

Integration of foreign graduates into the Finnish workforce.

What career obstacles do educated foreigners encounter and how to overcome them?

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Finland is an attractive destination for higher education and graduate employment opportunities. A great number of students from all over the world decide to get a bachelor's or master's degree from Finland and build their career in Finland. However, the statistics shows that the majority of graduates struggle to find an employment after graduation and leave the country looking for perspectives in other countries where their skills and experience seem to be more appreciated. The situation is unfavourable not only for educated foreigners, but also for Finland due to the brain drain problem when talented graduates use all the gained knowledge for the benefit of other countries. The aim of the study is to define why some educated foreigners succeed in their job search competition and start building their career in Finland while the others struggle to receive a chance to be invited for a job interview. The research question is "What career obstacles do educated foreigners encounter and how to overcome them?" The research was conducted through a qualitative study with the help of semi-structured interviews with two groups of educated foreigners (those having a master's degree from a Finnish educational institution or being currently a master's student) where the first group consisted of employed educated foreigners and the second group – unemployed educated foreigners. After analysing the data gained from the interviews and the theoretical material it became possible to define the main obstacles among international talents and suggest solutions intended to cause positive changes.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Finland is an attractive destination for immigrants moving with the purpose of working and studying. According to the Finnish Immigration Service (2022), the number of applications for residence permit on the basis of work was considerably high in 2021: 36,206 applicants compared to 15,012 applicants in 2020. The number of residence permits based on studies also increased significantly in 2021 and accounted for 6,711 applications compared to 3,299 applications in 2020. The processing time of applications based on working or studying is planned to be reduced up to one month due to the increasing number of immigrants. It demands specific changes, reforms, and system development. However, these measures are necessary for making the process of employment-based immigration to Finland easier.

According to Deutsche Welle (2021), a shortage of skilled labour is the reason for Finland's growing interest in advertising the country as a desirable destination for immigration. The Finnish government realizes the consequences of aging population that will affect Finland's economic dependency ratio. Nowadays the number of workforces over 65 years old accounts for 35% and it is expected to increase up to 47% by 2030. Therefore, the population growth in the country is highly dependent on immigrants.

The first steps for improvement were made in 2017 when Finland launched the Talent Boost Programme (Syrjälä 2021). The aim of the programme is to attract skilled international students and graduates to build their career in Finland and use their knowledge for the benefit of the country and its modernization. It is also supposed to encourage Finnish employers to hire talented foreigners.

Free education in Finland conducted in English has always attracted potential students from different countries all over the world. However, according to Finnish National Agency for Education (2018), due to the introduction of tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students in 2017, the number of applicants dramatically decreased – 37% decline among master's students at universities and 17% among bachelor's students at Universities of Applied Sciences. More than 75% of foreign students were originally from non-EU/EEA countries – Russia, Vietnam, China, Nepal and India. The new policy did not affect the

interest of applicants from EU/EEA in getting higher education in Finland in 2017. Fortunately, according to the Finnish National Agency for Education (2023), the situation positively changed in 2023 as the number of applicants has doubled comparing to the previous year and accounted for 61,800 students with more than 50,000 applicants from outside the EU/EEA.

However, according to Deutsche Welle (2021), despite the efforts of the Finnish government to increase the number of skilled immigrants through specific programmes and shortening of the period for processing applications for residence permits, the problem of distrust of foreigners and prejudice regarding their competence, followed by unwillingness to employ them, still exists in Finland. As a result, such as discrimination influences the desire of immigrants to move to Finland and contribute to its prosperity. Finnish employers often refuse to recognize foreign qualifications (diplomas and work experience) gained outside which affects the chances of non-Finnish applicants to get hired.

Khan et al. (2021) criticize the Finnish government for putting effort into attracting new immigrants while there are still talented foreigners inside of the country waiting to get employed. For instance, according to Helsingin kaupunki (2021), the unemployment rate of foreign residents in Helsinki was 17% and employment rate 58% at the end of 2019 compared to the Finnish residents' unemployment rate of 7,5% and employment rate of 78,1% among 20–64-year-olds. At the end of 2020, the number of unemployed foreigners increased and accounted for 24,7%. The situation also depends on the origin of immigrants. Swedes, Estonians, and other representatives of the Western Europe demonstrated the highest employment rate.

According to Smith (2021), statistics shows that immigrants usually earn 25% less than native Finns. For instance, the average salary in tech sector varies between Finnish nationals - 5040€, EU nationals - 4440€ and non-EU nationals - 4000€ (YLE NEWS 2021). As a result, immigrants often have to change their career path and agree for low-paid jobs where they feel being exploited or even learn a completely new profession. (Tomperi et al. 2021)

The VATT Institute of Economic research specifies that the presence of foreign labour in Finland is more beneficial than unprofitable. Therefore, Finland is promoted for international students as an attractive country with great opportunities of getting a degree and making a good career in (Villa et al 2016).c However, the chances of foreigners to get employed depend not only on their professional qualifications, but also on other factors, such as networking skills and Finnish language skills, bureaucracy, and poor knowledge of the local labour market (Tomperi et al. 2021).

1.1 Research question and research aim

According to the Nomad Today (2019), the Finnish government continues to create new programmes aiming to help talented immigrants to stay in the country after graduation and use their gained skills for the benefit of Finland and its economic growth. Finland is actively promoted as an attractive country to study and work in, establish a start-up in, take part in building technological innovations or applying knowledge to create a sustainable development. The employment of foreign graduates is also highly recommended for Finnish employers. However, educated foreigners face a great number of obstacles when trying to enter a Finnish job market.

The aim of the research is to find out what prevents educated foreigners from getting employed in Finland. The research question is: **What career obstacles do educated foreigners encounter and how to overcome them?**

The objectives of the research include interviewing two groups of educated foreigners (those having a master's degree from a Finnish University or University of Applied Sciences or being currently a master's student) and analysing their profiles to determine why some of them succeeded in landing a job in Finland and some did not. The first group of employed immigrants include the ones having a job corresponding to their qualifications; unemployed immigrants group consists of those who are either completely unemployed or those doing a job where they are overqualified.

The following sub-questions help to disclose the problem and define the direction of the research: What were the strengths and advantages of those who succeeded and got

employed? What was wrong in the behaviour of those who stayed unemployed? What actions should be taken by the society and individuals to change the situation and decrease high unemployment rates?

1.2 Delimitations

According to Helsingin kaupunki (2021), applicants coming from the European Union have better chances to find a job comparing to immigrants from other countries. Therefore, the research is limited to representatives from the countries of origin outside of the European Union. Since the number of immigrants from non-EU countries is still big, cultural aspects of any particular country of origin are not taken into consideration. Age and gender are not specified either, although both male and female representatives of different ages were interviewed.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The chapter is divided into three sections starting with the cross-cultural management describing the importance of diversity and inclusion for the benefit of companies aiming to succeed globally, as well as the differences in national culture highlighting the peculiarities of Finnish life and working culture in comparison with other cultures. The second section illustrates the Finnish labour market with the focus on the shortage of labour, discrimination of foreigners at workplaces, and language barrier as one of the most common obstacles for succeeding in landing a job in Finland. The third section is dedicated to career building peculiarities in Finland starting from the role of studying in Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences for a future career followed by the importance of networking and participating in Talent Boost programmes to increase the opportunity of getting hired.

2.1 Cross-cultural management

According to Velo (2012), nowadays, business is done differently without geographical limits due to the globalization development. Business targeted only on local market will most likely be less beneficial than the one maintained across borders. Therefore, it is essential to conceive other cultures to guarantee a successful communication and relationship. Hofstede (2011) defines “culture” as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others”. Velo (2012) states that such a collective programming or mental programming which can be characterized as a certain behaviour and attitude to life, can easily be mistreated due to stereotyping. It seems more convenient to stereotype in order to avoid possible delusion.

According to Sokolova (2022), the main idea of cross-cultural management is to solve communication and team management problems. It helps to manage employees and clients from different cultures and work together efficiently for the mutual benefit. Tomar (2019) asserts that leaders are often too focused on the results and targets when closing deals instead of stopping and thinking how to improve their business. One important factor, which is often not taken into consideration, is diversity. Employees with different

cultural backgrounds can bring much value to the company by presenting their unique ideas and approaches.

Neeley (2015) also emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural management and diversity in the success of the global economy as the combination of international and local knowledge and expertise can bring prominent results. As soon as the leader highlights that team members have a common goal to help the company succeed and each of them is an important part of it, the team becomes more cohesive despite culture differences. Emotional connection in a team between different members is also important to consider, especially if they work at the same office which helps to avoid social distance. They can always speak, interact closely with each other, and adjust to a certain common behaviour comparing to those who work geographically far away from each other.

According to Logemann (2021), remote work made it possible to broaden geographical boundaries, although before 2020 the attitude to this way of working was very skeptical. Managers did not believe in the effectiveness of distant working. However, after this forced transformation into a new working style, almost 73% of them admitted these changes resulted in success. According to the report by the Society of Human Resource Management (2019), global teams are more collaborative, productive, engaged and satisfied comparing to non-diverse teams. Nevertheless, global teams working remotely can also have some issues, such as time zone difference and assistance in legal issues.

Logemann (2021) also specifies the importance of the collaboration and involvement in multinational companies working remotely. Remote employees tend to be connected to their overseas team than to the company. It is essential to make these employees feel involved and valued and build trust. To succeed in performing this task, executives should be more present at cross-border meetings at least virtually and strengthen the communication and belongingness of employees to the company.

2.1.1 Diversity and Inclusion in Finland

According to Hunt et al. (2015), diverse workforce has a great impact on companies as their financial rate increases significantly. As it was examined by McKinsey research

‘Diversity Matters’, companies with a racial and ethnical diversity have a 35% probability of receiving higher financial returns. However, Dixon-Fyle et al. (2020) state that unfortunately even diverse companies can fail to provide their employees with equality, openness, fairness, and freedom of biases, in other words, let them feel included. According to Inclusive Employers (2023), inclusion helps people feel welcome, respected and open in expressing themselves at workplace. Dixon-Fyle et al. (2020) underlines the importance of inclusion in diverse companies if they aim to strengthen their financial performance.

Sippola (2007) asserts that diversity and inclusion policy at workplace is relatively new for Finland. Only 50% of top Finnish companies emphasized their equality policy on their website and only 21% of them used the actual term “diversity” which turned out to be one of the lowest rates among other European countries. The situation has not considerably changed since then, according to Uehigashi et al. (2022) from Boston Consulting Group, as Finland, being one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, still fails to demonstrate the willingness to apply diversity, inclusion, and equity at workplaces. Nevertheless, 95% of Finns acknowledge the importance of diversity and inclusion and its impact on a company’s success. Moreover, 65% of Finns mentioned that their companies would have much more potential with diverse teams which could bring more creativity and innovativeness.

According to Teivainen (2018), The Confederation of Finnish Industries planned to increase the number of foreign workforces up to 35,000 by 2023 to prevent skills shortage. It was also suggested to provide a wage subsidy up to 70% of companies hiring international talents as it would facilitate the integration of immigrants. However, Aalto (2021) underlines that Finland still has lack of trust to immigrants. Thus, foreign employees are not treated equally in the workplace, and they prefer relocating to other countries. The recruitment process can also be unfair due to bias connected with a foreign name. Consequently, anonymous recruiting becomes more widespread since, according to Huumonen (2021), it focuses on expertise and educational background rather than an applicant’s origin.

Finnish companies need a systematic approach to improve the diversity and inclusion policy, according to Uehigashi et al. (2022). The first step is to expound the importance of this policy and include it into the company's strategy by executing targets and governance. The second step is to expand the diversity and inclusion policy where the middle managers deploy initiatives for their employees, such as benefits, trainings, career development, work-life balance, etc. The third step is to implement the new policy into the company's culture to help employees feel that their emotional and functional needs, such as value proposition, are respected. Uehigashi et al. underline that although some big Finnish companies have already made a progress in implementing the new policy, they are still on the first step. The new policy is still evolving and needs a constant improvement.

