

**LABOUR MARKET EXPERIENCES OF WEST AFRICAN
IMMIGRANTS WITH FINNISH QUALIFICATIONS IN HELSINKI**

Teinye Briggs

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the challenges faced by immigrants with Finnish educational qualifications in the labor market. In this study, specific emphasis is placed on West African Immigrants with Finnish qualifications in Helsinki, Finland. The study in trying to achieve this did an extensive review of the pattern of labor migration in an era of globalization. It also examined the patterns of emigration from Africa to Finland and also looked into the challenges faced by immigrants with regards to the problems of integration, job placement and the challenges of ethnic and racial segregation. Consequently, a case study of West African immigrants was chosen for specific analysis.

Qualitative analysis was chosen using the semi structured interview to elicit responses from five respondents who were chosen from the Greater Helsinki area. This is in addition to personal observation as a fellow West African immigrant who is at the verge of entering the Finnish labor market with a Finnish academic qualification too.

The findings were divided into three parts with the first part focusing on Finnish universities' experiences of the interviewees. This is to assess the level of integration and acceptance into the Finnish society. The second part dwells on real life experiences after graduation and the different dimensions of challenges faced by the respondents. The last part looks at the psychosocial impediments confronting West African immigrants in Finland in the course of job search after graduation. Useful recommendations were offered to improve the employability of these immigrants in the Finnish labor market for the overall development of the country.

Key Words: Labor market, Finnish Education, Qualifications, Immigrants, West Africa.

Qualitative Research.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Millions of people worldwide are leaving their home countries every year for leisure, adventure, for religious purposes, and in search of work amongst other reasons. However, in this study, the interest of the researcher is on those who migrate to study in foreign countries, acquire educational qualifications and search of work in their country of residence. At the beginning of the twenty first century, the total number of persons living outside their countries of origin worldwide was estimated at over 150 million. Out of this number, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates some 100 million as migrant workers and their families. The study equally shows that Africa has one of the largest numbers of migrant workers, about 20million, and one fifth of the global total. From the African subtotal, West Africa contributes more than 25% of migrants in search of jobs which relies on some form of education or acquisition of skills. This migratory pattern, which has been fuelled by globalization, has continued to have significant impact on the world economy.

According to the ILO facts on migration, migrant workers send home to developing countries, large volumes of remittances estimated at between US\$16 Billion and US\$25 Billion, with informal remittances in 2005 to support their families and communities, while at the same time contributing to the growth of their host countries. (www.ilo.org/migrant). The rate of remittances seems to be on the increase over time and space (ILO). It should be noted as immigrants who studied and acquired educational qualifications in their countries of residence, certain challenges still confront them. Some of these challenges include; sound language comprehension, lack of adequate integration, discrimination of minority groups and possible feeling of inferiority resulting from non integration in their countries of residence (Basch et al. 1994; Portes, 1999; Waters 1999; Faist 2000).

1.1 Background

During the economic depression of the 1990's in Finland, the employment rate plummeted for both the Finns as well as for the foreign labour force in Finland. However, the difference in terms of percentage was significant. Foreigners lost their jobs more easily than Finnish people did, they were more dispensable and as the number of immigrants coming to Finland continues to increase annually, it will be pertinent to understand how much the situation today differs from 20 years ago (Koivukangas, 2003, 5-6). Over the past two decades, the number of people living in Finland, who are not Finnish citizens, has increased significantly. In 2008 a total of 143 256 foreigners resided in Finland while the corresponding figure in 1990 was 26 255 individuals, in other words, the number of foreigners residing in Finland has increased by 117 001 persons over a time span of 18 years. Approximately 2.5 percent of the employed labour force is of foreign origin (figures from 2006). Foreign referring to individuals who do not have either of the two official languages Finnish or Swedish, nor the minority language Sami stated as their mother tongue. The biggest language groups among foreigners working in Finland speak Russian followed by Estonian and English (Statistics Finland, 2009; Statistikcentralen, 2006).

Out of this non Africans make up a sizeable proportion of the immigrant population, while West Africans remain a significant component of Finnish immigrants. While in Finland, these immigrants pursue various levels of education to enhance their socio-economic status through gainful employment in Finland. This decision stems largely from the widely acceptable high reputation that Finnish education has acquired in the last few decades. According to (Dahlskog , 2010) for years, the Finnish educational system has received positive attention and gained a good reputation, partly due to the success of Finnish students in international measurements and comparisons such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in which Finland has ranked highly ever since its introduction in 2000. Finland annually receives a significant stream of delegations called "educational pilgrims" from around 50 different countries that come to the country in order

to find out the secret to the success of the Finnish educational system. Research has shown that teachers in Finland are happier than their counterparts in other countries and this might be one of the reasons that Finnish pupils achieve such good results. (PBS).

In the immigration discourse, the value of immigrants has been usually assessed in terms of their ability to benefit and to enrich their country of residence. It is difficult to determine economic benefits of immigration to Finland. However, many studies have demonstrated that immigrants contributed to Finland in different ways, and the country has benefited from immigration (Li 2008). Today, highly educated immigrants continue to contribute to Finnish competitive strength in a global market place. There is a widespread belief that education is a key determinant of an individual's economic success in society (Immigration Act 2001). People's human capital is considered as a resource, which can be exploited effectively and can be profitable for individuals and society as a whole. However, various structural constraints exist in society. Finnish society is also highly stratified according to inequalities of class, gender, race and ethnicity, region and many other social factors (Wotherspoon 2009, 225-226). Even in the face of these apparent challenges which are not peculiar to the Finnish society these immigrants pursue various disciplines in Finnish Universities with the hope of finding gainful employment opportunities. It is therefore the thrust of this work to examine the challenges and prospects of West African immigrants in Helsinki with regards to job prospects upon graduation from Universities in Finland. The study will thus assist in a sound social policy of integration of immigrants into the Finnish society.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The study essentially investigates the experiences of West African immigrants with Finnish educational qualifications in the Finnish labour market. In doing this the study attempts a sustained inquiry of the various challenges faced by West African immigrants who obtained Finnish qualifications in the labour market. The challenges were viewed

from the psychological, economic and social spheres with a view to offering useful recommendations that will help them cope with the challenges after graduation.

1.3 Research Questions

The study seeks to cover these two research questions;

- a) What kind of challenges do they encounter in course of seeking their desired career jobs?
- b) What are the skills/tools required of them to secure their desired career jobs?

The study vigorously provide answers to the aforesaid questions through the review of relevant literature and the responses from interviewees selected from West African immigrants in Helsinki who have acquired Finnish educational qualifications and have experienced the challenges of the Finnish labour market.

2 GLOBALISATION AND MIGRATION

People migrate for different reasons. To understand these reasons, it will be pertinent to understand to make a review of the impact of globalisation on migratory pattern across the globe. According to Castles (2002), this new migratory trend could be associated with globalization, and could be seen as “globalization of international migration”. Castles (2002, 1144) holds that “migration is clearly a systemic element in the processes of globalization, but this is merely a new form of a systemic role that has existed in various guises ever since the beginnings of the capitalist world market around the sixteenth century”. According to Castles (2002, 1146-1147), the need to explore certain characteristics of current international migration cannot be over emphasized. International migrants are diversified in terms of social and cultural characteristics (from skilled and entrepreneurial migrants to unskilled labour migration, asylum seekers, and growth in independent female migration). Second, the growing increase in information and transport technology has tremendously enhanced increase in migration. King (2002, 89) suggests that new trend in migration largely has to do with non-economic motivation associated with self-realization, life-style and consumption pattern. Community formation among immigrants in Western Europe lead to the discussions that promoted the integration of immigrants, their citizenship rights and the possibility for multiculturalists’ policies. In the 90s however, most migrants in Germany got the privilege to begin to enjoy citizenship rights.

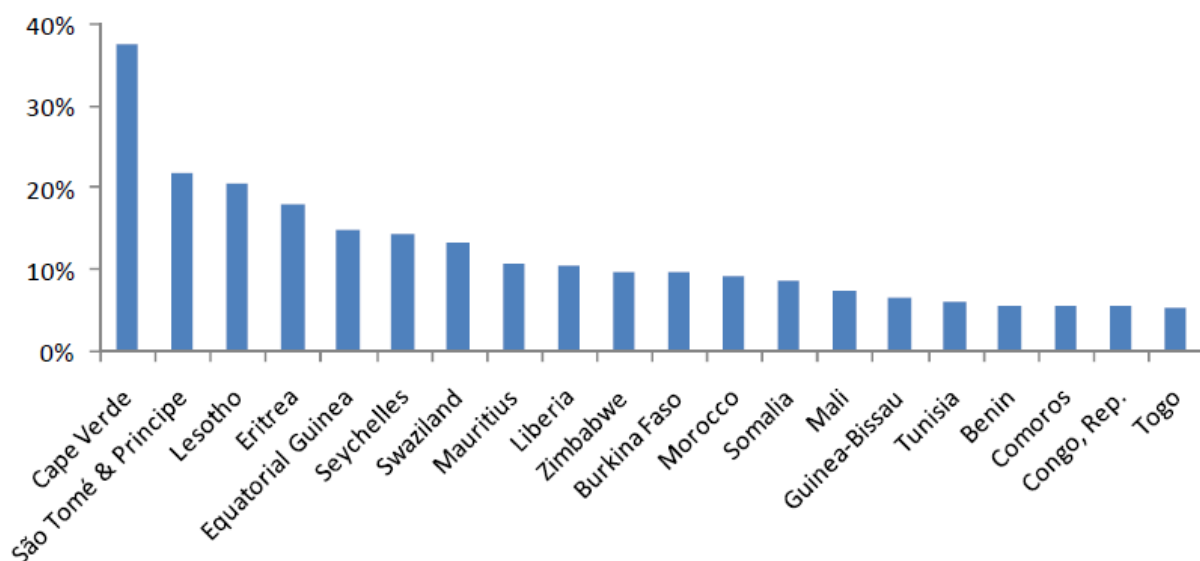
2.1 Trends in African Migration

According to official statistics, about 30 million Africans-about 3 percent of the population-have migrated internationally (including within Africa). This figure-which includes both voluntary migrants and international refugees-almost, certainly underestimates the size and importance of migration from, and particularly within, Africa.

