics and begin to identify in forms of gender, race, and ethnicity. When we identify all these forms of differences between others around

us it is natural that we can develop and sense of discomfort, and distrust about these different diversities and it is the responsibility of the adults around us to address these discomforts and shape our perceptions in a way that we understand that differences are not necessarily a threat. Our identity goes on to develop when we become aware of variations and therefore try to discover how and where we fit in, and we usually warm up to spaces or surroundings where people have similar identities, we group ourselves with those that are similar or whose values, beliefs and characteristics align with ours.

3.2 Privilege.

Privilege is defined as unearned and frequently taken-for-granted advantages accrued purely through one's birth into a certain group, it is suggested that the existence of privilege is such that it is unseen and engrained within social systems and it gives people choices, opportunities, permission and dominance to control people of less privileged groups while it appears natural (McIntosh, 1988).

In its simplest definition, privilege can be understood as the variety of advantages accessible by a person compared with other individuals, in relation to their identities and pre-given condition within the social system. based on this definition, conversations around privilege must be inherent with the understanding of biases, and social and political contexts that prevail in the society (Magdalene, 2019)

Researchers and authors have noted that privilege is attained through visible affiliations such as skin colour or race and gender etc. and as a result of that these social privileges for instance based on gender grant statuses to a particular gender group in terms of culture, profession, to dominate and marginalize another gender group and a common example of this can be the status of men to that of women.

Privilege nowadays is also seen through many different lenses such as financial privilege, geographical location, attractiveness, and intelligence among many other layers of perspectives.

Dr Steven Smith (2014), a psychologist and author, views the concept of privilege in terms of resources, that these resources are correlated with human happiness and well-being including but not limited to positive relationships, positive emotions, good health, volunteering service, having enough money to meet basic needs, finding

meaning in life, emotional stability and successes and then he goes on to suggest none of the above is guaranteed by money except the ability to meet basic needs.

There is the argument that privilege does not necessarily bring happiness or fulfilment and this argument can be used to deny privilege, the denial of privilege is therefore the lack of its recognition. White privilege for instance- Individuals of the white race are often oblivious to their privilege, and this might be backed by the argument that just because they are white, they have it easy in life. But people are more likely to be aware of their experiences of oppression than they are likely to be aware of their privilege.

Groups of people that are oppressed and discriminated against simply because of their race or gender are continually reminded of these aspects of themselves and therefore consider not having to experience this a privilege that they do not possess. And as a result of this, groups of individuals that are privileged, due to the unawareness of such experiences are unlikely to be able to acknowledge those experiences and can easily ignore the fact that others are denied the opportunities based on certain factors that do not earn them certain privileges (Pease, 2010).

One might say the reason privilege is met with such contempt or is reacted to in terms of defence, denial or argumentatively is ignorance, and misguidance, and this it can also be said, is intended by the oppressive systems that have been put into place. 'One of the functions of privilege is to structure the world so that mechanisms of privileges are invisible- in the sense that they are unexamined to those who benefit from them' (Bailey,1998).

4 Language as a form of Identity.

Language is the standard method of human communication and interaction, it comprises of words used in a coordinated and common way and expressed by speech, writing or gestures. Languages are usually strongly tied to a sense of belonging to a certain national or regional group and in-group speech can represent or symbolize cultural commonality and ethnic identity. The way we talk and express ourselves verbally is important in displaying who we are and therefore indicating our

identity. Language is an aspect that is intrinsically connected to a person's identity (Villegas-Torres & Mora-Pablo, 2018).

Moreover, language has a strong relationship with various forms of identities such as race, ethnicity, and culture hence people with similar racial or cultural backgrounds may use similar languages. The development of language as an identity begins right from infancy and the biggest influence on what language an individual adopts as their mother tongue is usually family, this is a result of the number of time children spend interacting with their parents on a regular basis, by transmitting speech skills targeted to develop their form of communication, parents play a critical role in their children's language development (Vizuette, 2022).