2.1.2 Dimensions of national cultures by Geert Hofstede

Geert Hofstede conducted a large research project (the IBM study) regarding the differences in national culture of business employees. According to his cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede 2001), there are five dimensions of national culture differences: power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, long-term/short-term orientation. The sixth dimension – 'Indulgence and restraint' was discovered and determined later (Hofstede et al 2010).

Nickerson (2022) specifies that although nowadays there is a growing tendency to diversity, any country can be categorized through these dimensions defining a common behavior and habits of a particular culture. This approach, based on Hofstede's model, can be used in sociology, psychology, and international management.

Hofstede et al (2010) describe *Power Distance* as the index measuring the level of inequity in society. It aims to determine and demonstrate how this inequity and high or low hierarchy is handled by people of different cultures. The definition of large Power Distance includes high hierarchy where a less powerful person is dependent on a more powerful one and such an inequity is common, and it is accepted by the society. In this case children are taught to respect parents and obey them. It is also expected that children provide security to old parents and take care of them. The same rule applies to teachers

who are supposed to be respected and esteemed since they are considered as gurus gifting students with knowledge and wisdom. The examples of countries with a large Power Distance are Malaysia, Mexico, China, India, Russia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, etc.

Small Power Distance is characterized by low hierarchy where everyone is treated equally and respectfully regardless of their status. In this case independence of children is encouraged by parents and children are given an opportunity to take control of their life by themselves and learn by mistakes. A teacher-student relationship is based on mutual respect, where each opinion is appreciated and taken into consideration. Students are allowed and encouraged to ask questions and argue if they disagree with a teacher's point of view. The examples of countries with small Power Distance include Austria, Denmark, New Zealand, Finland, Israel, United Kingdom, etc. (Hofstede et al 2010)

Large or small Power Distance in the workplace is also differentiated by high and low hierarchy. Large Power Distance is defined by a big gap between bosses and subordinates where superiors give commands and subordinates are supposed to obey. There can be many sub-levels between the highest superior and the lowest subordinate. The difference between their salaries is colossal. The age factor also plays a significant role as older management representatives are usually respected more than younger ones. (Hofstede et al 2010)

In small Power Distance there is equity between superiors and subordinates. The hierarchical pyramid is lower with a smaller number of employees. Each person belonging to subordinates has chances to become a superior any time. The salary range difference is not as enormous as in large Power Distance. (Hofstede et al 2010)

Individualism/collectivism dimension is defined by the role of an individual ("I") and a group ("We") in the society. If the interest of the group predominates over the interest of an individual, these societies are determined as *Collectivist*. The very first group people belong to when they are born is their family. Children in such societies learn identifying themselves as "We" instead of "I". In *Individualist* society a child defines himself/herself as "I" being more independent. It is also expected that as soon as such children grow, they

learn how to stand on their own feet and may leave a family house. (Hofstede et al 2010)
Competition and personal achievements are determined as a priority (Nickerson 2021).

According to Hofstede et al (2010), the typical examples of Individualist countries are the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. However, World Population Review (2022) defined Israel as the most Individualistic country nowadays according to the US News ranks. Examples of the Collectivist countries include Pakistan, Venezuela, Indonesia, China, Turkey, Russia, Portugal, etc. (Hofstede et al 2010). Although China, Russia and Saudi Arabia used to be defined as Collectivist societies by Hofstede et al (2010), nowadays they are ranked as the most individualistic societies, according to World Population Review (2022).

Masculinity/femininity index defines what behaviour in society is interpreted as masculine or feminine. Hofstede (Hofstede et al 2010) mentions that men are historically supposed to be aggressive, competitive, and more focused on accomplishments outside their home and material success, while women are usually tender and more oriented to home and quality of life by taking care of their children and helping others.

Therefore, according to Hofstede Insights (2022), masculine society is more competition-oriented (United States, Mexico, Italy, Japan, China) and feminine society is more consensus-oriented (Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, The Netherlands). Hofstede et al (2010) also underline that masculinity index is concentrated on high earnings, social recognition and promotion; femininity index is characterized by building a good relationship at work and co-operating with one another instead of competing.

Uncertainty avoidance index demonstrates the attitude of society to uncertainty and ambiguity. Hofstede et al (2010) explain the main idea of this index on the example of the questionnaire for IBM employees (regardless of their status of superior or subordinate) where they were asked about the stress level at work, readiness to obey the company's rules no matter what and their intention to stay at the company for a long time and make a career there. These questions and answers to them show how different societies react to unpredictability and how ready or unready they are to face the future. Do they live for the day, or do they make long-term plans?

According to Hofstede et al (2010), laws and regulations are usually considered as tools helping people to avoid uncertainty. Societies with weak uncertainty avoidance tend to have informal rules and regulations. They do not overwork if it is not necessary and there is no hurry for it (Sweden, Denmark, United Kingdom, Singapore, Vietnam, Hong Kong). Cultures belonging to strong uncertainty avoidance are more used to accurate and structured regulations. They always work harder as time is money (Greece, Japan, Germany, Belgium, Argentina, Russia).

Long-term orientation versus *short-term orientation* is the fifth dimension by Hofstede where long-term oriented society (Hong Kong, Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan) is more focused on the future and modern trends encouraging persistence, development and long-term growth, while short-term oriented society (Pakistan, Nigeria, Great Britain, Canada, Germany) tends to maintain traditions and social obligations, as well as short-term goals with the main focus on past and present. (Hofstede et al 2010)

Since long-term orientation societies are more thrift and sparing, they tend to have a more pragmatic approach to marriage. Short-term orientation societies, on the contrary, prefer spending money enjoying the youth time and current relationship. When doing business, countries with a long-term orientation dimension do not expect immediate results; they would prefer taking time to establish a strong alliance and reliable relationship with new business partners and markets. Short-term oriented countries are concentrated on quick results where the achievements are shown in monthly, quarterly or yearly reports. (Hofstede et al 2010)

The last dimension described by Hofstede et al (2010) is *Indulgence* versus *restraint* which refers to a degree of a human's freedom to express natural drives and enjoyments. Is society open for having fun and enjoying life (indulgence) or does this desire for happiness have to be controlled and curbed? (restraint) The typical examples of the countries with the high degree of indulgence are Venezuela, Mexico, Nigeria, Australia, Sweden, The United States, Cyprus, etc.; countries with the high degree of restraint are China, Russia, Hong Kong, Latvia, Belarus, Pakistan, Egypt, etc. Hofstede et al (2010) compare the indulgence/restraint dimension between Philippines and Hong Kong pointing out that

poor citizens of Philippines are much happier and freer in expressing joy than rich people of Hong Kong.

Ehsanfar (2019) specifies that it is also important to be careful with concentrating on pleasure and enjoyment too much as it may become an obstacle for people to achieve long-term goals. Societies with a high degree of restraint try to adapt in life leaving their personal needs behind which may also cause problems as it can influence their attitude to work negatively.

2.1.3 Finland through Hofstede's 6-D model

In order to define what kind of life and working culture Finland has, it can be analysed through Hofstede's dimensions (see Figure 1). This model helps to compare the Finnish culture to others. (Hofstede Insights 2022)

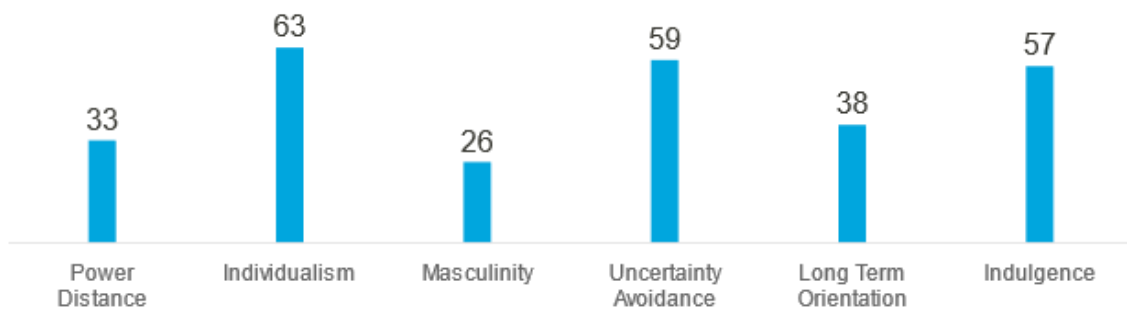


Figure 1. Finland through Hofstede's 6-D model (Hofstede Insights 2022)

According to Hofstede Insights (2022), the Power Distance score for Finland is 33 which is rather low. It shows the close relationship and small emotional distance between employees and superiors in decision making as the opinion of subordinates is listened and taken into consideration by superiors (Hofstede et al 2010). Employees are rather independent than controlled by bosses. The hierarchy is low, and managers are approached by their first names. (Hofstede Insights 2022)

The Finnish score for Individualism is 63 meaning that Finns are individualistic and identify themselves as "I" (Hofstede Insights 2022). Each person is rather characterized by

their individual characteristics than in terms of a group and takes responsibility for his/her own actions. According to Hofstede et al (2010), such people appreciate freedom and personal time for leisure activities. They also prefer a challenging work where their own accomplishments can be noticed.

Masculinity score is relatively small – 26 which means that Finland is rather a feminine society with such values as equity, solidarity, and modesty, as well as concern with the quality of life. Negotiations play an important role in resolving conflicts. (Hofstede Insights 2022) The work goals of such a society include cooperation and good relations with superiors resulting in employment security (Hofstede et al 2010).

Finland is the country preferring to avoid vagueness, according to its high Uncertainty avoidance score of 59 (Hofstede Insights 2022). These societies need a particular law, rules, technologies, or religion to feel safe and avoid ambiguity. Accuracy and punctuality are also important for them. According to Hofstede et al (2010), ambiguity arouses fear and anxiety which may cause an excessive consumption of alcohol.

Due to the low score (38) of Long-term orientation, Finland can be considered as a non-innovative culture with respect for traditions and stability; the focus is rather made on achieving quick results than building up long-term goals (Hofstede Insights 2022). Hofstede et al (2010) underline, that societies with a low score for Long-term orientation value leisure and free time as soon as the goal is achieved.

Finnish Indulgence score of 57 signifies the lack of control over desires and impulses and preference for enjoying life and spending energy and money for leisure and delight (Hofstede Insights 2022). Happiness and optimism with the focus on positive emotions, freedom of speech and care for human rights are typical characteristics of indulgent countries.

2.2 Finnish labour market

As stated by Finnish Government (2023), Finland has the lowest employment rate among Nordic countries. It is planned to increase it from the current 72,4% to 75%. The goals seem to be difficult to accomplish due to the current unfavourable situation with the

economy, aging population in Finland and low birth rate. The government intends to solve the problem and change the situation with the labour market by putting effective measures into action, such as:

- making employment services more efficient taking into consideration individual needs of job seekers
- amending unemployment benefits by promoting short-term employment, facilitating job searching process with the help of a personal plan and introducing sanctions
- increasing pay subsidy in the third sector and private sector for aging and long-term job seekers and simplifying the procedure for potential employers
- providing young people under 25 years old and graduates under 30 years old with internships, workshops, and work trials
- supporting people with part-time work capacity through coaches and social enterprises

The other objectives of the government include improving the situation with gender equality in Finland by promoting equal pay and transparency between men and women, preventing discrimination based on pregnancy and reforming the family leave policy by treating mothers and fathers equally and prolonging earnings-related leaves. Another significant goal is to strengthen stability and trust in the labour market. It is planned to be accomplished through introducing the new reform and giving employees more information about their rights, supporting small enterprises, improving work-life balance flexibility, supervising labour protection and opposing grey economy, promoting work-based immigration and integration of a foreign workforce. (Finnish Government 2023)

2.2.1 Shortage of labour and aging population in Finland

According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2022), the total number of unemployed job seekers in Finland decreased by 14,900 comparing to the previous year and accounted for 260,400. The number of unemployed immigrants increased by 4,900 and accounted for 37,100 citizens in total. The situation with long-term unemployment (those who have been unemployed for more than a year) positively

changed as the number of long-term job seekers decreased by 21,100 citizens, 86,200 in total comparing to the previous year.