Many Africans have moved to new countries, in most cases neighbouring ones, without necessary documentations. And migration has a broad impact: each migrant may support a significant network of family members in the home country through remittances; in areas of heavy out-migration, economic activity is often highly dependent on these inflows. Emigration from Africa has increased substantially over the past several decades.

Nevertheless, the migration rate (the ratio of emigrants to the total population of the country of origin) remains low on average, although with considerable variation across countries. Some of the smaller countries (for instance, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Seychelles, São Tomé and Príncipe, Lesotho, and Mali) have gross emigration rates that exceed 10 percent (figure 1). This is in part because of limited livelihood opportunities and a high variability of income owing to dependence on primary commodities (Docquier and Schiff 2009). Several countries suffering civil disorder also have high emigration rates. For example, after more than three decades of war, Eritrean emigrants equal almost 20 percent of the country's population.

Fig 1 Stock of African Immigrants within the shores of Africa (2010)



Source: Author's calculations, based on data from World Bank 2011.

About two-thirds of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly poorer migrants, go to other countries in the region; the bulk of migrants remain within their sub-regions. In West Africa, for example, more than 70 percent of intra-African emigration was within the sub-region. In contrast, more than 90 percent of migrants from North Africa travel to countries outside the region.

Migrants from middle-income countries disproportionately migrate to destinations outside Africa, as they are more likely to have the resources to pay for transport to, and resettlement expenses in the OECD countries, and are more likely to have the education and other skills required to find a job there. By contrast, emigrants originating from poorer countries generally go to neighbouring countries, reflecting limited resources as well as common linguistic and historical roots.

New data on migration from household surveys conducted in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal indicate that migrants tend to be young adults (two-thirds of Burkina Faso emigrants were between the ages of 15 and 40) and male (more than 90 percent in Burkina Faso), generally with some education beyond primary school. For example, in Ghana the marginal increase in the probability of sending a migrant is about 8 percent for each additional year of schooling of the head of household. A similar trend is also observed in Nigeria, but not in the Burkina Faso survey. Migration from these countries resulted in significant occupational changes, in particular a transition from farming to trading, semi-skilled employment, and professional jobs. In Burkina Faso and Nigeria, migration allowed a shift from self-employment, often in farming, to wage employment. In Senegal, the shift in labour-market status is significant for students, many of whom were able to find wage employment after migrating. The sex, age, and educational composition of migrants vary by whether migration is within the country, to neighbouring countries, or to the OECD countries. Not surprisingly, migrants to the OECD countries generally tend to

be older and better educated, and more than 70 percent are men. The survey data also show low rates of return: the share of emigrants who returned was only 3 percent in Nigeria, 9 percent in Senegal, and 25 percent in Burkina Faso.

The majority of those who do return in Burkina Faso and Nigeria come back in fewer than four years. In Senegal, however, 66 percent of returnees had 15 or more years abroad. Demographic factors are likely to increase emigration from Africa substantially. The working age population is set to decline between 2010 and 2050 in Europe and the United States, and to increase sharply (implying a doubling of the labour force) in Sub-Saharan Africa . While the impact of declining population on labour demand in industrialized countries is uncertain, the aging of their populations will increase the demand for personal and health-care services. And in Africa, the growth of employment may not be strong enough to absorb all of the new entrants to the labour force. Thus both the demand and supply of migrants are likely to rise in the future. And even if Africa achieves rapid growth, the income gap with industrialized countries will remain a substantial incentive to migrate for the foreseeable future.

2.2 Immigrants as a Heterogeneous Entity

In order to investigate educational inequality associated with immigrants in Finland similar to other western countries, it is necessary to recognize that immigrants are not a homogeneous entity. First of all, immigrants to Finland are admitted under various classes: independent or economic class, which also includes such groups as assisted relatives and business immigrants, family class, Convention refugees, and the designated class (De Silva, 1997).

The family class consists of the immediate members of the family (spouses, fiancés, dependent children, and parents and grandparents who will not enter the labour force) while assisted relatives include other relatives. Convention refugees include refugees

defined as such under the 1951 United Nations Convention, “a class of individuals who have left their country and cannot return because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, group membership or political opinion” (Johnson 2006, 53). The designated class also includes people in refugee-like situations, but who are not qualified under the UN definition of a refugee. It is important to mention that the independent class is required to obtain the necessary number of points to pass a selection test whereas the family class, Convention refugees, and the designated class are admitted under humanitarian considerations. Consequently, immigrants who are selected according to the point system are expected to perform better economically than those who are accepted according to the humanitarian reasons.

2.3 Immigrants Demographics in Finland

It is not a matter of debate anymore that many ethnic and racial origins are found among immigrants in Finland. The rapid growth of the visible minority population was triggered by the changes in immigration regulations in 80’s that have led to the shift in the principal source countries from European to non-European and to the shift in the ethnic origins of immigrants. Due to its geo-political location and history, Finland was not a major crossroads of migration in the 20th century. Until the 1980s, there was a far higher amount of emigration than immigration in Finland. The Finnish Institute of Migration calculated in 2004 that 790,000 Finns have emigrated since 1945 with 296,000 expatriates currently living abroad (Korkiasaari, 2005). Approximately, 132,000 people of foreign origin were resident in Finland in 2005 (Statistics Finland, 2007). The majority of these foreigners were not asylum seekers or refugees; 47 percent of migrants were spouses or partners of Finns (Heikkilä, 2007). The rate of asylum applications has hovered steadily around 2000 per year between 1990 and 2006 (Ministry of Labour, 2007).

Though temporary labour migration is increasing, Finland has small number of foreign workers unlike other European nations. Less than 1 percent of the Finnish workforce can be categorized as low-wage foreign workers (Bartram, 2007, 767). Indeed, immigrants to Finland tend to have a higher educational level than immigrants to Sweden or Denmark,

for example, which can be attributed to proportionately large number of Estonians and Russians (Johansson, 2008).

Finland joined the European Union in 1995. The EU is still developing an immigration agenda and cannot intrude on the sovereign right of nations to determine their own immigration policies. The main impact of EU membership on Finnish migration policies has been on asylum policies. The Finnish system of dealing with immigration issues is different from many other European countries because there are multiple actors's involved (local police, the Immigration Authority, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.) in developing policy rather than a single agency.

Migrants as a whole nonetheless remain a very small proportion of the Finnish population (approximately 2.5%) and are largely resident in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Migrants in Finland are enormously diverse and represent over 150 language groups and nationalities. Russian is the largest single language group (28.5%) among migrants, with English coming in a distant second (6.8%) (Institute of Migration, 2003). Migrants tend to have significantly higher unemployment rates than Finns despite being a far younger population group generally, though the rates vary greatly by nationality. Silverman (1999) states have adopted legalized attitude towards foreigners; are attitudes that vary depending on nationality or presumed reasons for immigration (Silverman, 1999).

2.4 General Theories on Ethnic and Racial Exclusion

In order to answer these questions, I will use previously accumulated theoretical knowledge to derive typical propositions for explaining cross-national and inter-individual differences in ethnic or racial exclusion. This is intended to give useful foundations for some of the challenges that West African immigrants can face in the Finnish labour market even with Finnish qualifications. In a series of previous publications (Coenders and Scheepers, 1998; Coenders, 2001; Lubbers, 2001; Scheepers et al., 2002a, 2002b; Lubbers et al., 2002; Gijssberts et al., 2004), I set out to explore two paradigms we consider to be complementary, i.e. Realistic Conflict Theory and Social Identity Theory. Realistic

Conflict Theory is the proposition that competition over scarce resources between social groups is considered the catalyst of antagonistic inter-group attitudes, and this has been underlined by two quite different traditions, both dating back to the fifties. Social psychological experiments have shown that competition between groups improves solidarity within a specific group and increases hostility between groups (Sherif and Sherif 1969; 1979).

Sociologists have focussed on societal causes of group conflicts as well as on societal conditions under which these conflicts arise. Coser (1956) claimed that each social system is characterised by competition over scarce resources (material resources, power and status) between social groups, such as ethnic and racial groups. In this theoretical tradition, Blalock (1967) made an analytical distinction between, on the one hand, actual competition and, on the other hand, perceived competition. He used 'actual competition' to refer to macro- or meso-level socio-economic conditions such as the availability of scarce resources and market mechanisms regulating the distribution of these scarce resources. Moreover, he suggested that actual competition may also refer to a micro level, i.e. competition between individuals from ethnic and racial groups that hold similar social positions, for instance, work in similar niches of the labour market. Blalock proposed that these actual competitive conditions might affect the majorities' perceptions of competition that is the subjectively perceived socio-economic threat on the part of ethnic out groups, which in turn may induce hostile, unfavourable stances toward these out-groups.