Another important influence on identity and language identity in particular is the geographical location, it can impact language use in various aspects such as varying accents, dialects and vocabulary of a language. All languages have dialectic variations (Abdulfattah & Mansour, 2017), and for this reason, an outsider of a certain geographical area with a common language of use may face difficulties understanding the precise language. For instance, the English language is vastly used around the world but the way it is used or spoken differs significantly by region, a prominent example of the difference in language use would be American English and British English, the difference in the accents of the two geographic locations differ significantly. Furthermore, because language is continuously changing, there is an emergence of slang. Slang is a type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as informal and commonly used in speech but avoided in writing. But even changes within a common language can be a cause of misunderstandings or misinterpretations let alone a completely different language whilst communicating. Linguistic struggles can alter an individual's identity since language barriers can deter the flow of idea sharing, thoughts, and feelings. Hence, successful communication between people should never be taken for granted (Vizuette, 2022).

4.1 Language requirements for Finnish workplaces and organizations.

Languages in Finland.

According to the Institute for the Languages of Finland (Kotimaisten Kielten Keskus, 2022), the official national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. Additionally, there are more than 150 first languages spoken in Finland. In 2021, approximately 4.80 million people in Finland spoke Finnish while the majority of these had Finnish as their first language, 288,000 spoke Swedish as their first language and the number of people speaking other languages rose by 485,000 (Statista, 2022).

Foreign languages in Finland

At the end of 2020, Finland had over 432,847 foreign-language speakers making up to 8% of Finland's population in total. The largest of the foreign-speaking groups are Russian making up about 1.6% of the population, Estonian which is about 1.6%, and then Arabic with about 0.7% and English with approximately 0.5% (Languages of Finland 100 – One hundred Years of Finnish languages, 2021). The largest percentage of the of the foreign speakers is concentrated mostly in the Capital of Finland, Helsinki.

5 Methodology

This section aims to illustrate the methodology and process of the study by providing a discussion of the choice of the research topic and attempting to answer the questions of the study. The researcher starts by describing the research problem, and then the chosen methods of data collection, the researcher then presents the results and attempts to derive a clear analysis of the research thereby developing a discussion from the process.

5.1 Research problem and approach.

This study aims to explore a deep understanding of the extent to which certain aspects hinder access to employment opportunities for foreign labour in Finland, the aspect of focus in this study being language proficiency requirements by Finnish workplaces. The Finnish government has for some time now acknowledged that an increase in work-based immigration is one of the vital actions Finland ought to take

in order to boost and improve the employment and economy of the country ("Survey: 40% of foreign specialists face discrimination in Finnish workplaces | News | Yle Uutiset"), 2022).

Finnish workplaces however have yet to adjust and implement inclusive actions to aid foreign workers in being able to acquire jobs in these workspaces. A survey conducted by the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK found that excessively high requirements for the Finnish language proficiency were perceived as the biggest obstacle in pursuing employment for foreign labour (Confederation of Finnish Industries, 2021).

5.2 Qualitative Research

The method of research used in this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is essentially suitable for understanding people's experiences in a humanistic and interpretive approach (Jackson, Drummond, Camara, 2007). Qualitative research establishes the need to contact people directly and acquire their testimonies hence, some of the important questions the researcher asks while considering this method is how to gain access to participants, what questions to ask the participants, what is the expectation of the nature of responses to the questions from the participants and how the questions and responses will aid the researcher in understanding the chosen issue under study.

5.3 Narrative Inquiry.

This research is carried out with the use of the narrative inquiry approach, an approach that focuses on the use of stories and data, where stories are gathered in order to obtain an understanding of participants' experiences as lived and told (Savin-Baden, 2007, p. 459). In this approach, the event is considered as the "story" and the inquiry "narrative". The inquirer describes the lives of individuals, gathers, and tells stories about people's experiences, and writes narratives of these experiences (Hatch & Wisniewski, 2002).

Why the choice of approach?

The researcher chooses narrative inquiry because she finds that the framework of the approach works best to provide what the researcher is trying to inquire about. The approach provides the opportunity to focus on the participant's perceptions of the Finnish professional working environment leading to the formation of a narrative from each participant's experiences to elucidate on how the Finnish language as a job requirement has hindered their access to employment opportunities in professional fields that they are pursuing a career in.