However, despite the positive changes in the unemployment rates (taking into consideration the total number of both Finnish and foreign citizens), labour shortage rates continue to grow. The health and social services (nurses, teachers, early childhood education specialists, dentists, psychologists, etc.) are among the sectors with the highest possibility of being hit by the labour shortage in the nearest future. Restaurant and catering services are in big risk as well. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2022) According to Deutsche Welle (2021), Finnish government, realizing the consequences of aging population affecting the country's economic dependency ratio, actively started advertising the country as a desirable destination for immigration. Nowadays the number of workforces over 65 years old accounts for 35% and it is expected to increase up to 47% by 2030. Therefore, the population growth in Finland is highly dependent on immigrants.

According to Trade Union JHL (2022), they are looking for a solution of the labour shortage problem by conducting a research project aiming to change working life. The project is also financed by other unions. JHL suggests solving the problem by increasing the birth and employment rate, as well as immigration. In compliance with their survey, the attitude of Finns towards labour immigration changed positively and 67% of respondents (out of 1000 respondents in total) admitted the necessity of it comparing to the previous rate of 52% from last year. (JHL 2022)

Finnish population is one of the oldest in Europe and the problem of its aging society has been frequently discussed in the country. The number of 65-year-old citizens is forecasted to increase from 22% to 26% by 2030. As a result, there is a threat that the number of aging people will exceed the number working-aged people in the future, according to Finnish institute for health and welfare (2023). Johnson (2019) forecasts the fall in the working-age citizens by 200,000 by 2050.

According to Valkama and Oulasvirta (2021), small towns are not attractive for people anymore and the majority prefers relocating to bigger cities which also causes problems to welfare system. The birth rate has also dramatically decreased in Finland. The fertility

rate is the smallest in Europe with 1.4 children per woman with the population growth caused only by foreign population (Cochaud-Kaminski 2022).

The lack of manpower in Helsinki makes it challenging for local employers to find suitable professionals. Therefore, the government tries to implement different programmes to attract foreign specialists and entrepreneurs. (Cochaud-Kaminski 2022) In accordance with the calculations of Etila Economic Research Institute, Finland needs 44,000 immigrants to regulate the situation with the lack of labour force and, as a result, to make a positive impact on the Finnish economy. The Finns Party appeals to attract the immigrants that are already based in Finland since the majority of them are well-educated and can bring much value. However, the idea of labour immigration was criticized due to the concerns that it will cause more harm than value to the Finnish economy. (YLE NEWS 2023)

2.2.2 Discrimination of immigrants in working life

Mannila (2021) states that according to the study by Tampere University in 2018, Finland is classified as the country with the highest work discrimination rate. The most popular reasons of discrimination are age, gender, or both simultaneously. The study showed men had a clear advantage over women. According to the review of integration in 2019, only 57% of foreign men and 49% of foreign women were employed in 2017. Only 30% of immigrants had a job corresponding to their educational background. Such regions as Lapland, Kainuu, South Savo, Central Finland and North Karelia and Åland demonstrated the lowest rates of employment of foreign talents. However, English-speaking foreigners had a clear advantage over Asian and African representatives. Nevertheless, both groups loose considerably in comparison with Finns who had high employment rates among OECD countries.

According to the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the number of unemployed foreigners in Finland was rated as 28,6% while the unemployment rate of the entire population accounted for 7,9%. It demonstrates that immigrants have considerably higher chances of staying unemployed compared to Finns. The results of the study (See Figure 2) conducted by Jasinskaya-Lahti, Liebkind and Vesala (2002) with more than 3500

participants from the largest immigrant groups in Finland (Russians, Estonians, Somalis, Arabs, Vietnamese, Albanians and Ingrian Finns) showed that 50% of the respondents experienced discrimination in the recruitment process. Somalis (81%) and Arabs (64%) experienced discrimination more frequently than people with European names; Estonians, for instance, had lowest discrimination rates comparing to all other foreigners – 35%. (Larja et al. 2012)

	All groups				Russians				Estonians				Ingrian Finns			
	1997		2001		1997		2001		1997		2001		1997		2001	
Context	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Recruitment	46	403	50	1350	45	88	51	193	40	68	35	205	34	44	46	259
Advancement	25	180	24	573	17	22	27	79	18	29	20	108	20	18	18	88
Termination	9	63	6	173	5	6	4	13	6	10	5	6	10	9	3	17
Bullying	33	239	31	800	26	33	30	106	22	34	27	159	33	31	29	155

	Somalis				Vietnamese				Arabs				Turks		Albanians	
	1997		2001		1997		2001		1997		2001		1997		2001	
Context	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Recruitment	44	30	81	155	41	36	49	180	66	73	64	221	56	63	48	137
Advancement	27	14	41	69	28	24	18	59	40	39	37	103	33	34	26	68
Termination	12	5	21	35	1	1	5	18	11	17	14	42	14	15	10	24
Bullying	23	11	43	78	28	26	27	95	48	48	44	129	53	56	31	76

Adapted from Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind and Vesala (2002) and Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind (1997).

Figure 2. Immigrants who perceived discrimination at work due to their foreign origin (Larja et al. 2012, Ministry of Employment and the Economy)

Another study conducted by Akhlaq Ahmad in 2016-2017 revealed that applicants with a Finnish name received 390 invitations for a job interview out of 1000 applications in total, while the Iraqis received only 134 invitations and Somalis 99 invitations (YLE NEWS 2019). Candidates with an English and Russian name had an advantage since their discrimination rate was 28% and 38%, while applicants with an Iraqi and Somali name had a considerably higher discrimination rate of 62% and 72% (Ahmad 2020) According to YLE NEWS (2021) changing the original surname into a Finnish sounding one significantly increases the chances of being invited for an interview and getting hired.

In addition to being discriminated when looking for a job in Finland, immigrants face another problem – pay inequality as they earn 25% less comparing to native Finns.

According to Smith (2021) and the interviews conducted by Helsinki Times, Finnish employees had better chances of being promoted and receiving a higher salary comparing to immigrants doing the same amount of work. The problem of being underpaid is often connected with the fact that immigrants are not always fully aware of their rights which causes them being exploited. The reason of their accepting unattractive job offers with a low salary is also based on the long and unsuccessful job-searching process due to which immigrants prefer working and being underpaid instead of staying completely unemployed. Many educated foreigners have to do unpaid internships or agree to earn less in their field of interest comparing to Finns (Khan et al 2021). According to Mauri (2019), most student migrants work as cleaners, dishwashers, or newspaper deliverers; those who got a chance to be employed by a start-up were either underpaid or completely unpaid.

According to Daily Finland (2022) and E2 Tutkimus research, 51% of the respondents moving to Finland due to marriage or relationship had to think about switching their career since their education and working experience were unvalued in Finland. Laura Linderman, Senior Director and Head of Work of Business Finland's Work in Finland, specifies that changing a career path in order to increase chances of landing a job can be considered as a waste of skills that foreign talents could utilize for the benefit of Finnish companies. Bontenbal et al. (2019) underline the conflicting views regarding recognition of previous qualification and skills of immigrants. On the one hand, Finnish employers refuse to acknowledge the qualifications of migrants gained from abroad. On the other hand, the Finnish government emphasizes the value and uniqueness of these skills and their potential benefit for the Finnish economy.

2.2.3 Language barrier

Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) (Pratchett 2021) conducted a survey determining the opportunities for foreign talents to live in Finland and build their career there. According to the results, safety of living and high-quality education appeared to be attractive for immigrants. However, strict requirements regarding fluency of the Finnish language proved to be one of the biggest obstacles preventing international talents from entering the Finnish labour market. Miriam Holsten, chair of EK's International Business

Club, states, that it is in the hands of Finnish employers to reconsider the Finnish language requirements since such a high language proficiency is not necessary in all work tasks.

According to Kantola (2021), international students studying in Finland specify that Finnish employers set unrealistic requirements expecting that foreigners are supposed to have native-level proficiency in Finnish while for Finns it is usually enough to have only intermediate level of English. Even when a company declares itself as diverse and inclusive, coffee breaks are usually held in Finnish and foreign employees are left outside. However, Pratchett (2021) states that it is not necessary to take radical measures and change the company language completely into English, while it is recommended at least to conduct meetings in English and let foreign employees participate in discussions.

Valkama & Pantzar (2021) assert that the unwillingness of Finnish employers to hire international employees can be accounted for by the lack of English language skills that these Finnish employers possess. It is typical for those organizations where the official languages have always been Finnish and Swedish, and they are not used to speaking English at work. Approximately 40% of Finnish companies have either no capacity or desire to hire international talents. It causes labour shortage as the number of candidates is narrowed down to only those who speak Finnish fluently. According to YLE NEWS (2019), a foreign name can also become a big obstacle and prevent a potential candidate from being invited for an interview even having an excellent proficiency in Finnish. Härmä and Teivanen (2015) underline that Finnish employers pay attention to foreign candidates when struggling to find a suitable Finnish-speaking specialist.

Another problem with the language is the absence of appropriate Finnish-language courses. The level of such courses provided and recommended by the Unemployment office is not usually enough for Finnish employers. As a result, foreign job seekers are often forced to do cleaning jobs where they are overqualified or encouraged to start their own business. However, even being an entrepreneur can still be challenging due to the lack of language skills as all the necessary official information for entrepreneur is also provided in Finnish. (YLE NEWS 2021)

Although the mayor of Helsinki aimed to name Helsinki an English-speaking city encouraging talented foreigners to build their career in Finland, more than 36% of foreign students leave the country due to the language difficulties and as a result, impossibility of landing a job. He also specified that the problem was to be discussed and solved at the national level, not only in Helsinki. (Henley, 2021)

2.3 Career-building in Finland

Looking for a job in Finland is considered challenging for immigrants, especially regarding jobs they aspire to (Habti & Koikkalainen 2013 pp.75-76). Recognition of the qualifications and diplomas obtained abroad is also a long and complicated process. (YLE NEWS 2019). However, Korpela & Cord (2021) maintain that Finland needs foreign workers and has a lot of opportunities for career development to offer them since nowadays Finnish companies try to expand globally instead of focusing on the limited domestic market. Technology sector in particular is in greatest demand for foreign specialists.

The results of the research regarding integration of immigrants into the working life in Finland conducted by Pehkonen (2006) showed that the Employment office was the first place where they could learn more about job vacancies in Finland, as well as language courses or training programmes. However, the interviewees underlined that apart from the information about vacancies, no other help or assistance (for instance, contacting potential employers and promoting immigrants to them, thereby providing foreigners with some recommendation letters) were received. This form of support from the authorities was considered important as it could increase the chances of getting employed since being referenced by a Finnish person resulted in landing the first jobs for some of the interviewees.

According to Ali Najafi, BBA graduate interviewed by Laurea University of Applied Sciences (2019) recommends attending CV workshops, networking events, updating and polishing LinkedIn profile as importance steps for increasing the chances of getting hired. Najafi also mentioned the importance of highlighting strengths and accomplishments on job interviews and fairs as they might cover and outshine the lack of Finnish language skills if language is the main reason of getting rejected.

2.3.1 Studying in Finland

According to the data of the Finnish National Agency for Education (2018), the introduction of tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students in 2017 caused dramatical changes as the number of applicants considerably decreased – 37% decline among master’s students at universities and 17% among bachelor’s students at Universities of Applied Sciences. The majority of foreign students (more than 75%) were originally from non-EU/EEA countries – Russia, Vietnam, China, Nepal and India. Despite the new policy, Finland was an attractive destination for getting a higher education for applicants from EU/EEA in 2017. The number of international students interested in studying in Finland increased in 2018 - 628 students from EU/EEA and 1725 students from other countries. However, the level of interest of foreign students outside of the EU/EEA was still lower comparing to 2016 (2276 students), but higher comparing to 2017 with 1665 students.

The situation positively changed in 2023 as the number of applicants (mostly other nationalities than Finns who counted 14% from the total number) in Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences has doubled comparing to the previous year and accounted for 61,800 students with more than 50,000 applicants from outside the EU/EEA. The majority of students came from Bangladesh and Nigeria. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2023)

The Ministry of Education and Culture (2016) prepared a strategy for advertising internationalization in higher education sector in Finland. The aim was to research the current situation in the sector and improve it by making Finnish education institutions more attractive in Europe and worldwide. It was planned to achieve the goal by 2025 and secure the frontrunner position for Finland. According to the new policies “Better together for a better world” by Ministry of Education and Culture (2016), Finland is expected to become an open and international country, ready for experiments and interesting researchers inspiring other countries for cooperation networks and becoming an attractive investment location. The process of moving to Finland for studying and working is also planned to be simplified.