This argument was explained in a similar fashion by Bobo (1988), building on Blumer (1958), who proposed a relationship between 'external threat' and 'perceived threat' to explain opposition to racial policies. Next, empirical studies have shown that hostile, unfavourable attitudes toward out-groups are often strongly related to in-group favouritism (e.g. Adorno et al., 1950/1982; 3 Levine and Campbell 1972; Brewer 1986; Scheepers et al., 1990). This phenomenon may be explained in terms of a second paradigm we refer to, i.e. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1981, 1982; Turner 1982; Brown, 1995), according to which individuals have the fundamental need to perceive their

in-group as superior to ethnic out-groups. Subsequently, they apply favourable characteristics that they perceive among members of the in-group to themselves via mental processes labelled as social identification, and they value out-groups negatively via mechanisms of social contra-identification. It is obvious that these mechanisms may have their effects, even under conditions of actual absence of ethnic out-groups, and therefore may explain the prevalence of anti-Semitism without Jewish people being around in the social contexts of majority people (Tajfel, 1981). Now, I propose that under competitive conditions, central to Realistic Conflict Theories, these processes may intensify.

Therefore, I consider Social Identity Theory to complement to propositions from Realistic Conflict Theory, which I refer to as Ethnic Competition Theory, summarised in a core proposition: competition, at an individual as well as at a contextual level, may reinforce the mechanisms of social identification and contra-identification, the eventual outcome of which is referred to as ethnic or racial exclusionism. The importance of this presentation is that within the academic arena, no matter the legal provisions in modern democratic societies like Finland where statutes have made adequate provisions for immigrant rights in the labour market, the truth remains that real life experiences of immigrants in Helsinki shows various forms of exclusion arising from ethnic and racial prejudices in the labour market. At times these may be unintended but remain manifest within the perception of the immigrants. This apparent reality will eventually be tested from the responses of the respondents based on real life experiences in the subsequent chapters.

3 UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN FINLAND

Generally immigrants believe that Northern Europe is an ‘Eldorado’, a land flowing with milk and honey where everything is in abundance including well paid jobs. This explains why many African and indeed West African immigrants will do everything possible to migrate in search of greener pastures. Part of this quest is to acquire tertiary education in Finland in order to enhance their job prospects. It is also important to note that like every other country on the face of this earth, Finland also has her own unemployment challenges arising from the global economic recession and the stiff competition emerging from the Asian angle. Needless to say that Finland recovered from the severe economic depression it underwent at the beginning of the 1990's during which the unemployment rate rose at an alarming rate. For several consecutive years until the year 2008, the unemployment rate has been declining.

Table 1: Unemployment Rates in Finland, EA16 and EU27 (adapted from Trading Economics & Dahlskog, 2010)

Year	Finland	EA16	EU27
	Unemployment Rate (%)		
2001	9,1	8,2	
2002	9,1	8,7	
2003	9,0	8,9	
2004	8,8	9,1	
2005	8,4	8,8	
2006	7,7	7,9	
2007	6,8	7,4	
2008	6,4	8,2	7,5
2009	8,7	10,0	9,5

Table 1 shows the national unemployment rate in Finland, the unemployment rate of the Euro zone (EA16) and the European Union (EU27). During the past decade in Finland, the unemployment rate decreased for seven consecutive years between the years 2001-2008. However, in 2009, the unemployment rate was 8.7 percent in comparison to the year 2008 when the rate was about 6, 4 percent. Due to the most recent economic crisis, most countries in Europe and in the rest of the world as well, have experienced a negative trend regarding unemployment rates. Although the national unemployment rate in Finland is below the EU average of 10 percent, the unemployment rates of foreign citizens living and working in Finland is still considerably higher than it is for the rest of the country and the EU average. (Fin facts).

However, recent realities have shown that the Nordic countries which include Finland are faring much more better in term of economic stability and employment prospects, Southern, Central and indeed substantially sound economies of Britain and France are currently groaning with the Greek and Spanish economies almost in ruins and in need of urgent excruciating bail outs. When you compare the Finnish economy to these, the difference is obvious that Finland is a lot more stable and the economy vibrant. More so, compared with Western African realities, Finland is a place to be for immigrants from countries where more than 50% of the population live below the poverty line.

3.1 Comparison of Immigrant Employment Rates

Deriving from statistics, one can note, that people of certain nationalities have higher representation in the Finnish labour market than those from other nationalities or geographical areas. This might be the result of several different factors such as level of education, language barriers and also cultural differences. In some cases, the differences are remarkable. As we were able to see in Table 2, the national unemployment rate of Finland was 8.7 percent in 2009. The unemployment statistics for foreigners however, is at a rate of 20 percent which is more than twice as high as the national rate (statistics from 2007).

The largest immigrant groups in the Finnish labour market come from Russia, Estonia and Sweden. Table 2 shows that the unemployment rate of Swedes living in Finland was estimated to be around 9 percent in 2007, the corresponding national unemployment rate in 2007 was 6.8 percent. The second largest group in the Finnish labour market, the Estonians, have an unemployment rate of 10 percent whilst the biggest group, Russians have an unemployment rate of 30 percent.

Table 2. Immigrants Unemployment Rates (Adapted from Dahlskog, 2010)

Citizenship	Labour Force (2005)	Unemployment rate (regional labour statistics)					Estimate of the Ministry of Labour		
		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2005	2006	2007
Russia	11720	42	39	39	36	34	39	35	30
Estonia	8734	20	18	16	15	14	16	12	10
Sweden	3847	17	16	17	16	15	11	10	9
United Kingdom	1773	12	12	14	14	11	13	11	10
Germany	1641	11	11	11	11	11	11	9	6
Turkey	1439	32	31	31	30	27	30	27	23
Somalia	1345	58	60	62	60	59	62	58	53
Serbia	1246	59	56	53	53	45	41	45	38
Thailand	1221	30	29	30	30	27	29	25	22
China	1215	10	9	9	10	8	10	8	7
Iraq	1075	75	73	70	66	64	67	66	62
Iran	928	62	61	61	55	51	60	54	47
USA	893	9	11	10	11	13	12	11	10
Vietnam	774	43	42	42	45	43	48	43	40
Italy	669	16	15	20	17	16	17	13	12
France	650	10	11	13	13	12	14	11	10
Afghanistan	502	...	69	66	75	64	66	62	54
Norway	352	15	15	15	14	13	12	10	8
Morocco	350	50	45	47	46	49	50	47	44
Others	14454								
Foreigners total	54828	31	28	29	27	25	28	24	20

As we discover in Table 2, the immigrants working in Finland with the lowest unemployment rates are EU citizens and the highest rates are those of immigrants from the

Middle East and Northern Africa. With an unemployment rate of 62 percent in 2007, Iraqi citizens have the highest unemployment rates followed by Afghani with 54 per-cent, Somali citizens with 53 percent and Iranian with 47 percent. The majority of Finland's immigrants live in the capital region, and the employment situations for immigrants is reportedly better there than in the rest of the country. According to Helsingin Sanomat (2005) Finnish education and work experience is valued more than the foreign equivalences, and this is a contributing factor to the high unemployment rates of immigrants who consequently are forced to change their professions in order to be able to penetrate the labour market. (Helsingin Sanomat International Edition, 2005)

Language does have an impact on the unemployment rates. A good command of the Finnish language means easy communication and this is also a contributing factor in the case of Estonians in the Finnish labour market. Estonian and Finnish are similar languages and the cultures are alike and therefore it is easy for an Estonian to communicate with a Finnish person and vice versa. Russians generally have a high level of education, a fact that has not seemed to make a great impact on their unemployment rate which was estimated to be around 30 percent in 2007. Table 3 shows that 19 people originating from western countries generally experience low unemployment rates, which are almost similar to the national employment rates. Although research has shown that the prospects for immigrants to find jobs increases the longer they have stayed in Finland, there seems to be an exception for people originating from the Middle East and from the former Yugoslavia who still experience poor employment rates on the Finnish labour market.

Another group with a significantly high rate of unemployment is that of the Somali immigrants who represent one of the largest immigrant groups in Finland. Koivukangas (2003) writes that it is unfortunate that the "increase in immigration to Finland took place in a period when the country was struck by heavy depression" which occurred in the early 1990s, a fact that is also pointed out by Helsingin Sanomat International Edition (2005) by stating that regard-less of the fact that a lot of the Somali immigrants have Finnish educations in fields that are experiencing a shortage of labour, they are still experiencing difficulties in finding jobs. It is difficult to find an explanation to this other than that this

treatment of the Somali is a result of negative attitudes and impressions, probably stemming from the time of the economic depression. (Helsingin Sanomat International Edition, 2005)

Although such factors as language and culture most likely play a role in the employment situations of foreigners, there are other underlying factors that need to be considered. Marsh (2005) discusses the 'race relations' perspective, a theory that explains why society treats ethnic minorities differently. In certain situations, members of minorities are defined by their distinctive identities and by the way they are treated socially, and consequently certain races are being disfavoured in, for instance employment related matters. Minority groups thus tend to become victimized and classified as 'racially disadvantaged', a fact that might evoke negative attitudes from the ethnic majority. Marsh uses the following quote by Richard Maudling (quoted in Marsh 2005, 319) in his book "Sociology: making a sense of society": "Difficulty in race relations arises from the speed of the arrival of immigrants and their concentration in certain areas. This has led to social changes being imposed on the people already living in those areas, who perhaps find it hard to accept them. (Marsh 2005, 319) This quote by Maudling supports the thoughts of Koivukangas (2003) who believes that the reasons for which certain immigrant groups are being treated unequally in the labour market is due to the circumstances under which they came to Finland and therefore the attitudes towards foreigners is already enrooted in the attitudes of the natives.