5.4 Data collection method.

Interviewing.

The researcher uses the technique of interviewing individuals to collect data. In the qualitative research method, interviewing is a set of techniques for gathering data from participants through the utilization of structured semi-structured or unstructured questioning formats (Jackson, Drummond, Camara, 2007, p. 25). In this study, the use of semi-structured interviewing is utilized to aid a more expanded and deeper understanding of participants' experiences and stories. The researcher records the interviews with the consent of the participants thereafter transcribing the recorded material for analysis. Since the method of narrative Inquiry is utilized, the interviews are narrative where information is obtained through conversations with the participants. The researcher considers the bias effect and vigilantly tries to be conscious of it by avoidance of comments evaluating participants' responses and paying equal attention to all parts of the conversations among other aspects.

Participants.

The sample of this research consisted of 5 individuals of ages between 23 and 35 all from foreign backgrounds who have moved to Finland less than a decade ago to pursue higher studies or seek employment or their family members' decision to relocate to Finland.

Data collection criteria (sample).

The technique of purposeful sampling was utilized. Purposeful sampling refers to the identification and selection of individuals that have experience with the concept of interest (Cresswell & Plano, 2011). The individuals selected to participate are all from foreign backgrounds who have resided in Finland for longer than 2 years and have experienced the Finnish language job requirement as an obstacle in their pursuit of professional employment in Finland. The participants varied in race/ethnicity (two Asians, two white Europeans and one black participant born in Europe), and the participants are all pursuing studies related to business at higher education institutions in Finland.

Procedure.

Five Interviews were scheduled with each participant at a time of each's convenience and format each participant was comfortable with. Two interviews were carried out virtually and three were conducted in person. The researcher did not prepare a set of structured questions but rather stated one question to the participants at the start of the interview, that way the participants were able to narrate their experience without the influence of what they might think they need to say. The researcher did not set a time limit for the interview, the participants were informed that the interview or narration could be as long or as short as they wished. During the interview, any gestures, comments, or facial expressions were avoided by the researcher so as not to influence the narration and the participants of the interview were alerted by the researcher why the mentioned actions would be avoided. The interviews were recorded and transcribed shortly after with consent from the participants and a request for later verification of their experiences during interpretation was made by the researcher.

5.5 Analysis

Thematic approach-

Thematic analysis is a method that is used for systematically identifying, organising, and providing insight into patterns of meaning which are themes across a dataset (Braun &Clarke, 2012). With the thematic approach to this research, the collective and shared experiences of participants were seen and explored and there was an important identification of relation in experiences. The analysis provides an answer to the question being explored in this research.

During analysing of the research data, the researcher familiarised herself with the data by immersing in the data, rereading the transcribed interview data of the participants, and listening to the recorded versions of the interviews thereby interpreting the participants' experience and understanding what assumptions and narratives the participants construct of themselves from these experiences.

Themes.

During familiarization themes are generated from the data collected, to capture important aspects in the data that relate to the research question and therefore represent a pattern of responses with meaning in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

In the data collected for this research, the themes below were generated in relation to the issue of research. Various snippets of the interviews were examined to identify patterns within them, themes are then generated and addressed in detail including examples from the collected data as supporting evidence.

Review of potential themes.

Searching for jobs: Looking for a job related to my profession/ to match my experience. Highlighting the participants' experiences of their search for various types of jobs including internships, and jobs matching their work experience acquired prior to moving to Finland. Some of the participants with work experience and professional qualifications expected to be able to find jobs in their respective fields

when they moved to Finland and those that pursued higher education in Finland expected ease in finding jobs since they had an educational background from Finland. Participants expressed feelings of disappointment and despair when things turned out other than they had expected.

Lack of Finnish language skills: 'I didn't speak the native language'. Focusing on the extent the Finnish language skills impacted on the experiences participants had while pursuing their desired job opportunities. The participants expressed concern about how difficult it is/was to find a job without fluent Finnish language skills and highlighted that they took courses or managed other ways of learning the language to aid them in finding the jobs that match their qualifications.