According to Deutsche Welle (2021), despite the efforts of the Finnish government to increase the number of skilled immigrants due to demographic problem and a skilled labour shortage by launching specific programmes and shortening the period of processing applications for residence permits, the problem of discrimination of foreigners in Finland might cause obstacles and unwillingness to come to the country and contribute to its prosperity. According to YLE NEWS (2019), although approximately 3000 foreign students come to Finland for studying, the majority of them (approximately 2000) leave the country after graduation due to the difficulties in the job search process.

2.3.2 Networking

Jinia et al. (2021) underline that it is essential for immigrants to expand social and professional networks as it can help them to learn about job opportunities, especially the ones that are not advertised. According to YLE NEWS (2019), 85% of jobs in Finland are hidden. Anne Badan, the founder and CEO of the Shortcut, draws attention to the disadvantage of foreigners comparing to locals due to the lack of good networking base. Hiring managers prefer looking for candidates among friends and networks which makes it more difficult for foreigners to be taken into consideration in a job search process. Badan also emphasizes that if Finnish companies continue doing business with small group of people they know, Finland will have less opportunity for growth since businesses with diverse teams in 33% of cases become more successful than competitors consisting of locals only.

According to Khan et al. (2021), building networks within other migrants is not as effective in job search as with Finns who have useful labour market related connections. However, Habti & Koikkalainen (2013 p.49) specify that immigrants find it difficult to make friends with Finnish people as Finland is not open to foreigners and most Finns already have a close circle of friends that they do not wish to broaden. Jinia et al. (2021) also maintain that Finnish people are not considered very interactive. Nevertheless, professional networking is reputed easier to build due to a low hierarchy at workplaces comparing to social networking. Language barrier is also mentioned as one of the main obstacles to succeed in networking.

Peter Kelly, senior lecturer at Aalto University, finds it essential for universities to support international students in the networking process. Kelly underlines a common mistake of foreign students in building networks too late postponing it until the actual job searching process. It is also recommended to universities to advertise and expose foreign students especially to small companies since global companies are usually more open in welcoming foreign workforce and creating internships. (Bogdan 2021)

Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (2022) recommends LinkedIn as a good source to build networks. It is common in Finland to send a connection request after getting acquainted at some event. It is also possible to approach completely unknown people. However, in this case it is recommended to write a short message explaining what this connection is intended for instead of sending a connection request with an embedded text. Participating at job fairs, as well as volunteering are also considered important to succeed in landing a job. Another way to improve chances of being hired is finding a mentor who can provide give useful advice regarding a job searching process and career development.

2.3.3 Introducing talent boost programmes

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2021) emphasizes that immigrants are important for Finland as their special skills can be useful in promoting Finnish innovations and attracting international investments into the country. In addition to attracting new talented foreigners, it is also necessary to help immigrants already living in Finland and prevent brain-drain. The solution was suggested by the Government of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä in 2017 launching the Talent Boost Programme aimed for international specialists living in Finland or interested in moving to Finland who would make a positive impact on the growth of Finnish companies and Finnish economy. According to Syrjälä (2021), Talent Boost Programme was launched to attract skilled international students and graduates to build their career in Finland and use their knowledge for the benefit of the country and its modernization. It is also supposed to encourage Finnish employers to hire talented foreigners and improve the internationalization in the country.

According to Marja-Leena Laakso, Vice Rector of the University of Jyväskylä, Finnish stability and safety attract foreign-born graduates to build their career in Finland.

However, it seems to be easier to get a study place in Finland than to find a workplace after graduation since the opportunities of foreigners for employment are lower comparing to native Finns. Therefore, Talent Boost programme was aimed to increase the chances of immigrants landing a job in Finland. (Syrjälä 2021)

The necessity of attracting skilled immigrants and helping them to build their career in Finland was also discussed by the City of Espoo. Therefore, it was decided to open a new Competence Centre for Highly Educated Immigrants in Espoo in March 2021. According to Teemu Haapalehto, Manager of Immigration Affairs of Espoo, highly educated foreigners often face with difficulties in finding a suitable workplace matching their skills and competence. The new centre aims to provide different free services, such as networking, recruitment services for foreign talents, as well as business services for potential employers. (City of Espoo 2021) Similar Talent Boost activities were promoted and opened in other cities and regions as well (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2021).

Khan et al. (2021) criticize the government and emphasize the importance of taking into consideration foreigners already living in Finland instead of focusing on attracting new immigrants. The “90 Day Finn” programme was launched in November 2020 by Helsinki Business Hub aiming to attract tech professional from the United States and advertising Finland as the best country in the world in terms of work-life balance, education, public services, etc. The programme included a relocation package for entrants and their families for 90 days. All the necessary documents, such as housing, schools and healthcare were provided to the participants. (Helsinki Partners 2020) According to Business Helsinki (2022), the choice of applicants is not limited by the professionals from the United States; it also includes participants from different countries, such as Hong Kong, South Africa, etc. Some of the participants decided to stay in Finland permanently and some of them invested in the Finnish circular economy. Khan et al. find it paradoxical that the talents of highly educated foreigners living in Finland are wasted as they stay unemployed or underemployed (19,4% unemployment rate among foreign-based population).

In addition to the Talent Boost Programme and the “90 day Finn” programme, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2022) also promotes and organizes

Talent Boost Summit – a national event supporting international recruitment, diversity at workplaces and Finland’s attractiveness. The event is aimed for companies, organizations, stakeholders, and international talents providing a good opportunity to network and learn about different services for international recruitment.

3 METHODOLOGY

The current chapter includes the description of the research type, method, strategy, as well as data collection and analysis, along with the reasoning for the approach in the thesis.

3.1 Research type

The problem presented in the current research is wide and it is not only connected with business, but also with sociology and psychology. The initial research question demanded some additional questions to reach the root of the problem and find the reason why educated foreigners stay unemployed and how to help them overcome these difficulties.

Having taken the above-mentioned factors into consideration, a qualitative research approach was chosen. Although Hancock et al. (2009) maintain that qualitative research is not applicable for a larger population, it seemed to be more suitable and relevant as it covers a human behavior, psychology and cultural aspects which cannot only be measured by numbers and short answers. In case of the current research topic, it would be difficult to receive a complete picture of the problem using only short and laconic answers since, according to Gioia et al. (2012), qualitative method provides more space in interpreting.

When choosing a qualitative research type, there is a good opportunity to receive detailed answers, hear intonations and watch emotions. All these factors are important to gain a better understanding of what the interviewees were faced with during their job search process, how they analysed their own mistakes and what kind of advice they could give to fresh graduates and job seekers to avoid the situations when educated immigrants stay unemployed for a long time.

3.2 Research method

Qualitative research is often used for analysing social problems and helps to answer “why” questions which is also relevant for the current research topic. According to Zainal

(2007), these types of questions are also applicable for a case study approach which was chosen for the current thesis topic. It is used in analysing behavioural problems, such as unemployment and helps to explore a real-life phenomenon focusing on a small group or a particular geographical area. Since the focus of the current research was made on educated foreigners (already employed and still unemployed) living in Finland, case study corresponded to the above-mentioned criteria as the chosen method.

3.3 Data gathering

Interviewees were educated foreigners who either possessed a master's degree from Finland or who still studied for their master's degree. They were divided into two groups. The first group included foreigners who succeeded in their job search process and started building a prominent career in Finland. The participants shared their stories describing which steps they took and what they changed in their tactics to finally become employed. The second group consisted of foreigners living in Finland and struggling in their attempts to get hired. They were asked questions regarding their opportunities of getting employed in Finland, possible obstacles on their way to success, factors to consider when applying for a job and possible reasons of their being rejected by potential employers.

Representatives of the first group had a full-time job either closely connected with their master's degree from Finland or at least the job corresponding to their background and qualifications in general. If an interviewee had a short-time project, internship, a part-time job or a full-time job, but low-paid and below their qualifications, this person was considered to belong to the second group of unemployed foreigners as he/she was not satisfied with their current job due to being overqualified there. These educated foreigners continued looking for a suitable and stable job where they could use all their gained knowledge (through master's studies, as well as previous studies and work experience) and their full potential.

All the interviews were conducted in English in October-November. The total number of interviewees is 12, where six persons belonged to the first group of employed foreigners and the other six belonged to the second group of unemployed foreigners. There were

both male and female representatives from the following countries: Bangladesh, India, Iraq, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, and Vietnam (Table 1).

Employed educated foreigners		Unemployed educated foreigners	
Interviewee	Country of origin	Inter-viewee	Country of origin
#1	Nicaragua	#7	Nepal
#2	Russia	#8	Vietnam
#3	Vietnam	#9	Iraq
#4	Nepal	#10	Bangladesh
#5	Vietnam	#11	India
#6	Pakistan	#12	India

Table 1. Interview participants

Four interviews were conducted face-to-face with the help of audio recorder, while the other eight were held through a video conversation using Microsoft Teams. All the interviewees were given both options to choose from according to their preferences. The interviewees were also informed about the anonymity of the interview and about the fact that all their answers would only be used for the current research and not for any other purposes.

The time spent for each interview varied from 20 to 50 minutes (excluding the time for greeting, small talk and farewell speech) depending on how detailed the answers of the participants were and how many additional questions had to be asked to learn more about some interesting points. The questions were not sent to the interviewees in advance. However, they were informed about the topic of the current research and the interview, i.e., the difficulties of educated foreigners in building a career in Finland.

There were some issues in collecting the data or, to be more precise, in finding the right candidates who would agree to share their positive or negative experience. Most of the participants had a willingness to be interviewed and to help to answer the research question as they felt their belonging to the issue. Some potential candidates were suspicious

and concerned since they were afraid that this interview could influence their reputation in a negative way either at the current workplace or at a future potential workplace.

Some of the potential candidates were found on LinkedIn through the “Open to work” tag next to their profile picture to match with the second group of unemployed foreigners. The candidates for the first group of employed foreigners were also found on LinkedIn through the title on their profile where it was mentioned they had a master’s degree from Finland or through scrolling down to the information about their education and current job. Those interviewees who belonged to the close circle of the interviewer (friends, acquaintances, and former/current classmates) were easier to approach and ask to participate in the current research. The completely unknown persons who had been contacted through LinkedIn were more difficult to approach. They either completely ignored the messages of the interviewer or found excuses not to participate for different reasons.

The questions varied for employed and unemployed candidates. However, similar questions were also presented, such as asking about the country of origin, the background information, steps that were taken to find a job, prejudice towards foreigners at a job interview, ability to stand out and show all your potential at a job interview, and advice that they could give to other job seekers based on their own positive or negative experience.

3.4 Data analysis

Since the main problem presented in the research relates to the difficulties of educated foreigners in making a career in Finland, an inductive method was chosen as a suitable method to explore what could be possible reasons for that, what kind of obstacles these foreigners might be faced with and what are the potential ways of improving the situation. According to Soiferman (2010), when using an inductive approach, it starts with an observation of a particular phenomenon and turns into more general themes and patterns. As a result, with the help of specific data observations, preliminary propositions can be investigated, and general conclusions can be drawn.

Gioia et al. (2012) suggested the approach aiming to see the transformation from raw data to emergent theory. Consequently, Gioia Method was selected as the suitable method to

analyze the gathered data since it was applicable for the current qualitative research. According to this method, the data is categorized into a 1-st order analysis with informant centric terms and codes and 2-nd order analysis with researcher-centric concepts, themes, and dimensions. Therefore, it becomes possible to display a connection between data and the applied concept.

According to Gioia et al. 2012, there is a concern regarding the qualitative method connected with the willingness of informants to provide the genuine information or information that would be useful and valuable for the research. Even the fact that the informant would stay anonymous might still prevent a person from being open enough in his/her statements. This concern was proved during the data collection process for the current research as some interviewees felt hesitant to present some information openly being afraid that it could be exposed, although they were assured of the anonymity.