4 LABOUR MARKET THEORIES AND THE CHALLENGES OF IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION INTO FINNISH SOCIETY

All over the world, immigrants face interesting challenges in the labour market of their resident countries. The bulk of these challenges arise from overt and covert social exclusion inherent in social relations in virtually every society on earth. Part of this could be rooted in ethnic and racial prejudices and or as a result of competition for scarce resources where foreigners are maligned for coming to share that little opportunity that is enough for the natives. This has been treated in detail in the preceding chapters of the work. In the same vein, Carita Dahlskog (2010) reviewing profusely the works of Marsh (2005) discusses a theory called "the dual labour market theory" according to which, the labour market is divided into two sectors: primary and secondary. Distinguishing factors in the primary market are for instance high salaries, good working conditions and prospects et cetera, and this market attracts the so called "stable" workers. The secondary market on the other hand is quite the opposite, the common traits are for example bad working conditions, low salaries and insecurity, and this market attracts the so called "unstable workers" which are for instance ethnic minorities and women. Fine (1998) states that "the labour market is treated as an uneven playing field, whose surface irregularities are a simple reflection of discrimination." (Marsh, 2005, 333; Fine, 1998, 213)

The employment situations of foreigners in Finland shows that there lies some truth in the dual labour market theory in the sense that there is a high representation of foreigners in fields that would be categorized as secondary market positions. This might also relate to other factors such as language, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.1 Equal Opportunities

In order for an organization to attain the most efficient results in terms of resourcefulness, which is to say hiring the right person for the right job, it is crucial that factors such as

ethnicity, race, gender, marital status et cetera. are not a hinder in the recruitment process. In an ideal situation, equality of opportunity is to be practiced at all times when procuring staff; people are after all considered to be the most valuable of an organisation's assets. In order to successfully implement equal opportunity policies, the reasons for doing so as well as the objectives, must be identifiable in order for changes in attitudes to be possible (Pilbeam and Corbridge 2002, 173-174). While the above assertion is laudable to ensure maximum efficiency in organisations, realities on ground tend to show that this is not always the case as different form of prejudices exists and whether the Finnish labour market treats West African immigrants fairly would be seen in the work.

4.2 Legislation Concerning Integration

It has been widely acknowledged that immigrants face a lot of integration challenges in their countries of residence. The International Labour organisation also notes that immigrants should adequately be integrated into their new environments and countries of residence to function optimally. United Nations (UN) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have been at the forefront of labour rights legislations and the protection of the human right of migrant workers for nearly a century. A good number of their conventions are also especially centred on the rights of migrant workers. The following ILO conventions namely;

Convention on Migration for Employment (C97, 1949) and the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention (C143, 1975), are the conventions that directly advocate for migrant workers. Convention C97 advocated for the protection of the labour rights of legally resident migrants or immigrants, while Convention C143 promotes the protection of the basic human rights of all migrant workers.

However, the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Right of Migrant Workers and members of their families (ICRWM) is the only overreaching international mechanism that specifically addressed both the human rights and labour rights of the

migrant workers. From my perspective, ICRWM provides the best international legal framework for the protection of migrant workers globally. The opponents of this convention accused it of encroaching into their national immigrant policies and making their boundaries porous to the future illegal economic migrants. European Union in general and Finland in particular is yet to sign and ratify this convention. Part of the best ways to guarantee the rights of immigrants is to have them fully integrated into the society by fully removing all obstacles that could hamper their psychosocial functioning in their country of residence. In the light of this many countries have tried a lot of integration policies that will generally ensure that immigrants become part and parcel of their country of residence and by so doing contribute their utmost to the development of these countries. Consequently, conscious of this fact, most countries make concerted efforts to guarantee the integration of immigrants.

The Finnish authorities in pursuit of this enacted legislative frameworks that reinforce integration of immigrants. When facing a new environment for a significant period of time, immigrants are confronted with the ability to integrate into the host society is of utmost importance for a complete and amicable transition into the new surroundings. However, this might not always happen completely without the help of external forces and therefore, there are measures that can be taken into action in order to ensure that immigrants are receiving all the assistance they are entitled to in the process of integration. The act in which these measures are described is called "Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers 493/1999" (Integration Act) which took effect on 1 May 1999. For the purpose of this study, mainly the measures concerning the integration of immigrants will be discussed.

Although Koivukangas (2003) points out that the negative attitudes towards certain minority groups might be explained through the economic history of the country, there are also social aspects that ought to be taken into consideration. Zegers de Beijl (2000) states that the reluctance to effectively implement anti-discrimination measures as fundamental parts of integration policies by governments of countries that receive immigrants who live

legally and on a permanent basis, might unintentionally contribute to the disintegration of society. Other contributors to disintegration may be employers who do not recognize their corporate responsibility. The probability of inequality occurring is increased when discrimination is not addressed. (Zegers de Beijl 2000, 5)

4.3 The Integration Act

The main aim of the Integration Act is to promote the participation and the influence that immigrants have in the Finnish society and thus improving the management of matters of a social and economic nature of the immigrants. The Act includes methods on how to promote integration as well as equality and freedom of choice. It is important that the culture and language of the foreigner or immigrant is preserved whilst simultaneously taking part in the functions of society and working life. The fact that there is a need for authorities to seek the promotion of immigrant integration and that there are resources allotted for these measures, shows that individual development is something that will not happen by itself, nor is complete integration a quick process, on the contrary, it might take several years and is highly dependent on the attitudes of the society that the immigrant is surrounded by. (Government report no 5 of 2002, 4 - 8)

In order to allow successful integration and to optimize the chances of employment, knowledge of either one of the two official languages Finnish or Swedish is almost always required and this also aids in reaching another of the main objectives, which is to develop rapport between Finns and immigrants. Another important step in the integration process is for the immigrants to acquire knowledge and appreciation of the Finnish culture and what it comprises, this includes learning about the Finnish life-style, legal system and working life. Integration is not something that happens through isolating immigrants, and although the Integration Act does not specify what exactly is meant by preserving a culture, upon implementation of the Act, the Finnish Parliament specifically stressed the fact that care is to be taken to make sure that the measures taken to fulfil the objectives of the Integration Act do not infringe upon the rights of the immigrants to their own cultures and languages. (Government report no 5 of 2002, 4-8)

4.4 Non-Discrimination Act

The Non-Discrimination Act entered into force in February, 2004. The purpose of the Non-Discrimination Act is to enable and improve legal protection for people who have been discriminated under conditions stated in this Act. The Act specifies what qualifies as discrimination. Both direct and indirect discrimination due to any of the following reasons is prohibited by the act: personal features and characteristics, ethnic origin, national origin, religion, language, sexual orientation, health, disabilities, age, gender. (Ministry of Labour, 2004). This section of the work has a very sound policy frame works aimed at non-discrimination and integration policies to ensure that immigrants are adequately protected within the framework of the law. Furthermore, on the basis of these provisions, the labour market is supposed to be a level playing field for everyone in Finland especially with persons with equivalent educational qualifications and experience. However, just as in other societies, in practice this may not be so because of the obvious prejudices enumerated in the previous chapters. More so, the real life experiences of the respondents in this research work will give us useful insights to the extent that these values apply in the Finnish society.

5 FINNISH LABOUR LEGISLATION

Since the work focuses on the labour market experience of West African immigrants with Finnish qualification, it is imperative to briefly review the Finnish labour legislations in order to see and understand the legal rights and privileges that the law bestows on workers when they enter into work relationship with employers. Before going further, I want to point out that the labour law of Finland does not discriminate between citizens and non citizens. It treats everybody equal irrespective of the individual's nationality. The law covers and protects all the legal workers in Finland, natives and foreigners alike as long as the employment relationship takes place within the Finnish territory. The Finnish labour legislation consists of laws that regulate employment relationship between an employer and an employee. The Labour legislation is divided into Acts, and each Act is devoted to a particular area or aspect of the employment relationship. The following are some of the most important Acts that regulate the employment relationship in Finland.

5.1 Employment Contract Act

Employment Contract Act (55/2011) is the latest reformed version of this Act. The Employment Contract Act enters into effect as a legal relationship when work is performed for an employer under his or her supervision, and when an employee receives remuneration for work done. Employment work contract is the legal bond or covenant between employer and employee. The highlights of this act are the decrees on the following;

- i. entering into an employment contract
- ii. the responsibilities of the employer and employee
- iii. the prohibition of discrimination (both in the employment relationship and
- iv. the recruitment process)
- v. the determination of the minimum terms of employment
- vi. the employee's right to family leave

- vii. laying off an employee
- viii. terminating the contract of employment
- ix. the liability for indemnity
- x. contracts of employment of international nature and (Employment Contracts Act 2001)

5.2 The collective Agreement Act (436/1946)

This act contains the central principles of collective bargaining. The two important functions of this act is that firstly, it provides guarantees and determines employees' benefits, and secondly it contains the obligations to maintain industrial peace at work place. The Collective Agreement takes place between employer's trade union and employee's union. The trade unions are the associations responsible for the protection of the interest of the both parties to ensure equity and fairness. It is the work of the bargaining parties to agree on the conditions of the employment contract and employer employee relationship. The collective agreement becomes binding by consent and endorsement of an employer and an employee. The collective agreement details the workers' rights, privileges and obligation, including penalties for defaulting. It equally explains employer's rights, privileges and obligations toward the employees. Majority of contracts in Finland involves collective agreement. (Employment Contracts Act 2001)

5.3 Non-Discrimination Act (21/2004) and prohibitions of discrimination

The purpose of this act in Finnish labour law is to guarantee equal treatment of all employment-seekers and employees, and discourage discrimination at the work place.