Learning the language: difficult to learn. Participants narrate their experiences while trying to learn the Finnish language, some express having faced difficulty in learning a whole new language, and some participants express how the levels of Finnish they had acquired proved insufficient for the kind of roles they aimed for.

Working in low-skilled jobs, as an alternative: Exploring the realization some of the participants had that it was easier for them to acquire low-skilled level jobs as opposed to what they hope to pursue as career paths. Without desired Finnish language skills as job requirements, some participants expressed that they had to opt for low-skilled jobs as that was what they managed to get.

Prospects: Change/ not so hope/ uncertain. In terms of career paths in Finland, the participants had different views, those that moved earlier to Finland expressed that there has been some change in the extent to which Finnish was a barrier to acquiring jobs while some participants were uncertain if they would be able to pursue their desired career paths without the Finnish language skills required.

Trustworthiness and rigour.

The trustworthiness or rigour in research is the degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods utilized to ensure the quality of research (Pilot & Beck, 2014). Throughout the research process of data gathering, analysing, interpreting, and reporting, the researcher remained conscious and attentive to trustworthiness and quality. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), there are four criteria to be explored in trustworthiness, these include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The researcher ensured to try and meet these four criteria by engaging with the participants during data collection, gathering data from different perspectives and analysing, comparing data, and pursuing common patterns and actively involving participants in the interpretation process. While these efforts were made, it is not possible for the researcher to ensure that the reader finds it trustworthy however the researcher still hopes the research will be engaging and academically rigorous to interested parties.

Reflexivity.

This, regarding research, refers to the examination of the researcher's own beliefs, judgements, and practices and how these may have influenced the research (Hammond, 2014). Reflexivity gives the researcher the opportunity to be open about her subjectivities and biases considering she shares similar experiences while living in Finland. The researcher engages in reflexivity by constantly reflecting on the decisions made while analysing thereby strengthening the trustworthiness and quality of the research by holding herself accountable.

Final defined themes (Report).

The final defined themes were formulated through analysing that each theme has a unique and specific aspect that addresses the research issue (Braun and Clarke, 2012). To define the themes to be precise and prevent overlapping, some of the reviewed potential themes were made sub-themes, for instance 'Learning the language' and 'Finnish Language as a barrier are combined into the theme, Finnish language use and learning. Two themes were generated.

Professional Job Search.

In the case of the participants of this research, they migrated to Finland for different reasons, namely, due to family relocation or moving for family (spouse) and studies. The participants aimed to establish themselves in Finland where they had to adapt to a new culture, new environment and new language. Some had already enrolled in higher education institutions on arrival while others decided later to pursue higher education in Finland as a means to increase their chances of acquiring employment in Finland. Isidora illustrates this situation in her account:

Prior to moving to Finland, I studied sociology for two years, but I didn't complete the degree program previously I also worked as an English teacher for three years I worked as a sales and customer service representative and also a little bit in hospitality. When I started having like higher goals for myself and started searching for other opportunities that match my experience and like education I didn't have any success in finding anything that is related to my skills and experience that I got back home what I found is that the majority of the job as that I looked at was interested in required Finnish language my Finnish language level is at A2 I would say so like beginner but yeah. When I saw that I can't really move up higher than those basic kind of jobs like waitressing and cleaning I enrolled in a university here in Finland and there was an English program.

The previous snippet illustrates that there was a hindrance for the participant in acquiring employment that she believes matched her qualifications and that this was the lack of Finnish language skills. Ben (not real name) illustrates a similar experience:

I was already then a web designer and graphic designer I was working as a web and graphic designer for a long time but when I came to Finland that time the labor market in Finland was not so good as it is today and I tried to find so many jobs but then I couldn't find anything any job of my profession because that time it was like 2015 and 2014, it was almost impossible to get a job if you don't if you don't have the language skills. I started doing some unprofessional, unskilled jobs like posting and cleaning you know and then life was really hard then.