During the 1st order analysis, the information was collected from the interviews by choosing interesting and specific points and statements that could further be used for the 2nd order analysis. Initially, the specific points and key words were selected separately from the answers of each group – employed and unemployed foreigners. Then, when many repetitions were found, these common key aspects from both groups were united into one big group of the main 1st order codes. During the 2nd order analysis connections, similarities and differences were determined and the received categories were labeled; it was necessary to define which aspects would be helpful to answer the main research question starting from those specific points and moving to the more general propositions. Then these 2nd order themes turned into aggregate dimensions. At this stage the data was connected with the theoretical information. Therefore, a grounded theory model was built, and it became possible to see the dynamics between explaining the phenomenon and connecting it with the theory. As a result, the important concepts were represented, and the dynamics became more transparent (Figure 3).

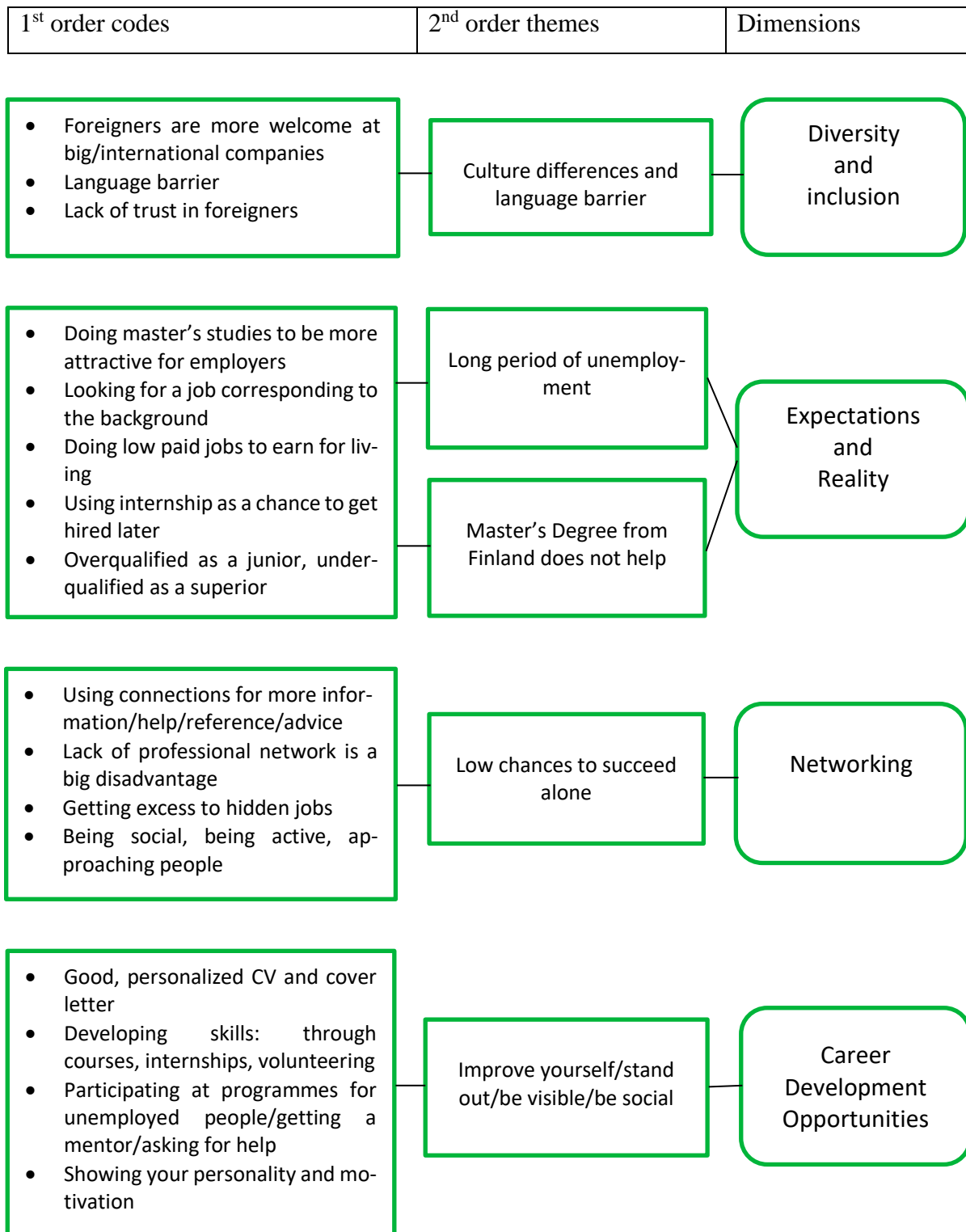


Figure 3. The process of coding the gathered data into dimensions.

4 FINDINGS

In this chapter, the four dimensions, that were determined through data analysis, are presented – Diversity and Inclusion, Expectations and Reality, Networking, Career Development Opportunities. Direct quotations are used for demonstrating that most of the interviewees pointed out these topics as very significant ones on the way of foreigners to succeed in getting a job. Looking at the final four dimensions, it can be noticed that there are two main problems arising which can be further analysed as the possible obstacles – attitude of society to foreigners leading to the question ‘What can society do to prevent these obstacles?’ and the attitude of individuals (educated foreigners) to the job searching process and their own effort that could improve their chances leading to the question ‘What can individuals do to prevent these obstacles?’.

The emotions of the interviewees have also been examined during the interview process. Representatives of the employed group looked very positive, carefree, and relaxed, although all of them had to overcome various difficulties on the way to receiving their job. The tone of the voice of theirs was very calm and confident. All of them were satisfied with their workplaces, duties and responsibilities and enjoyed working. Educated foreigners from the unemployed group, on the contrary, looked sad, disappointed, and tired of the endless useless attempts to prove their capabilities and find a job. A note of hopelessness and desperation could be heard in the tone of their voice. Nevertheless, all of them persisted in looking for new opportunities.

4.1 Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and Inclusion was presented as one of the final dimensions since the majority of the interviewees from the ‘Unemployed foreigners’ group mentioned about their preferring to apply for big global companies or international ones (even small companies, but with foreign employees). They believe they would have more chances to be hired there as such companies with foreign employees are usually more loyal to immigrants, they are more concerned about knowledge than nationality and appreciate the value that foreigners may bring with their unique way of thinking that could be interesting and beneficial for the company.

“Initially I was only targeting big companies. Because I thought big companies will have better tolerance towards immigrants. In smaller companies there is always a risk if too many people are from the same country, then it becomes difficult as language is a big barrier. So, for smaller companies I would always check if the workforce on LinkedIn looks more international or they have a clearly visible inclusive culture”. (#12)

“I have realized that most of the jobs I applied for are from big international companies that have offices and premises in different countries. So, they already have an international team, and the language would not be too essential for the work you are doing. I also realized that IT and software companies that work in SaaS field are most willing to accept international employees” (#8)

The interviewees from the “Employed foreigners” group answering the question about the size of the company they work at, and the number of foreign employees there, also pointed out that they had a considerable diversity among their colleagues coming from different countries. Therefore, they also felt very welcome and included there. The companies they work at are also big and famous which explains the willingness of unemployed immigrants to choose such companies instead of small Finnish ones with only Finns working there.

*“In Finland *** has the biggest number of foreign employees, even in my team I have some. I have seen a lot of people from India, China, from all over the world. So, I think *** is pretty international” (#4)*

“My role is a global recruiter. I am hiring people globally from all parts of the world from Africa, Asia, Europe, America, Latina America, the UK” (#6)

Culture differences were also emphasized as a probable reason why Finnish employers would prefer hiring a Finn instead of a foreigner. They do not always know what to expect from a foreign employee and how well he/she will perform at work. Finnish employers are not sure if the degrees and diplomas a foreigner has, are authentic. Therefore, these employers or hiring managers might feel suspicious and have some prejudice toward people with a foreign background.

“It's very also easy to trust a Finn when I'm hiring someone. If they have said something in the CV, it means that it's true and they are not making a CV just to kind of get the job and they have no actual experience which happens a lot for foreigners. A lot of people just put something on their CV just for the sake of getting the job, but they have no experience in that. That is quite known in the professional world that foreigners kind of lie on

their CVs [...] So, then the impression is bad. Finland is a very small country. People discuss, they talk to their friends, they talk to other people about what's happening, how foreigners are there, so then foreigners end up making a very bad impression and ruining their credibility” (#11)

“The term ‘overqualified’ is a tricky term. It’s often used by people who don’t want to hire a foreign person living in Finland. The term ‘overqualified’ will be the escape or the excuse for most of the places to reject me. This is a polite way to say you are not preferred to be engaged with as a person with a foreign background. In my opinion, there are two categories to identify this problem: there are limitations and obstacles. Limitations are related to language, for example. This is a limitation which can be overcome if I develop my Finnish language. But the obstacle is the most important issue. Obstacles are related to people's attitude or tendency to not be willing to engage with people from foreign countries. It’s much related to the issue of trust, experiences. We don’t know you; we don’t know your background. You said you worked in these places. We recognize those qualifications, but we cannot take a risk” (#9)

As it was mentioned above in the example of Interviewee #9, language barrier is also a considerable problem, and it is probably one of the most common reasons for foreigners to be rejected. Most of the interviewees pointed out that they preferred skipping job offers requiring fluent Finnish. Most of the interviewees referred to the job descriptions in English that required Finnish. It felt very confusing and disappointing for them. In some cases, even changing the career path completely was considered as a necessary option since learning to speak Finnish fluently as a native seemed to be much more challenging than starting from scratch and mastering a new profession.

“I think that my language skill was not so good as compared to 2017 because now I think it's one of the skills that I have developed during these years - learning a little bit Finnish until a certain level like Level 3 or something. So, I definitely look for jobs which specifically say that the level of Finnish required is this much, so I usually read in the job description if they have some kind of compulsory language requirement if the job applicant has to be a native Finn or not” (#7)

“And the other reason which I feel like as an excuse for me is a language barrier, because maybe a couple of job descriptions were in Finnish, but mostly it was in English and I applied for it in English, but then there were some surprises, like in the beginning the description was in English and then below when you reached the line of the skills that we need you to have, we would like you to have fluent English and Finnish” (#1)

“I thought to myself that I only had two options here – either I start to learn Finnish to get better jobs in my field (in hospitality) or I need to find a new path for my future. So, I did research to find out what were the most needed jobs, a field that does not require a local language too much. So, that’s how I chose my master’s degree” (#8)

4.2 Expectations and Reality

Interviewees from both groups came to Finland for varied reasons – studying, moving to the country because of their partner, moving as a refugee, looking for new opportunities in life, etc. Some of them had particular expectations and they chose the country of destination carefully. They had rather clear goals what they would wish to achieve here, while the others chose the destination randomly or they had to come to Finland due to a working contract of their partner and hoped they would find themselves and their path in this country as well.

“I applied not even thinking what was going to happen in the future. We just applied with some of my friends thinking: ‘Let’s explore something.’ When I moved here, I started thinking career wise” (#10)

“Before I came to Finland and made my decision to seek for a refugee, I did some research about the country, the overall situation, population, job opportunities, etc. And I had some reasonable information or knowledge about the situation in Finland, that Finland is not a big diverse country like Germany, The Netherlands or whatsoever [...] About the job search, I knew it might be limited to some sort, but I did not expect that it is that kind of limited. I still believed that there are lots of available places to people who cannot speak Finnish well. But the reality comes as an opposite to what I thought previously” (#9)

Most of the interviewees from both groups mentioned that they had to do low-paid jobs before they found something corresponding to their skills and knowledge. They had to do it to support themselves financially and get a working residence permit that would give them time to look for a better job matching their profile and career goals.

“I was working at a food packaging company. Even though it was a management position, I think that anyone can do this job without studying and having any qualifications, without any degrees. That time it was fine, but not at the moment, because I want to do something related to my field” (#10)

“I did quite a lot of jobs in a restaurant field. I was working at some restaurant for three years. Before I applied for a master's degree, I took time off for about a year during Covid and now I am working again part-time for another restaurant. So, basically, I am doing shift jobs and I did a bit of management there” (#8)

Some of interviewees had a bachelor's degree from Finland and they wanted to continue their studying path. Some of them decided to get a master's degree from Finland hoping that it would be more relevant and trustworthy here and they would have better chances

to land a job. They tried searching for a job with those qualifications they had already had, but it became clear for them later that a local degree would increase their chances and make them more attractive in the eyes of local employers.