The right to equal and non-discriminatory treatment is one of the basic rights of every worker or prospective worker in Finland. This act requires employers to treat all the employees equally in all ramifications. It applies to recruitment, working conditions, promotion in the career, education and the conditions of enterprising and support for work

activities. Discrimination arising from age, ethnic or country of origin, language, religion, belief, opinion, health status, disability, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics, is outlawed by this Act. The act also stipulates penalty for offenders and compensation for the offended. Discrimination in employment relationship carries a maximum amount of 15,000 euro, of which a court can award more amounts depending on the seriousness of the case (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs, 2005).

5.4 The working Hours Act (605/ 1996)

This act is applicable to employees of industries, civil services, municipality officials, federations of the municipalities and other public sectors. It stipulates that regular working hours may be based on 8-hour working day or 40-hour working week. The working hour is included in the collective agreement contract. There is a provision for private negotiation between the employer and the employee on the working hour based on certain condition; it should not exceed 52 weeks duration. Under this provision a worker can do 80 hours in two weeks or 120 hours in three weeks. Furthermore, the Act has provisions concerning overtime. Over time is defines as a work that exceeds number of hours allowed by law as regular working hours. It could be done either per day or per week. Daily overtime is done when a person exceed 8 hours during a 24 hours period or exceed regular 40 hours a week. 250 hours is the maximum an employer can allow in a year. Finally, overtime is remunerated with additional, higher pay: for the first two daily hours of overtime normal pay is increased by 50% and for the following hours by 100 %. Weekly over-time hours are increased by 50 %. The 12 first overtime hours of a two-week period and the 18 first hours of a three-week period are increased by 50 % and the following hours with double pay. Section 18 of this act states that employee's consent must be sought when the need for overtime arises, unless additional work has been part of the contract agreement, while section 33 of the act states that work done on Sunday should be calculated as twice the regular working hour. (Työsuojeluhallinto- Occupational safety and Health Administration; Ministry of Labour, 2005)

5.5 The Annual Holiday Act (162/ 2005)

This is the act that specifies the length of annual leave, holiday payment and the granting of annual leave. The Annual Holiday Act depends on the principle of earning, meaning that the holiday is earned by working during the holiday credit year starting from April 1st previous year to 31st of March of the new year. This Act is applied with certain regulations, for instance people who work for a minimum of 14 days in all the months are within the 14 day rule, while people who work for 35-hours in at least one of the months are within the 35 hours rule. 2 or 2.5 working annual leave are earned each month depending on the duration of employment. Every worker who has worked for over 12 months is entitled to paid annual holiday which should be calculated according to the employee's working hours per month. The following is calculated as working hours or days within a full holiday credit month; annual leave, sick leave, maternity or paternity leave, days of temporary child-care leave, study leave and days of layoffs as contained in the Act. (Työsuojeluhallinto- Occupational safety and Health Administration, Ministry of Labour)

5.6 Occupational and Safety Act (738/2002)

This Act provides legal backing for the improvement of work environment and working conditions in order to protect and sustain the workers' ability to exercise their contracted duties. The aim is to forestall and prevent work related accidents , occupational diseases and other dangers cause by work or work environment to the employees well being . This Act mandates the employers to take into consideration the well being of the workers while evaluating, planning and implementing measure relating to work place. It is the employers' duty to provide the health and safety instruction and guideline, while the employees are

obliged to follow the instructions for their own safety. (Työsuojeluhallinto- Occupational safety and Health Administration; Ministry of Labour, 2005)

6 OTHER WORKERS PREROGATIVE IN FINLAND

This covers other important rights that form part of general privileges of workers in Finland which are not explicitly mentioned in the Acts, but can be found from other sources such as trade unions documents and from Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

6.1 Accident insurance

A foreign person working for a Finnish employer in Finland must be provided with compulsory accident insurance. The insurance should cover accidents that occur at work place or accidents that occur on the process of coming to work.

6.2 Paid holiday Allowance

The following Finnish public holidays are paid holidays:

New Year's Day (1 January), Epiphany (6 January), Good Friday, Easter Monday

1 May, Ascension Day, Midsummer's Eve, Midsummer Day, Finnish Independence Day (6 December) , Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day (24, 25, and 26 December). All the work duties performed on the above mentioned holidays shall be compensated with additional payment according to collective agreement. (Palvelualojen Ammattiliito)

6.3 Evening and Night Bonuses

According to PAM (Palvelualojen Ammattiliito) which is the trade union for most service industries including cleaning companies , the following are allowances for evening and night work. The evening work bonus from (18:00 – 24:00) is 1.00 €/h, while the night work bonus from (24:00 – 06:00) is 1.95 €/h (PAM).

6.4 Extortionate work discrimination in Finland (Penal Code 47 3 a § (302/2004))

This penal code was introduced in Finland in the year 2004 after disclosure of the exploitation of Chinese stone workers in Finland. The crime of extortionate work discrimination can be interpreted as circumstances where the workers receive remuneration below the minimum wage, and where the condition of work is below standard. Furthermore, this criminal act could as well include the same ground as work discrimination (Penal Code 47 3 §). The work discrimination ground include race, nationality or ethnic origin, nationality, colour, language, sex, age, family status, sexual preference or state of health, religion, political opinion, political or industrial activity or a comparable circumstance. The crime of extortionate work discrimination is also applied in the case where foreign workers' ignorance has been exploited by employers (HE 151/2003, 1).

7 METHODOLOGY

In this section, based on my overall methodological approach, I will clarify how and why I selected my research methods. Research methods can be simply defined as a specific research technique for collecting data. In this regard any specific research method can be used in either qualitative or quantitative research strategies. However, since some research methods enable the researchers to get “deeper” knowledge about any phenomenon, some methods have closer associations with qualitative researches. For example, research methods such as observation, text and documents, interviews and audio/video recording are usually preferred in qualitative research strategies. Out of these methods, I had decided that interviews will be most useful and suitable concerning my research strategy before I started my fieldwork.

Although interviews as a research technique are widely used in social sciences, it is necessary to make a differentiation between different forms of interviews. In terms of the numbers of informants, “individual” and “paired” interviews can be accepted as two modes of them. The key feature of the first one is that it has the “ability to provide an undiluted focus on the individual” and a “detailed investigation of people’s personal perspective” (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, 36). Also, it may provide an “in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena are located and for very detailed subject coverage” (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, 36). The second type, paired interview, allows participants “to reflect on, and draw comparison with, what they hear from other” and enable researchers to investigate “subjects in which dialogue with others play an important part, or where two people form a naturally occurring unit” (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, 37). In my fieldwork, I mostly conducted individual interviews. In terms of the structure of the interviews, “structured”, “semi-structured” and “unstructured interviews” are accepted as three forms of interviews. Out of these forms, I preferred conducting semi-structured interviews, in which “researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of

leeway in how to reply”, “questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule”, and “questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewees” (Bryman 2004, 321).

7.1 Research Design

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001, 316), qualitative research design involves relatively small-scale studies for in-depth investigations with the aim of understanding social phenomena from the participants’ perspectives, using interactive strategies in real-life situations. I selected an essentially qualitative approach for data collection and analysis, as this study investigates the challenges faced by West African immigrants with Finnish academic qualifications in Helsinki, Finland. The aim of the researcher was to examine the labour market challenges that immigrants from West Africa in Helsinki area actually face on a daily basis regarding job opportunities in an intensely competing job environment. Therefore, I made an effort to gather as much of the true feelings, beliefs and ideals, experiences, thoughts and actions of the participants as possible, as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2006, 373).

Qualitative research was considered appropriate for this study because it enabled me to gain understanding and insight into the challenges faced by West African immigrants in Helsinki, Finland. This is to enable these challenges to be appreciated with a view to addressing them to promote the social policy of the Finnish government and in furtherance of social justice and egalitarian Finnish society.

I am a would be graduate myself and has shared the experiences of a lot other West African immigrants battling with job placements in Finnish private and public establishments after graduation from Finnish Universities, thus could relate to the

experiences of my colleagues. Perhaps as a result of this, participants seemed willing to share and discuss their problems and solutions with me on a personal level during the interviews. By interacting directly with West African immigrants with Finnish educational qualifications in Helsinki, Finland, I focused on what the issues or problems were regarding the challenges of competing in the Finnish labour market with other job seekers after graduation.

The data obtained from this technique was also supplemented with interpretive data. To gain a general understanding of the activities mentioned on the lists of the interview questions, I carried out semi-structured interviews with respondents. (Weller and Romney, 1988) The open-ended design of semi structured interviews allows for minimum control of informants' responses, yet because the same questions are asked, comparison across informants is possible (Bernard, 2002). All the interviews were tape recorded with the permission of each informant.