Despite having acquired professional skills and experience, Isidora and Ben perceived that their qualifications could not be utilized in Finland, so they had to opt for low-skilled jobs. In relation to this, research by Nichols & Virsinger (2021) found various obstacles in the employment of immigrants in Finland's professional fields such as tech, this being a result of recruitment practices namely, strict language requirements and a lack of understanding of foreign qualifications and experience.

Moreover, from the snippets of Isidora and Ben's narration, it is evident that there is a limit to what kind of jobs one can acquire as a foreigner with limited Finnish skills, Maksim's experience perception of this is elaborated when he expresses that:

I'm not going to look for any other courses because it seemed like that the lecture stop on B2 level they think that is enough for you to like to communicate which is partially true but if you want to get higher in the hierarchy it's never enough and I think this is how uh like my case can prove it because I can say that if I need to find a job right now like in the in the shop construction area once again logistics I can find it like within a week without any problems or like at any fast food chain restaurant because of my Finnish language but if I want to get higher it's just it's not enough yet.

As for some participants, particularly the ones that moved to Finland purposely to pursue higher education (in English) have found that it does not guarantee ease in acquiring professional employment during their studies (internship) and neither when they graduate. In Aisha's experience she reports about her search for internship:

When I started to apply for internships and start my journey in finding an internship, I found that. It was quite difficult as I didn't speak the native language in Finland, which is finished. I didn't realize that language would be such a barrier, especially since I'm studying in English and it's an international degree. However, it was quite difficult to find an internship or position that despite being a suitable candidate for all the requirements, it was still a very difficult thing to realize that finish is a must.

From Aisha's fragment of the interview, it is possible to notice both frustration and disappointment from the experience as it turned out otherwise than what she had expected. As Aalto (2021) notes that English-speaking foreigners often acquire higher degrees in English but still end up having challenges in the job market. Blaire, who graduated from a university in Finland adds to her account in this regard:

I just graduated from Laurea with an international business degree last year and I'm on the journey of job hunting. I'm currently looking for a job that related in my profession which is the marketing and social media. I started looking for jobs when I was second year already, so I just tried to like to restart the market to see what kind of skillset they need and just try to apply. I've applied to like 100 applications during my second year or third year at my university and then most of them I didn't get an answer. Some of them send rejections and some of them with a clear rejection reason that they decided to process with someone with Finnish language skills rather than me with just English.

In the previous comment, Blaire describes how early she started searching for employment in her professional field but after a whole year from graduating, she is still in the process of trying to find a job despite sending out a great number of

applications. In this statement, the strong effect the lack of the Finnish language had on her not being hired for the jobs is detected as she points out it was given as a clear reason for rejection.

Finnish Language Use and Learning.

Learning the Finnish is vital for integrating into the Finnish society but Aalto (2021) notes that even when internationals that have studied the language, they still face difficulties in integrating into the Finnish job market. Moreover, for those who come to pursue higher education in English, they don't have the time or opportunity to study the Finnish language. This is elaborated well in Blaire's account when she expressed:

…they decided to process with someone with Finnish language skills rather than me with just English. So, at the time I feel like a I need to compete with the Finnish local people here. So, I started to learn Finnish, but it's really hard to balance out because I need to work. I need to study and then I need to study a whole new language. Uh, and I didn't really manage to do it well, after a while I decided to just focus on graduating.

A study found that the main reason Finnish language studies were not completed was time constraints, that learning Finnish required intensive studying, investing a great amount of time and effort (von Konow, 2015)

A common pattern is noted in the experience of the participants with Finnish language learning is insufficient materials and resources to learn the required proficiency level of the Finnish language. For instance, in Maksim's experience who stated that he acquired a good level of Finnish from a lower education institution as he moved to Finland while still underage, he later, while pursuing higher education, attempted to add on his Finnish language skills, he illustrates the experience:

To many courses I went, one thing I felt is that they really concentrate on basics and my basics are really good and it didn't matter how hard I try to find like more you know like C1 level courses where you have to like actually talk for the whole life maybe like the whole lecture is based in the way that you spoke to the teacher on some topics so you all get this practice but all of them were based on learning grammar and stuff like that which is like never connected to the real life.