“I thought a local education would be more credible, if not from my home country. I had a master's degree from Europe already – from Germany and Spain, but since I was not getting job opportunities, I started with this Master's” (#12)

“I guess, the major reason was just like to complete master's degree because I wanted to get my studies fully completed. But then another reason would be a possibility to earn more because master's people with a master's degree you tend to earn more” (#2)

Nevertheless, based on the answers from the employed group, it was clear that a master's degree from Finland did not matter much, the actual knowledge and previous experience did (at least in global companies where those interviewees work). However, some of the employed interviewees could assume that a degree from Finland was probably taken into consideration, but they did not consider it right and fair comparing to candidates without a local degree.

“I mean just the quality of the degree matters and the University you graduated from matters. It doesn't matter where you come from or doesn't matter where you studied, in which country you studied. So, I don't think we have any specific privilege for those who completed their studies in Finland” (#2)

“I believe that for this job it did not matter that I had a Finnish degree, but my prior experience helped me because for this job they needed someone who is experienced in recruiting and sourcing candidates from different platforms” (#6)

“So, probably that's one of the influences that I have a Master's. But it should not be like that. I mean even if you don't have a master's degree from this country from any University here, you should not be rejected for that reason” (#1)

Some immigrants have already been living in Finland for a long time and have either a permanent residence permit or a citizenship. They hoped that it would also be beneficial for their future career if they integrate to the Finnish society in full by learning the language and becoming a citizen. Unfortunately, expectations and reality did not match in this case either.

“I have a Finnish passport and I thought that having the citizenship of Finland would also help me a little bit to land a job in Finland. I thought so, but I mean I think, well, I was wrong maybe, and my expectations did not go as planned” (#7)

4.3 Networking

Networking was specified by all the interviewees (from both groups) as one of the crucial factors in starting a career in Finland. It is a good opportunity for unemployed foreigners to get noticed and show their capabilities since it is not always possible due to being sorted out during the first stage of the selection process. It was also presented as an unfortunate obstacle preventing candidates from proving what they are worth of.

“References are very critical in landing an interview. If you have somebody giving a reference and the hiring team knows that person, then you will 100% have a chance for at least an interview. But if you are randomly shooting a dart to hit the target, then it becomes a number game, a random process and probability” (#12)

Networking can also become a door to a hidden job market if potential employers are looking for a suitable employee that they can rely on and be convinced that the job will be performed on a high level. In these cases, close connections might be taken into account first due to being implied as safe and trustworthy candidates.

“It was like a bit different recruiting process. There was no open application, so I was just kind of referred by friends. It was not advertised” (#2)

“So, I think that is the basic challenge that my network is not as strong as local people have, so usually when the position is advertised, it's already internally discussed with many people and people are hired already before the official statement appears. It happened a lot of times [...] And the network is strong for Finns. Somebody knows someone and they kind of can connect. So, the company I was talking to with like 80% of their staff was internal recommendations. 80% of people came through someone who knew them” (#11)

“The places where I worked, even either a traineeship or a substitute work, summer job or temporary contracts – those where I succeeded to sign a contract, came from my network, not from the traditional way of sending applications” (#9)

Some Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences offer some help to their students by contacting companies they are partnered up with and recommending their students to potential employers. Although, in this situation the main networking and cooperation is made by universities, not directly by students, nevertheless, it gives unemployed foreigners a chance to showcase themselves being “referenced” by their school as a guarantee of their skills and talent.

“Networking I did from my school LUT. There was a woman who was managing jobs for students. She could recommend, she could contact the management of the companies for LUT students. LUT has this kind of programme for international students” (#10)

Although all the interviewees indicated the importance of networking, some contradictions were noticed in their attitude to networking or, to be more precise, to what type of networking would be more beneficial for job seekers. Both cases and comments seem reasonable, and it depends on individual characteristics which side to prefer.

According to the interviewee #5 from the employed group, it would be rational to meet successful people who can teach you something, give some good advice, encourage you and show on their own example that everything is possible no matter how difficult your situation is at the moment and how much you struggle to get a job. Seeing successful people around gives a powerful motivation to be similar to them one day, while spending your time around people who only complain about being treated differently comparing to Finns and feeling discriminated, makes you demotivated and prevents from moving forward to achieve your goals.

“In the moment of weakness, I went to a mentor (...) I loved to feel more confident when I talked with people and reached out to professional people. I think international students here can be demotivated and think they are not strong enough as Finnish people, because they think they are underprivileged already being a foreigner [...] But if they get to know the world, the society, the city of Helsinki and Finnish people, they will see their confidence goes up [...] So, I just focused on success, I don't focus on annoyance” (#5)

As opposed to the previous opinion, interviewee #11 recommended unemployed immigrants to spend more time with people experiencing the same issues and having difficulties in finding a job too. According to interviewee #11, these people will understand you and support you in the moments of bad luck and emotional breakdown as they have already gone through it before, and they know what it feels. It is worth mentioning that the interviewee emphasized the importance of getting social and staying around people instead of being isolated. Thus, there was no direct comparison between other “unsuccessful” unemployed people and employed people who have succeeded in their career. However, it seemed interesting, that in this case it was recommended to find like-minded people compared to interviewee #5 who mentioned the importance of contacting successful people who have already achieved something and who can teach you something.

“So, one thing that I would highly recommend for anyone in this process is to have a peer support group like to not do it alone all the time. Meet at least once or twice a week with people who are in a similar boat, who are also looking for a job; it doesn't matter if their profile matches yours or they are looking for different kinds of jobs. You just need to have a place to go and some people to talk about the problems you're facing, you need to even have a place where you can just complain: ‘OK, I didn't get it’. It's extremely important to do it as a community, rather than in isolation” (#11)

4.4 Career Development Opportunities

In addition to networking that was mentioned by all the interviewees as one of the crucial factors to be considered when looking for a job, representatives from both employed and unemployed groups named other essential hints which could be helpful to increase chances of getting employed. All the advice was based on their personal experience including mistakes and triumphs. It was essential to include the question “What kind of advice would you give to fresh graduates and those who have been struggling for a long time looking for a job?” for the interviewees of both groups. Employed representatives could share their experience and useful knowledge that could have an impact on unemployed people and help to find a solution or define a reason of some immigrants succeeding in getting a job and the others still struggling. The question was also important for the unemployed interviewees as a chance to analyse their own job searching process and their actions by taking into consideration previous mistakes and correcting them for turning them into future opportunities.

All the interviewees highlighted the importance of learning something new and useful, updating current skills and getting acquainted with other subjects. Constant learning and self-development were named to be considered and applied to increase the possibilities of landing a job. It was recommended to study at courses and get certificates, do internships (that could lead to becoming a full employee later) and volunteer. All the new knowledge gained through these options could be useful at a new workplace and it would also serve as a good sign that a job seeker did something while staying unemployed instead of getting stuck on the same level. It was also advertised as a reasonable “excuse” to cover gaps in CV.

“You need to learn a new thing every day. That's all we need at any job [...] You can start doing a small project, small exercise. Try to demonstrate it to get qualified for the first round. For example, build a portfolio, try to add a small item there; it does not need to

be a big project, just one day when you do some funny exercise, just put it there. Then after half a year, you can have a real portfolio of what you have achieved from small to big. They are going to see your progress. They think: 'This guy has done quite many things gradually and consistently. He has a willing to do something and learn'. You show the right mentality" (#3)

"If you have the opportunity to do an internship, whether your Master programme required it or not, do it, if you have the time. But don't do it unpaid and try to negotiate it from the beginning [...] If it's an internship, it's possible to work for them later" (#1)

"Don't believe that whatever you are saying will be enough for the interviewer. It would always help if you could show something that would prove that what you achieved in your life is actually true. It's not just a story [...] We wanted to hire someone from Finland because they can immediately start. [...] But we ended up hiring someone from Turkey. The only reason why this candidate stood out is that he was showing each and everything of what he was saying. He has made a presentation. He was participating in different competitions in Turkey, and he was showing all the seminars and competitions that he attended and what prize he got. There were pictures, there were videos, certificates from the competitions" (#6)

Polishing your CV by making it look more structured and highlighting new acquisitions to it was specified as a significant factor. Being creative when writing a cover letter was also mentioned as important to consider. A cover letter was described as a perfect tool to show your personality, not only enumerate your workplaces and description of the duties there since it is also necessary for a recruiter to know if you are a good match for the company and its working culture.

"I was participating in different kinds of CV clinics and how to make your application better [...] I was focused on making my CV and cover letter brilliant. Everybody who is looking for a job has to make their CV and cover letter personalized. Don't apply for hundred jobs, apply for ten jobs, but make the CV and cover letter really specific and personalized [...] I even changed the colour matching the brand of the company. I put a lot of effort and I can say it worked, because my manager applauded me for my CV and cover letter [...] Represent yourself in a piece of paper the best way possible" (#4)

Both employed and unemployed interviewees participated in different programmes aimed at job seekers. Such programmes were organized by the Unemployment office of Finland (TE-toimisto in Finnish) or other organizations, such as The Shortcut, Luckan Integration (Dörren, Fika), Entry Point mentoring programme by the city of Espoo, etc. For some of them it was a very interesting and useful experience as it helped them to get some support and advice.

"I had a mentorship from my school Aalto and outside of the school at Business Finland. Then I reached out to Dörren and Fika. I also went to LinkedIn, and I sent messages to

some people and some people came back to me and became my mentors. So, I spoke to high level and very knowledgeable people, and they were always willing to say: 'Ok, we can have a tea meeting'. They will not always answer, but there will always be people who will get back to you and they raise you and your confidence up" (#5)

The advice of being more specific and less general in choosing a degree and career path was also stated. It was explained as the necessity for a company to understand what you are proficient at and what your expertise is about. When it is clear what exactly you want to do at work, it becomes easier for you as well to target suitable companies and choose only positions that you could have greater chances of being admitted to.

Some of the interviewees supposed that if they had had another degree, they would have had better chances to land a job. And it would not matter much if they were foreigners or Finns.

"With my master's degree in international business it was very hard for me to get a job. It took me two or three years to apply for jobs that ended in success. Things only got better when I started a new more specialized technical degree in data, because I knew exactly what I could do with that. And companies also had a very specific demand and when I applied, they could easily say if it's a fit or not a fit. When you know you have something to offer them, the conversation is much easier, and everything becomes smoother. [...] Being more specific and not too general is the key" (#3)

"I would say that maybe students should decide carefully the degree. I mean in the end, if they get the degrees, will it help them to land a job in Finland or not. So, they have to decide carefully. So, I feel like if I had chosen a degree which was related with IT, I could have landed a job more easily" (#7)

5 DISCUSSION

The following chapter includes the analysis of all the data based on the findings from Chapter 4 (Diversity and Inclusion, Expectations and Reality, Networking, Career Development Opportunities) and theoretical framework from Chapter 2. The first part “Multiculturalism in Finland” is dedicated to the process of promoting internationalization in Finland by attracting foreigners to study and work in Finland. The second part “Career promises and reality” demonstrates that in practice it is rather problematic for foreign students to find an employment in Finland after graduation; as a result, despite the efforts of the Finnish government to attract foreign specialists, a great number of them leave the country due to the lack of job opportunities. The third part “Networking as an essential tool to succeed” highlights the importance of networking since it is a good opportunity to get an access to hidden jobs and get acquainted with the “useful” people who could either give a good advice or even provide a foreigner with a recommendation letter which is always taken into consideration in Finland during a hiring process. The last part “Personal branding and career development opportunities” describes the steps that a foreign student should do to impress Finnish employers and increase the chances of landing a job corresponding to their degree.