Generally, the study was conducted in a framework of qualitative research. This is because, I believe that qualitative research method will be the best way to let the target group speak for themselves. Above all, the application of phenomenological approach created a free space for the persons to narrate their own experiences in their own words (Husserl 1936; 1970). Similarly, phenomenologist's are of the view that a researcher using qualitative methods could gain access to the research subjects' meaning through their experiences (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007, 22).

Interviews were the means of data collection. Personal interviews were used. Research has shown that personal interviews make it possible for researchers to study social life through the view points, experiences and personal expressions of those passing through it (Boeije, 2010). My reason for choosing personal interview was to give each interviewee the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and to present them from personal perspective with own expression (Gubrium and Holstein 2000, 6). Unstructured questions

were asked to allow the interviewer to give the interviewees the opportunity to narrate their experiences without undue control and interruption. Semi-structured questions were asked to help the interviewees stick to the interview topic when they tend to divert to areas not necessary to the research. The target group for this study was the West African immigrants with Finnish qualifications resident in Helsinki. These target groups were selected through networking. The interview sessions were recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

Nowadays, this form of interviews, which means open-ended questions to small samples, are called as in-depth or qualitative interviews so as to show its differences from interviews used in quantitative researches. The crucial thing in this divergence is that there is a chance for the interviewer to make the interview in a more flexible mode, which includes in some cases unanswered and inconsistent questions, and unrecorded interviews (Bryman 2004, 332). In my fieldwork, the necessity of making interviews in social setting of job seekers compelled me to select such a flexible form. In my fieldwork, I also made some “informal interview” or “informal talks” besides semi-structured interviews. It is needed to define how I conceptualize informal interviewing. Rubin and Rubin (1995, 122-124), for instance, compare and contrast qualitative interviews with ordinary conversation, and admit that “as in ordinary conversations, only a few topic are covered in depth, and there are smooth transitions between the subjects”, and “people take turns speaking and acknowledge what the other has said”. They of course put the critical differences between two actions in the sense that “a normal conversation can drift along with little goal, but in the interviews, the researcher gently guides the discussion, leading it through stages, asking specific questions...” Since I have witnessed some difficulties in accessing respondents, most of my interviews (especially) with job seekers were made in limited time.

7.2 Research Process

Six persons were selected for the interview, and out of which five actually participated in the research exercise. The reason for the withdrawal of the other one respondent could not

be ascertained as he failed to turn up for the interview. Part of what I can deduce from the respondent who withdrew was the fact that he complained that he couldn't afford to keep the appointments with me because he had some job interviews to attend to. Out of the remaining five who participated in the interview three were males and two were females, two of the respondents came from Nigeria, one from Ghana and the other two from Cameroun. All the respondents live in Greater Helsinki area of Finland. In the same vein, all the respondents have completed university programmes in different Finnish Universities. Two of them have first and second degrees in Business; one has a Nursing degree while the last two has degrees in Plastic Technology and Intercultural Communication respectively. All the respondents have worked briefly in different Finnish establishments in the capacity of cleaners and dishwashers. One of the respondents just changed job from cleaning to housekeeping.

The timing and venue of the interviews were chosen by the interviewees themselves in order to make it easy for them to participate. Digital recorder was used to keep record of the conversations in order to help me remember everything said when I am doing transcribing. Heritage (1984, 238) was of the view that the method of recording and transcribing of interviews provide the following advantages in research processes:

- a) Assists the natural limitations of human memories and of the perceptive meaning that researchers may place on respondents' expressions.
- b) Give an opportunity for meticulous assessment of people's views;
- c) Allows for a crosscheck of respondents feedbacks.
- d) Create openness and provide opportunity for a public study of data and thereby giving room for a secondary analysis.
- e) Helps to vindicate researchers from the accusation of influencing the analysis with their values or prejudices
- f) Creates the opportunity for the data to be use in new researches (Heritage 2010, 238).

It must be stated clearly that the consent of the respondents were sought and obtained as part of the ethical consideration of the work. The longest interview session lasted for 1 hour, while the shortest session lasted for 40minutes.

The transcribing of the interviews from the digital recorder took 5 days to be completed. A total of 10 pages of A4 size papers were made from the transcription of the 5 interviews.

7.3 Data Analysis

This is a very crucial stage of the research enterprise. Jorgensen (1989, 107) posits analysis as splitting, setting apart or breaking of scientific data into small bits. After the points are broken into small sizes, the researcher arranges them according to types, classes, sequences processes, patterns or wholes. The reason for this system is to build or remake the information to make more meaning (Jorgensen 1989, 107). Consequently, the focus of data analysis is to create meaning from a network of social interactions.

I used thematic analysis in order to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method that comprises the main issues or themes arising in a body of evidence. Thematic analysis provides a means of organising and summarising the findings from a large, diverse body of research. It can handle qualitative and quantitative findings. (Pope, Mays and Popay 2007, 96.)

Further, Bogdan and Biklen, (1992) see data analysis as a technique of methodologically examining interview feedbacks, field notes and other research items gathered to help a researcher to understand them and be able to present them to others. Analysis includes working with research information, arranging them, splitting them into small parts, blending them, looking out for differences, noting the important lessons and making decision of what others should learn from the process (Bogdan and Biklen 1992, 153).

Data analysis is a very important aspect of all research studies, and a careful consideration is needed when choosing an analytic tool. Here for the purpose of the research work I

adopted a phenomenological analytic method which helped me to break down the data. In the process efforts were made to ensure the following; bracketing and phenomenological reduction, mark out important meanings, put meanings together to form themes, recapitulating all the interviews, validating and modifying them and bring out general and individual points from the interviews (Hycner, 1999).

The bracketing was done by listening to all the interviews and reading the transcripts made from them, mapping out similarities and differences in the personal experiences of each interviewee in regards to labour market experiences of West African immigrants with Finnish qualifications resident in Helsinki. Moreover, pulling the similarities and differences together helped me to understand the important themes in the labour market experiences of West African migrants with Finnish qualifications, and the pattern of occurrences of this social phenomenon. The experiences were split into parts and arranged under different themes. The process of arranging the data into themes is known as thematizing. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2010) define thematizing as the process of collecting together characteristics which occur several times in the interviews. The understanding is that pre-planned themes will be extracted from the interviews. It is the researcher who finally makes the theme based on his or her interpretation of the data (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2010, 173.)

7.4 Reliability and Validity of the Study

Reliability refers to the extent to which methods and measures used in the research convey reliable and useful data (Mateo, and Kirchholff 2009, 214). Validity and reliability are factors which any qualitative researcher should be anxious about while planning a study, analyzing results and judging the quality of the study (Patton 2001 cited in Golafshani, 2003) while validity questions if we are really measuring what we want to measure (Muijs 2000, 65).

Reliability and validity were required for this research in order to come out with correct results. Therefore the researcher ensures that the interview questions are not too short, too long and not vague to ensure that the questions are clear enough to be understood for adequate responses. The interview questions address the research problem and provide adequate answers to the research questions. For better understanding of the study, the results were grouped into categories where themes were later created to organize relevant information. In the same vein, Silverman (2008) defined validity as another word for truth (Silverman 2008, 210). In order to ensure validity of the data, the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the transcribed copies were sent to interviewees for cross checking.

7.5 Ethical Considerations

In the course of carrying out this research work, I made concerted efforts to ensure that all ethical standards required for research endeavours of this level are maintained and sustained throughout the research period. This is to guarantee the integrity of the research work and protect the respondents who volunteered to participate in the research work. The selected respondents were fully briefed on the nature of the research and their role and indeed risks (if any) in the course of the research. In the course of the research I also ensured confidentiality of the respondents' identity through the adoption of pseudo names to protect them from any form of identification and persecution because of their position and testimonies (Ethik-Kodex 1993, 15). All assurances were given to the respondents that their responses will be used for research purposes only and that data will be dispensed with after the research is concluded.

7.6 Limitation of the Work

This work cannot be said to be exhaustive as it is fraught with a lot of limitations: firstly it must be noted that researches of this nature may not be very free from author's prejudices

since it involves issues of possible discrimination. However, efforts were made to ensure that all sides were adequately covered to firm up the balancing of the viewpoints raised in the work. In the same vein, the challenge of scepticism is also there. As Brewer and Hunter (2006) explained that scepticism plays a reasonable and major part in every research (Brewer and Hunter 2006, 25). I tried my utmost to rigorously investigate the challenges faced by West African immigrants who have acquired Finnish educational qualifications in the labour market in terms of job prospects. The result was also presented as honestly as possible. This is not to say that the experiences of five immigrants can serve as the basis of generalisation, but it gives useful insights into this challenge and will guide the policy thrust of immigrants' participation in the Finnish labour market. Another research with a larger sample size and across races will probably dig deeper into the challenges of this group of immigrants.

8 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents my findings based on the responses received from the interviewees. Therefore, it describes the Labour market experiences of West African immigrants with Finnish qualifications; with a particular reference to those target groups resident in Helsinki.

8.1 Relevant Work Experience

This chapter presents the experiences of my respondents in relation to requisite work experience expected of them by employers.