In von Konow's (2015) study, she noted that Finnish classes were not perceived as helpful to get past the basics and acquire the spoken language proficiency.

Aisha expresses in relation to this:

Uh, I believe that even if you make the effort to learn the Finnish language, which I believe is a must since we do live in Finland, I do not think that in a year or two or five that we would have, we will achieve the language skills to work in a professional way in fluent Finnish, spoken and written.

From Aisha's comment, it can be detected how her experience with the Finnish language use and trying to learn has shaped her perception of mastering it even when she acknowledges that it is necessary considering the recruitment practices of Finnish workplaces.

While one participant, Ben, finds the language difficult to learn, he comments:

I felt like I couldn't study this language because it was really hard.

6 Discussion

This research investigates Finnish language as a barrier for international professionals in Finland in acquiring desired jobs or pursuing career paths in their qualified fields. A qualitative narrative approach was adopted to carry out this investigation whereby the interviewing technique was utilized to collect data. A sample of five participants who are professionals residing in Finland. Three interviews were conducted in person and two virtually and all participants were contacted for the interviews via their social media accounts. The chosen sample is diverse to reflect the purpose and concept of the study i.e., (Russian, Vietnamese, Danish-Somali, Serbian and Nepalese). The data collected from the participants was analysed through a thematic analysis approach.

While trying to professionally establish themselves in Finland, the participants faced various obstacles among them being the language barrier, they identified the significance of the Finnish language in Finnish workplaces as it is regarded as a vital requirement for professional employment. According to the participants' narrative, the language barrier drove some of them to work low-skilled jobs and go back to university to pursue international studies offered in Finland and one of the participants, Aisha even had to move back to her home country to complete an internship in time.

Participants also expressed their perceptions of the Finnish language from their experiences of trying to learn it. Maksim, for instance, whose Finnish skills mostly developed through his acquaintance with workmates and schoolmates, comments that when he later tried to study the language to acquire a higher level of its proficiency, the courses offered were insufficient in aiding him to reach the level of Finnish he considers satisfactory for the Finnish professional workplaces that require these skills.

Furthermore, in this research, there is evidence of how the Finnish language requirement has hindered the participants' success in pursuing their career goals. Right from the job descriptions that state 'Fluent/native Finnish skills' which discouraged them to apply to the jobs at all to participants being given clear rejection reasons as lack of Finnish skills.

Conclusion.

From this research, we discover how impactful the Finnish language as a job requirement is on the career paths foreign professionals pursue and how this has shaped their perception of thriving in Finland professionally. It is noted that despite Finland needing a significant increase in its workforce and acknowledging that the solution to this is in increasing the immigration of foreign labour to Finland, the country has yet to adjust its recruitment practices in the workplaces not only to aid foreign labour to thrive in their respective fields of qualifications but also to create more diverse and inclusive workplaces.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Participation Invitation

First message sent.

Dear X

I am conducting research for the thesis which is briefly about language requirements being an obstacle for foreign professionals in Finland to get jobs I was hoping I could interview you because I think your experience would really help, is this something you would be comfortable participating in?

Message after agreement to participate.

The approach I am using is narrative inquiry and it's best if the interview is in person and more like conversational and I'd have to record the interview to analyze it but it's possible to have the interview virtually too and to stay anonymous if you prefer.

Would you have sometime this week to meet up, the interview can be as long or as short as you like since it's your own experience so I'm not putting a time limit

Appendix 2. Participants' profiles

Participant	*Profile*
Maksim Minenko	Russian male aged 24 residing in Helsinki.
Aisha Hassan	Danish-Somali female aged 23 residing in Helsinki and Copenhagen
Isidora Sofronijevic	Serbian female, 28 years old, residing in Helsinki
Ben (not real name): Participant wishes to remain anonymous.	Nepalese residing in Helsinki.
Blaire Nguyen	Vietnamese residing in Helsinki.