5.1 Multiculturalism in Finland

The necessity of diversity at workplaces is a vital topic of discussion nowadays since diverse teams are considered as a key factor for companies to succeed globally. Big Finnish companies or global companies located in Finland have already made the first step to implement this policy (Uehigashi 2022) and seem to be more open in welcoming foreign employees. As it is maintained by Logemann (2021), it is a significant aspect of cross-cultural management to make members of multicultural teams feel involved and valued, especially working remotely when belongingness to the team and the company is less tangible. The interviewees also emphasized that international companies are more frequently preferred to be targeted since they usually value knowledge over nationality. Therefore, the chances of immigrants to land a job arise. Nevertheless, it means that the opportunities of small Finnish companies to grow and expand globally are reduced. Universities are recommended to step up and make an effort to expose international students to such

companies as it will be beneficial both for students looking for a job and small enterprises not having enough resources to find talented employees who could help their business to expand globally (Bogdan 2021).

In spite of the efforts of the Finnish government to advertise multiculturalism as an important element for the modernization of the country, the number of Finnish companies willing to apply the diversity and inclusion policy is relatively low comparing to other European countries (Uehigashi et al. 2022) depriving Finland of its competitive positioning globally, especially considering the fact that 65% of Finns admit that diverse teams would make a positive impact on the company. The interviewees also mentioned about their preferring to apply for jobs at companies that underline their equity policy and loyalty to diverse specialists on their websites. Companies with only Finnish and Swedish employees were seen as a red flag as the lack of foreign colleagues was a clear sign that foreigners would be unwelcome there.

Culture differences serve as a big barrier between Finnish employers and immigrants. The interviewees claimed that Finnish companies find it dangerous and risky to hire foreign specialists and prefer choosing Finnish people to be on the safe side. Finns are considered honest, reliable, and responsible people while foreigners coming from various countries all over the world with diverse cultural peculiarities are seen as unpredictable; their working style, habits and ethics might also be different from local ones. Another concern is foreign certificates and qualifications which can be problematic to check and authenticate while local documents can be easily verified.

Taking into account Hofstede's cultural dimension theory (2001), it is clear that Finnish cultural habits are different comparing to some non-EU countries. It probably influences the decision of Finnish employers when choosing their future employees as they might be concerned about possible misunderstandings and collision of opinions at work. According to Hofstede Insights (2022), Power distance score of Finland is relatively low demonstrating small distance between employees and superiors and low hierarchy at workplaces. The examples of countries with a high score opposite to Finland are India, Russia, China, Mexico. The Finnish score for Individualism is high which means that each Finn is classified by individual characteristics rather than a group of people and each

person is responsible for his/her own affairs and personal achievements are in priority. The opposite examples (Collectivism) are Pakistan, Venezuela, Indonesia. Since the Masculinity score of Finland is low, it is considered a feminine country with such values as equity, solidarity, and modesty, as well as ability to resolve conflicts. The countries belonging to the opposite masculine culture are China, The United States, Japan. According to a high uncertainty avoidance score of Finns, they prefer avoiding vagueness and need particular rules and law to feel safe. Singapore, Vietnam and Hong Kong belong to the other group with a weak score. The long-term orientation score of Finland is low depicting respect for traditions and stability with the focus on quick results rather than long-term goals. The countries with the opposite approach are Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan. Finnish Indulgence score signifies the lack of control over desires and impulses, as well as freedom of speech and care for human rights while in other countries, such as Hong Kong, Russia, Belarus, China desires and emotions are controlled and curbed. (Hofstede et al 2010)

Surprisingly, Finland might have similar values, views, and habits even with countries from other continents which originally might seem completely different from the Finnish culture. On the one hand, it might seem that countries with the similar values and approaches based on Hofstede's dimensions are supposed to work well together, understand each other easily and hence be predictable for each other and less risky as business partners or employees from the same company. On the other hand, it may cause lack of creativity and unique approaches to doing business, negotiating, or looking at the same problem from a completely different perspective. If everyone always agrees with each other, no space to grow and develop will be left.

A foreign sounding name can also be a big obstacle for a job applicant, according to YLE NEWS (2019) as it seems to be more important for Finnish employers to hire a native Finn even with a less attractive educational and working background than give a chance to a foreigner. Härmä and Teivanen (2015) maintain that some Finnish employers agree to consider immigrants as potential employees only when they are unable to find a suitable Finnish speaking candidate.

Lack of Finnish language skills appeared to be one of the biggest obstacles for foreign specialists to find a job, according to the answers of the interviewees. Most of them mentioned a common practice of Finnish companies to upload job descriptions in English requiring fluent Finnish. Foreigners found it very confusing. Some of the interviewees decided to change their field completely learning more about professions that would not require Finnish. Miriam Holsten, chair of EK's International Business Club (Pratchett 2021), states that a high language proficiency is not necessary at some workplaces and Finnish employers should reconsider their standards. Kantola (2021) also specifies that international students find it unfair that they are usually required to have a native proficiency of the Finnish language while for Finns it is enough to have only an intermediate level of English. The reason of Finnish employers' preferring not to hire foreigners can also be based on the lack of the English language skills among Finnish and Swedish speaking employees who are not used to using English daily, according to Valkama & Pantzar (2021). Thus, if Finnish companies intend to conquer international markets and expand globally, they should also reconsider their requirements of the level of the English language among Finnish and Swedish speaking employees by hiring only those professionals who speak English fluently.

5.2 Career promises and reality

The situation in the Finnish labour market is rather unfavourable comparing to other Nordic countries where the employment rate is higher, according to the Finnish government (2023). The economic situation, shortage of labour, aging population and low birth rate in Finland are considered to be the main reasons for that lag. The number of aging people is expected to exceed the number working-aged people in the future (Finnish institute for health and welfare (2023).

Although the reasons are determined, and the government attempts to improve the situation by inventing new measures, such as making Finland an attractive destination for studying, working, or becoming an entrepreneur, the number of unemployed immigrants increased by 4,900 citizens, according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2022). Despite the positive change in the total number of job seekers (both Finns and foreigners) which decreased by 14,900 citizens, the problem with the

shortage of labour has not been solved and the rates only continue to grow. On the one hand, Finnish employers complain about labour shortage and difficulties in finding a candidate with the right skillset; on the other hand, according to Valkama & Pantzar (2021), 40% of Finnish companies have either no capacity or desire to hire international talents. Consequently, their range of possible candidates is limited to Finns who might not possess all the necessary skills that Finnish employers expect and desire. It makes it hardly possible to improve the situation with a labour shortage as Finnish companies are left without a suitable employee due to their limitations and immigrants are left without a job since they are not even considered as good candidates.

Notwithstanding the strategy of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2016) to make Finnish higher educational institutions more attractive for international students in Europe and worldwide by 2025 by advertising Finland as an open country ready for experiments and cooperation networks, as well as a captivating destination for investments, the image of Finland as a not foreign-friendly country might foil all these efforts. According to YLE NEWS (2019), 2000 of foreign students out of 3000 leave the country after graduation due to the lack of employment opportunities. Some of the interviewees also admitted that they were trapped by the beautiful advertisements of Finnish universities to come for studying and building their successful career in Finland. Therefore, these interviewees got very disappointed when facing the reality. On the other hand, even collecting the information about the country and work opportunities in Finland before arriving and being ready for possible challenges, the interviewed immigrants seemed not to expect that the problem with unemployment was that huge and the job searching process would be that long and difficult.

Another problem educated foreigners face with when moving to Finland is the recognition of qualifications and diplomas obtained abroad. The results of the E2 Tutkimus research showed, that 51% of immigrants moving to Finland due to their marriage/relationship status had to change their profession and career path to increase the chances of getting hired, according to Daily Finland (2022). In order to look more attractive in the eyes of Finnish employers, already educated immigrants decide to become students again and enter Finnish universities hoping to become more competitive.

According to the interviewees, even a degree gained in Finland does not always guarantee success in getting a job corresponding to this degree. The representatives from the both groups admitted that they had to agree for low-paid jobs to secure their living and to receive a work-based residence permit, even if it was the job, where they were clearly overqualified, e.g., working as a waitress, a cleaner, a newspaper deliverer, a dishwasher, etc. Some of them had already possessed a master's degree from abroad before arriving to Finland. Nevertheless, these degrees were unvalued by Finnish employers, even if the diplomas were from the countries belonging to the European Union. The other interviewees completed Finnish educational institutions with a bachelor's degree and decided to study further expecting that a local master's degree would open more doors. However, based on the answers of the employed educated foreigners, their previous working experience, knowledge, and skills were more important for employers than the fact that they had a master's degree from Finland. Therefore, in their opinion, a local degree was not the main reason for their being hired. On the other hand, educated foreigners from the unemployed group, in spite of a previously gained good working experience, unique skills, as well as a Finnish master's degree, fail in their job searching process, nevertheless.

The problem of discrimination of foreigners in Finland is not only limited to their difficulties in getting employed. Securing a job does not guarantee being treated equally with Finns. According to Smith (2021), foreigners earn 25% less comparing to native Finns. In addition to that, Finnish employees usually have better chances of being promoted at work. Immigrants agree for a lower salary as they consider it to be a better option than staying completely unemployed. Even getting a Finnish passport does not change the situation for an immigrant. According to one of the interviewees from the unemployed group, integrating into the Finnish society by becoming a Finnish citizen neither makes an immigrant be treated equally with Finns, nor helps to increase the chances of landing a good well-paid job corresponding to the gained degree.

5.3 Networking as an essential tool to succeed

One of the key elements that was emphasized by the interviewees (both employed and unemployed) as a significant tool to increase chances of getting hired is networking.

Being referenced by someone gives a clear priority over other job candidates since this person's skills and capabilities are already proved and acknowledged. Interviewees from the unemployed group mentioned their struggling to even be selected for the next round of the job application process where they would be able to show their motivation and manifest their knowledge and experience matching the job requirements. According to the founder and CEO of the Shortcut Anne Badan (YLE NEWS 2019), it is common for hiring managers to give priority to referenced job candidates. It means that since immigrants (especially newcomers) do not usually have an extensive network, they automatically lose to locals who already possess many useful contacts and references from their previous workplaces.

Networking can also be useful in solving another essential problem – access to a hidden job market since, according to YLE NEWS (2019), 85% of jobs in Finland are not officially advertised. Some of the interviewees from the employed group confessed being referenced for a vacancy that has never been published. Unemployed educated foreigners acknowledge the lack of useful contacts to be their major issue on the way to succeed in landing a job. However, Habti & Koikkalainen (2013 p.49) admit that creating meaningful connections with locals seems to be rather challenging due to the common unwillingness of Finns to broaden their circle of friends and acquaintances. On the other hand, they are usually more interactive on LinkedIn which is also recommended by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (2022) as a good source to build networks. LinkedIn was also mentioned by the interviewees of both groups as a tool not only to get acquainted with new people, but also find inspirational articles, tips, and advice, as well as follow companies' news and vacancies.

5.4 Personal branding and career development opportunities

Launching a career in Finland is a complicated and challenging process for immigrants. According to the interviewees, it is very demotivating and frustrating to get rejection emails as it makes them feel unprivileged comparing to Finnish job applicants. It means that they have to try harder to impress Finnish employers and prove that they are worth being selected as future employees. Since foreign applicants usually lose in job competition due to the lack of the Finnish language skills which is, according to Confederation

of Finnish Industries (EK) (2021), one of the main obstacles for immigrants, they have to use other tools to cover this flaw as it was suggested by Ali Najafi, interviewed by Laurea University of Applied Sciences (2019).

Updating skills and gaining new knowledge constantly, as well as polishing CV and writing personalized cover letters were mentioned by the interviewees from the both groups as “must-do” actions when entering a Finnish job market. The interviewees underlined that it was important to showcase the willingness to learn by, for instance, participating in courses or studying something individually and adding the newly gained skills to CV, especially when not having enough practical experience. It was also recommended to agree for paid traineeships and even volunteering as in many cases it turned out to be the starting point for building a future career. Cover letter was presented as a perfect tool for a personal branding as this is a unique opportunity not only to enumerate previous career achievements, but also to prove being a good match for a company.

Educational institutions in Finland offer a great variety of degree programmes in English. It is important for a foreign student to determine which degree would be easier to apply at work and which field is more foreigners-friendly, according to the interviewees. Some of them regretted having chosen a particular degree programme that was too broad since Finnish employers often look for specific skills and education. The interviewees of both groups supposed that they would have landed a job much faster or would have had more chances to get hired had they thought more carefully what to study. It means that the actual problem of foreigners interested in moving to Finland is not connected with difficulties in entering Finnish universities; the main struggle is to find a job afterwards where the gained knowledge can be applied, according to Syrjälä (2021). Therefore, a carefully chosen degree programme is supposed to simplify a career path.