Some of my interviewees narrated the issue of insufficient relevant work experience as a factor militating against their inability to secure their desired job in Finland. According to one of my interviewee, “I had my two last work placements in organizations that are not directly related to my field of study. I just go there every day to sit down, check my emails and sometime even use Face book”. This in my opinion will leave the intern with little or no hands-on-ground training or experience that will enable the intern properly fit into the labour market after completing his/her studies. Therefore, if an employer honestly refuses to hire a prospective employee on the grounds of insufficient work experience, such an employer can be considered to have taken the right step. The reason being that hiring a new employee that will require extra training may not be cheap for the employer. This in my opinion may be the reason why most employers will rather prefer to hire an experienced worker rather than one with a lesser experience on the job. Studies have revealed that relevant work experience can be seen as intrinsically valuable by employers, who often seek evidence of it during recruitment in the believe that a range of workplace experiences will better equip graduates for the flexible workplace of the future (Harvey, L., Geall, V., Moon, S., Aston, J., Bowes, L. Blackwell, A. 1998).

Another interviewee also narrated how difficult it was to find an internship place in Helsinki where the working language is English. This according to my interviewee made him to accept any place he finds just to fulfill the internship requirement for him to graduate. This in turn hinders their future employment after graduation, as they will be left with little or no work experience to enable them to be hired. One of my respondents said: “Students are not often helped to find the right placement places by their institutions, as a result, the students go ahead to find organizations that are not even relevant to the module of the placement”. This means that if these foreign students are helped to find relevant placement places, they will be able to acquire the required skills expected of them by the labour market after graduation. This may to a large extent promote their employment chances.

In a survey on ‘graduate early experience of the labour market’ carried out in Manchester, relevance of work experience in gaining appropriate employment was one of the key findings of the survey. Nearly 48 percent of graduates felt that relevant work experience in a similar organization was an important factor in enabling them to obtain their jobs (Purcell, K., Pitcher, J. and Simm, C., 1999, 16).

8.2 Disadvantaged group in competitive job recruitment

In today’s global labor market, certain groups of people are considered as disadvantaged group in terms of competition for few job opportunities available. This group includes fresh graduates with little or no working experience, persons with disability, women especially nursing mothers, person nearing their retirement age and migrants seeking for employments outside the borders of their native countries (OECD-Thomas and Georges, 2008). Analyzing labor outcomes in Belgium, France, Netherlands and Portugal over a period of time, the OECD was of the view that migrants who are part of the labor

disadvantaged group stand little chance when they are faced in Job competition with their counterparts who are natives of the countries where they seek employment (OECD-Thomas and Georges, 2008). Some of my interviewees revealed that in Helsinki most employers are more likely to fill up a job vacancy with a native than a foreign even if the foreigner holds same qualification and experience like the native job applicant. This point was emphasized by Somerville and Sumpton (2009), describing the situation in the UK as regards migrants disadvantage position in Job recruitment competition, these authors believe that in high skilled labour, migrants stand at disadvantaged position against the natives in Job market because of the following factors namely, lack of language fluency, inadequate knowledge of the destination country's working culture, prejudices against migrants race, and lack of knowledge of the labour laws of the destination or residence country (Somerville and Sumpton, 2009).

However, from the analysis of the data of the interview, two of my interviewees believed that they stand little chance when faced with competition with their Finnish counterparts who holds similar qualifications as themselves. One of my interviewee said, "Most of my Finnish classmates who graduated the same day with me have been able to find work in their field of study few weeks after graduation while my job applications to these same companies, firms and organizations that employed my Finnish counterparts were not replied". The same interviewee further stressed that, "Some were told that there was no vacancy, while others were either told that their working experience was inadequate for the job applied, or that they do not possess the required language skills for the job position they applied for".

8.3 Covert and Overt Discrimination in the labor Market in Helsinki by Respondents

In the course of the interview, the respondents also appear to be a bit unanimous with regards to discrimination in the labour market in Helsinki while looking for job. Although the intensity of discrimination expressed by the respondents varied from mild to severe, it

also showed a marked departure from their university experience. They agreed that racial segregation exists in the real life situation of the Finnish labour market. Indeed my respondents agreed that blacks appear to be the most segregated against because of the obvious skin colour. While the Finnish government has done a lot to stem racial prejudice, the Finnish society shows racist bias especially in the private sector where most of the jobs are found. One of the respondents actually admitted that he was invited for an interview but later turned down in what he felt was racist since he was not given any good reason. One of my interviewee disclosed that, “A grocery shop recruited an eastern European instead of me even though I did better in the interview”. For this respondent the only explanation may be segregation based on colour. Immigrants even with qualifications from their resident countries have always faced discrimination. However, this is not unique to Finland.

In some cases, academic qualifications of immigrants are usually devalued even though they are obtained in their country of residence. For instance in Canada, even though the literature suggests that the factor of race and ethnic origin can adversely affect immigrants' earnings, it is not always clear whether it is racial origin, credentials, or other features that are disadvantaged. It seems that studies that analyze self-reported immigrants' experiences of discrimination demonstrate more explicitly how race and ethnicity influence the devaluation of immigrants' human capital. For instance, Basran and Zong (1998) surveyed foreign-trained Indo- and Chinese-Canadian professionals in Vancouver, reported that 65 per cent of respondents perceived discrimination on the basis of their skin colour, and 69 per cent mentioned national or ethnic origin as the factors that influenced the devaluation of their human capital (Basran and Zong, 1998, 12). In other words, Basran and Zong argue that visible minority immigrants in professional fields attributed their downward social mobility in Canada also to the problem of discrimination based on ethnic or racial origin.

In sum, the studies suggest that visible minority immigrants do not have the same chances in the Canadian labour market as majority member immigrants. Race, ethnicity, and country of origin can be considered to be an important factor that affects the devaluation of

immigrants' human capital in Canada. This Canadian experiment is common place in most advanced capitalist countries of the world. Even in the developing countries, ethnic and racial segregation exists although it varies in intensity. Part of the explanation given by experts is that it is a manifestation of the struggle for scarce economic resources and it is fairly endemic in most societies. One of the respondents actually revealed that, he is not bothered about it since the prospects of securing at least a means of livelihood is higher in Finland than his West African country of origin. He actually stated that, "In my country in Africa, the level of ethnic segregation in job placement is far higher than what I am experiencing here. I still prefer Finland to my country". Another respondent also stated that, "These whites are good if they trust you, some of them have a very large heart". More so the Finnish government have intensified integration programmes aimed at building a country that respects people of all colours. Time and proper orientation will actually deepen the integration process in Finland and reduce segregation.

8.4 Language Barrier, Immigrants and the Finnish Labor Market

The importance of good working knowledge of a country's language is a major determination of job prospects. Interviewees were asked their proficiency in both Finnish and Swedish languages which are the working languages. Almost all the respondents, four out of five had already acquired university in their countries before immigrating to Finland for graduate studies. One major challenge all expressed was their inability to communicate in neither Finnish nor Swedish languages, which are the two official languages in Finland. Consequently, employers were reluctant to hire persons with poor working language of the resident country. Some countries insist that employees undergo language training to be able to cope with job placements. In the same vein some countries will design incentives in terms of wage differentials to ensure that immigrants learn the working language(s). In fact, three of the respondents revealed that they were in Finnish language school, but could not cope and decided to discontinue. One of my respondent said, "The deeper I went into the study of Finnish language, the more complex it becomes for me to understand, and so I

decided to quit”. It beats my imagination on how an immigrant can expect to succeed without a proper working knowledge of the country of resident. In a research conducted by Li, Reitz, Ferrer and Riddell (2008) in Canada has shown the knowledge of a working language of English and French is not just an asset but leads to increased earnings by immigrants.

The results of this research, regarding the significance of immigrants’ educational degrees, are consistent with previous studies on the impact of educational credentials on immigrants’ earnings (Li 2001, 2008; Reitz 2001; Ferrer and Riddell 2008). Speaking English or French as a first language and years in Canada since immigration also had a positive impact on immigrants’ earnings. In Finland this is not an exception as evidence abounds to show that Finnish language mastery is a good requirement for job placement for immigrants. In fact, two of the respondents acknowledged that a good working knowledge of Finnish and Swedish languages would have fetched them not just a good job but a well paid job.

8.5 Psychosocial Factors Inhibiting the Respondents

Psychosocial refers to the stages of individual’s life from birth to death and focuses on social/environmental influences that interact with physical and psychological growth of the individual (Roeklein, 1998). The main aim of this definition in this research is not to delve deep into his psychosocial theory, but rather to highlight the point that psychosocial factors such as inferiority complex and discouragement can inhibit job applicants from applying for job position due to social and environmental influences. A job applicant might feel within him or herself that he or she is not competent enough to apply for job in certain companies or organisations. While it is possible that someone could be discouraged from applying for job because people he or she knows who are in same status with him or her have tried in the past and were unsuccessful.

For instance, the analysis of the research data revealed that some of the respondents have encountered psychosocial challenges while attempting to apply for job. One of my respondents said, “I seem to lack self confidence in making job applications for jobs in my field of study because most of my friends who graduated before me had still not been able to secure employment in their fields”. I consider this kind of attitude in my respondents as an issue self defeat, which to a large extent could hinder their job search in the Finnish labour market. While another two of my respondents confessed that they did not consider themselves comfortable nor fit to work in certain organisations assumed to be dominated by whites. One of them actually admitted that the same job he failed to apply for as a reason of having low confidence for the job position was picked up by another immigrant from same continent.