Another advice given by the interviewees as an opportunity to succeed in a job searching process was participating in different programmes for unemployed people. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2021) realized the importance of helping immigrants already living in Finland to prevent brain-drain. The helping hand was suggested by the Government of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä in 2017 introducing the Talent Boost Programme which appeared to be a win-win situation. According to Syrjälä (2021),

on the one hand, immigrants living in Finland or intending to move to Finland would get a necessary support and visibility for Finnish employers. On the other hand, the unique skills and knowledge of educated foreigners would be used for the benefit of Finland and its modernization. Subsequently, similar Talent Boost activities helping highly educated foreigners were promoted and opened in other cities and regions as well (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2021).

Nowadays there is a great variety of organizations offering help to immigrants. The examples mentioned by the interviewees were The Shortcut, Luckan Integration (Dörren, Fika), Entry Point mentoring programme by the city of Espoo, etc. However, the opinion of the interviewees differed regarding the networking in such organizations. An interviewee from the unemployed group specified the importance of peer support groups with the people having the same issues of not being able to find a suitable job since it is easier to support and encourage each other being in the same boat. Another person from the employed group had an opposite opinion that staying in the group with unemployed foreigners would be demotivating and burdensome since only more successful people with a good experience, wise advice and connections can be good motivators and role models. Both opinions seem to be correct, and each person can choose the best suitable option.

5.5 Summary

Having analysed the data from the interviews and theoretical framework, it becomes evident that the unemployment problem among educated foreigners has to be looked at from two different angles – *Finnish society* and *foreigners' own efforts*, where the role of the Finnish society is to accept multiculturalism and provide equal career opportunities both for Finns and foreigners and the role of educated foreigners is to adjust to local requirements and habits, such as constant self-development and active networking. Therefore, the problem can only be solved jointly with each party being responsible for their own contribution.

Thus, having examined the research question from the perspective of the *Finnish society*, the following two main obstacles were defined and described, and possible solutions were presented:

Unwillingness of Finnish employers to apply diversity and inclusion. The process of the development of diversity and inclusion policy in Finland has been progressing slowly. The majority of Finnish employers still prefer to give advantage to native job seekers and continue ignoring foreigners during a hiring process. Therefore, positive changes should start from the society. The solution was suggested by the Finnish government by implementing Talent Boost Programme and other similar programmes where educated foreigners would have a chance to demonstrate their expertise to Finnish employers through networking and recruitment campaigns. The government has already made the first step. Now it is the turn of Finnish employers to accept the new internationalization policy and start considering foreign specialists as potential employees.

False promises of a successful career by the Finnish government not corresponding to the reality. It is beneficial for Finland to attract international students and persuade them to stay in the country after graduation by using their creative ideas and unique approaches for the development of the Finnish economy. However, when these educated foreigners with Finnish diplomas in hands fail to find employment, they move to more foreigner-friendly countries and contribute to their economy. Therefore, promises should be backed by deeds through further assistance and help. It can be accomplished by cooperating with Finnish companies and providing educated foreigners with paid traineeships or work trials where they could show their potential and receive a full-time job later. Thus, during such internships Finnish companies get acquainted with international specialists and witness their useful contribution, while these international specialists acquire some practical experience at local companies and gain their trust of future Finnish employers. This is another example where the first action has to come from the Finnish society and their revising their old norms.

In addition to the changes that are supposed to be made by the Finnish society and government, the other two main obstacles were identified, and solutions were presented demonstrating what can also be done from the perspective of *individuals* or foreigners themselves to improve their chances to get employed:

Lack or shortage of networking. Based on the literature review and the answers of the interviewees, networking and communication skills appear to be very important in

Finland since getting acquainted with the “right” person may open doors leading to the actual employment. Some of the employed interviewees succeeded in landing a job due to being referenced, getting access to hidden jobs, or contacting a personal mentor who gave them some useful advice and directions. According to the unemployed interviewees, lack of useful connections decreased their chances of landing a job as they consider networking to be one of the most important tools to succeed in a career building in Finland. Therefore, it is essential for them to take the initiative and attempt to start growing their network as soon as possible upon arriving to Finland.

The necessity of constant self-development to surpass Finnish job candidates. Due to the Finnish employers’ distrust of immigrants, educated foreigners wishing to build their career in Finland should apply more efforts to prove they possess notable skills helping them to look more competitive equally with Finns. Creative, unique, and personalized cover letter can be a good trump card helping to stand out among other candidates and show not only the professional achievements as listed facts, but also the soft skills that these achievements were accompanied by. Traineeships and volunteering experience are also appreciated since they give an access to using some theoretical skills on practice and gaining an expertise. Therefore, constant development of skills is one of the essential steps for foreigners helping them to compete in a job search battle.

The last ascertained obstacle is described separately as it concerns both the Finnish society and foreigners and highlights what kind of obstacle both of them possess and what can be done to improve the situation:

Language barrier. The majority of immigrants prefer applying for jobs not requiring a fluent level of Finnish. It decreases their chances for employment since there is a great number of open positions that they skip due to the language unproficiency. Many Finnish companies (mostly small ones) use only Finnish as a working language due to insufficient English language skills which makes it problematic for them to do business and hold company meetings in English. Thus, the language barrier problem has two sides of the coin, and it should be solved simultaneously. Foreigners wishing to increase their chances of getting hired and have a greater variety of companies to apply for should improve their

Finnish language skills, while Finnish companies aiming to expand globally should ensure communication in English at workplaces.

6 CONCLUSION

Finland continues to be a captivating destination for immigrants due to the advertisement ensuring excellent higher education and graduate employment opportunities. However, not all the international students are able to enter a Finnish labour market and start building a prominent career. As it has been previously investigated, educated foreigners from the EU countries usually have better chances to secure employment than graduates from other countries. It can be explained by the culture similarities and differences of this countries with Finland. It seems to be easier for Finnish people to communicate, work and do business with European countries (belonging to the EU) as according to Hofstede dimensions they have more similar views and habits with them and more fraternal relationship than with countries from other continents or outside of the EU.

Despite the efforts of the Finnish government to promote internationalization, many Finnish companies agree to follow the new course rather unwillingly. International firms with a wide client base all over the world or companies aiming to expand globally have already perceived the advantages of foreign specialists in their team and continue looking for perfect employees based on their knowledge, experience, and motivation rather than nationality. However, the problem has not been completely solved. A great number of Finnish employers adhere to their conservative views preferring to give advantage to native job seekers since, in their opinion, it is easier to work with them due to their belonging to the same culture with the same working habits.

The results of the research show that the main career obstacles educated foreigners encounter are the following:

From the Finnish society:

- Unwillingness of Finnish employers to apply diversity and inclusion
- False promises of a successful career by the Finnish government not corresponding to the reality

From foreigners:

- Lack or shortage of networking
- The necessity of constant self-development to surpass Finnish job candidates

Common obstacle:

- Language barrier

Thus, the unemployment problem among educated foreigners in Finland has to be solved simultaneously by the *Finnish society* (through acknowledging multiculturalism and providing equal career opportunities regardless of nationality) and *foreigners' own efforts* (through adapting to local career building habits, such as constant self-improvement and active networking). Language barrier is a common obstacle that both parties are responsible for overcoming by improving their skills in Finnish (for foreigners) or English (for Finns).

Although the most evident obstacles are determined and the possible solutions are presented, it requires much work both from the Finnish society and foreigners themselves to change the situation positively. Multiculturalism and the necessity of foreign talents in the country have been widely advertised in Finland. However, the traces of improvement are still small and not all the local employers are ready to accept new rules of treating foreigners equally with Finns on a job market. It is challenging emotionally for foreigners as well to continue broadening their knowledge and obtaining new skills while being unable to apply them at work and show their capabilities since they are not considered as suitable job candidates only due to their nationality. Thus, only combined efforts can result in some progress when the number of unemployed educated foreigners finally reduces considerably.

6.1 Limitations

The focus of the current research was made on the countries outside of the European Union since educated foreigners from these countries seemed to have lower chances of landing a job comparing to the students inside of the EU. However, the number of countries outside the EU zone is still big and cultures vary considerably. Therefore, it was impossible to define the reasons of failure of educated foreigners based on a particular country of origin as the amount of prejudice regarding any concrete country and culture could be different. The other limitation is the number of interviewees. Since only twelve persons were interviewed and not all the possible countries were involved, it is difficult

to form an objective opinion proving that the reasons of success or failure are similar for everyone.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

Since the focus of the study was wide and the peculiarities of each particular country as well as the gender of the interviewees were not taken into consideration, the suggestions for further research could include limiting the study to a particular continent of country to define whether international students from one concrete country have bigger or smaller chances to succeed in Finland. The genders could also be taken into consideration to highlight whether there is a difference in the number of unemployed male and female foreigners.

It was investigated in the research process that applicants with Finnish diplomas and local work experience were more admired by Finnish employers than applicants with foreign degrees and experience gained abroad. However, the problem of giving preference to domestic skills concerns not only foreigners, but also Finnish people who previously studied or worked abroad. Returning to the homeland, they also struggle to acknowledge their capabilities and Finnish employers find such Finns rather unsuitable for their companies due to the foreign origin of their diplomas and work certificates. Therefore, the topic of the similar research could cover the problem of Finnish job seekers coming from abroad with high expectation of applying their knowledge for the benefit of the Finnish economy facing the cruel reality of mistrust and concern from domestic employers.

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APPENDIX

Interview questions for the 1st group – Employed educated foreigners

1. Where are you from?
2. What did you study (do you study) in Finland? What were your qualifications when you started looking for a job and when you got employed?
3. Where do you work and what do you do? How big is the company you work at? How many foreign employees work there (what is the approximate percentage of Finnish and foreign employees)?
4. Do you think you had an advantage comparing to other immigrants who studied outside of Finland? How did it influence the decision of your employer in your opinion?
5. How long did it take to become employed? Did you find a job quickly?
6. Which steps did you take to get hired? Did you keep sending applications or were you referenced by someone that resulted in being selected?
7. What do you think, why did you get hired? What were your strengths comparing to other candidates?
8. Nowadays job seekers are recommended to be able to sell themselves in order to stand out among other candidates and show their capabilities. Do you think you managed to sell yourself which resulted in your being hired? Was it easy or hard for you?
9. Did you feel any prejudice towards you as a foreigner at the interview?
10. Do you see any difference how you are treated at work comparing to native Finns?
11. Does your current job correspond to your background and qualification? Is it closely connected with your Finnish degree?
12. Does your current salary correspond to your experience and background or do you feel underpaid due to your foreign origin?
13. What kind of advice would you give to fresh graduates/those who have been struggling for a long time looking for a job?

Interview questions for the 2nd group – Unemployed educated foreigners

1. Where are you from?
2. What did you study in Finland? What are your qualifications?
3. What were your expectations regarding the future career when you came to Finland? Did you expect the Finnish degree would help you to get employed in Finland?
4. How long have you been looking for a job?
5. What kind of job would you like to have?
6. What kind of companies have you applied for? How big or small are they? Are these companies Finnish or international? Have you checked how many foreign employees they have?
7. Have you ever worked in Finland at all, even if it was a job where you were clearly overqualified? If yes, what kind of job did you have?
8. Which steps did you take in your job searching process? What were the main obstacles? Did you ask for any references?
9. What do you think, what were your weaknesses comparing to other foreign candidates and comparing to Finns?
10. Nowadays job seekers are recommended to be able to sell themselves in order to stand out among other candidates and show their capabilities. Is it hard or easy for you to sell yourself and present your skills in a more favourable way?
11. Did you feel any prejudice towards you as a foreigner at the job interview? How many job interviews (approximately) did you participate in? Was it a big or a small number comparing to the total number of applications?
12. What have you learnt through this long job searching process? Do you have any ideas for improving your chances?
13. What kind of advice would you give to fresh graduates/those who have been struggling for a long time looking for a job? What kind of mistakes should they avoid?