In this regard, the respondents lack of confidence in themselves play major role in their inability to get employment in their field of education. One of my respondent also revealed that discouragement equally play major role in foreign students inability to be employed in their field of study after studies in Finland. According to one of my respondent, “It is often the case that if A, B, C and D are international students who know each other while studying. A, B and C completed their studies and were unsuccessful in securing employment in Finland. When D finally completes his or her own studies he or she may conclude that immigrant students are not employable in Finland and so there is no point he or she attempting to apply for job”. This in my opinion may consequently lead to self defeat, which could impede further search for career employment.

However, although I was unable to find relevant literature or previous research to back up this particular finding; I feel compelled to explain this point in this research work because I found it very necessary information which previous researchers might not have uncovered during their research. On the personal level, I see myself having feeling of discouragement that it might be difficult to get employment in a professional career in Finland after studies since high percentage of international students I know who graduated from Finnish higher institutions have not been able to find job in their field of studies.

Although this challenge is not common to all the respondents it remains a strong issue since it is apparent that some other immigrants may be facing similar challenges silently.

8.6 Technological Gap

Another key discovery is a substantial technological gap between Finland and Africa. Most of the respondents already have university education in Africa before going for graduate studies in Finland. Gaps in Information Technology are so wide that the few years in Finland may not easily fill. One of my respondents said, “I find it difficult to apply for any job that requires demonstration of my IT skills; because I do not have any form of skills in that respect, in fact, I was opportune to use computer for the first time in my life in Finland”. You therefore have real situations where some immigrants from Africa may not have the requisite IT skills which are needed to be added to whatever Finnish University qualification for the enhancement of job prospects. Africa lags behind a lot and countries like India though battling with development challenges have advanced IT culture and by the time they migrate to Finland they already have a competitive advantage over African immigrants in IT knowledge and therefore find jobs easily. African immigrants tend to start from the scratch in IT knowledge and this affect their job prospects in Finland. One of my respondents said, “I was invited for a job interview by a company in Helsinki, and as part of the interview process, I was asked to demonstrate my skills in MS word and excel, and was unable to do so, and was not given the job”. The inability of this respondent to secure this job could be traced back to the poor IT skills he had back home.

Kofi Annan (1999) warns that “although the development of IT in Africa holds one of the greatest promises humanity has known, and offers the best chance yet for developing countries to take their rightful place in the global economy; one mission of African leaders is to ensure access as widely as possible”. This means that, IT accessibility should be strongly encouraged among our growing youths. To Koffi Annan, if the issue of wide IT

accessibility is not timely addressed, it will widen the gap between the haves and have-nots. In other words, it will widen the gap between the technology-rich and the technology-poor. This existing gap in technology between the western countries and developing countries have tremendously affected most West African graduates to be able to measure up in terms of demonstrating their IT skills in interviews, and this has to an extent affected their job prospects in Finland.

Mule (2000) observes that globalisation benefits those with technology, resources, information and access to markets. He further stressed that, IT is increasingly playing an important role in organizations and in society's ability to produce, access, adapt and apply information'. Most of my respondents narrated how they were unable to get hired in certain jobs as a result of their inability to proof their IT skills. This to my interviewees can be traced back to the poor background in IT they had back home.

8.7 Degree programs irrelevant to the demand of the labour Market

One of the important points made by most interviewees is the fact that some of the degree qualifications obtained in Finland are not in high demand in Finnish labour Market, or in some instances they are totally irrelevant to the market demand by public and private sectors. According the Finnish National Board of Education, Finnish polytechnic degrees are higher education degrees with a professional emphasis. The main mission of Finnish polytechnics is to provide higher education for professional expert assignments based on the requirements of the world of work and its development as well as on research and artistic premises. According to Finnish government policy decisions, polytechnics focus on high-quality education relevant to the world of work and on applied research and development specifically geared towards supporting small and medium-sized business activities and service sector (Hanhijoki, Katajisto , Kimari, and Savioja, 2009). However, two of my respondents disclosed that, "Some of the polytechnics which are the major recruiters of international students run some programs which are not in high demand in the

labour market. For instance there are some polytechnics that run degree programs in Plastic Technology, Corporate Governance, and Intercultural Communication”.

According to one of my interviewee most graduates from these programs with immigrant background often find it difficult to find jobs. For instance, since there is no big plastic market in Finland, there is consequently little demand for the graduates of this degree program, and in most cases indigenous students are given the few job offers available. The conclusion is that those international students who study these degree programs may end up not having an opportunity to develop their professional career in same field in which they obtained their degrees.

9 CONCLUSION

At this juncture I must say that I have made sustained effort to investigate the challenges faced by immigrants who enter the Finnish labour market in search for jobs after graduating from universities in Finland. Several literatures were reviewed to investigate possible challenges faced by immigrants in Finnish labour market. These social realities exist in various forms. As a West African immigrant in a Finnish university, I will soon graduate and enter the labour market as well and probably battle with the challenges I have enumerated above. Perhaps one major advantage I may have acquired is the fact I now fully know the challenges of immigrant graduates and in so doing I may have the opportunity to fix these challenges to suit my situation. The research work will also inspire further research into the wider dimensions of these challenges with a view to advising policy makers appropriately. Cases of covert/overt discrimination, language difficulty, competitive Finnish labour market, insufficient work experience, psychosocial challenges, irrelevant degree programs to the labour market and technological gaps were found to be the challenges that West Africans with Finnish qualifications face in the Finnish labour market. While the findings cannot be used to generalise, it serves as a useful guide for further research.

Finally, I wish to state here that all the responses from my interviewees are their own personal experiences, and the personal experiences from only five West African immigrants used for this research cannot be seen as the whole truth, or used to generalise the whole issue of this target group not able to find employment in Finland after graduation.

10 DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATION

This section offer series of discussions and conclude the research work in ways that will offer useful recommendations to readers and Finnish authorities alike. As a West African immigrant I am fully acquainted with challenges of finding jobs in Finland after graduation. This apparent fear is real to many immigrants of African origin. Issues of racial segregation against minority groups are common in many societies. Many authors believe that the ‘We and They’ in the face of competition for relative scarce resources explain why discrimination even in the labour market can be intense. The Finnish government has a track record of non-discrimination. It is also an immigrant-friendly country by international standard. More can still be done to adequately monitor discrimination against minority groups. The following recommendations were made:

10.1 Proper Monitoring of Segregation in the Labor Market

This can be done by full implementation of the Finnish Labour Laws which vigorously supports non-discrimination against people of different races resident in Finland. While this cannot be done from distant offices, law enforcement officers should monitor full implementation of these labour laws to allow for full participation of qualified immigrants who can help in the development of the Finnish economy through gainful employment.

10.2 Relevant Work Placements for Students

This can be done through well designed system of helping students sourcing relevant placement places. The idea is to enable these students get the requisite work experience

required by employers. Employers are more comfortable and consider it cheaper hiring experienced labour than an inexperienced one.

10.3 Immigrants Knowledge of Host Country's Language

The study has shown that Finnish language proficiency is of utmost importance. It is therefore important for West African immigrants in Finland to strive to master the two major languages, Finnish and Swedish which are very necessary for easy communication and job placement. It will also for all intent and purposes boost their chances of finding good jobs and good wages as well.

10.4 Good Knowledge of IT

This has also been identified as a one of the major setbacks for West African immigrant job seekers in Finland. These graduates from West Africa and indeed other African countries should vigorously update their IT knowledge to international standards to brighten their job prospects in Finland upon graduation. Bearing in mind that they come from a technologically backward region of the world, they need to work extra hard to level up in IT know how to compete effectively with their peers in the Finnish labour market.

11 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Conducting a study on the labour market experiences of West African immigrants with Finnish qualification has given me valued experiences in the field of research. I gained knowledge and understanding of the Finnish labour laws and how they work. For me, strong knowledge of resident countries labour laws is a prime achievement. Knowledge of these labour laws at least will create confidence in my mind as an employee while doing my legitimate work in Finland. The research enabled me to practice my professional skills in various ways. My professional development was enriched by contacting and reaching immigrants of various West African countries and talking them into understanding the significance of them participating in my research work. Convincing respondents of different West African countries to participate in a research work of this kind is indeed quite demanding; and my being able to achieve this goal, for me has enriched my professional development. Besides, my professional development was enriched in positive ways due to the fact that the study enabled me apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice. In sum, I was able to apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgment in course of the research.

During the research process I conducted interviews, which helped to acquaint me with the necessary tools that facilitate a qualitative interview process, like properly prepared interview questions, recording tools, a convenient and quiet place, the list continues. The study enabled me to meet and work with people from different fields, ideas, values, backgrounds and the list continues. It prepared me on how best to work with people from different walks of life, and to accept as well as cope with challenges I may encounter in life.

12 APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE LABOUR MARKET EXPERIENCES OF WEST AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS WITH FINNISH QUALIFICATIONS IN HELSINKI.

1. Can you describe how you felt when you received your admission letter to study in Finland
2. Could you describe your previous academic background before you arrived in Finland?
3. Have you had any previous work related experience prior to your arrival in Finland? If yes, what were they?
4. Had you some expectations before arriving Finland, with regards to finding employment in a related field after studies? If yes what were they?
5. What was your field of studies? When did you graduate? Have you been able to find employment in your area of specialization since after graduation? (a)If yes, how long did it take you to get this job? does this job meet your expectation? (b)If no, what kind of job are you doing?
6. Have you made some efforts to look for jobs in your desired career? Where you able to find job according to your field of study? If no, what factors do you think could be responsible?
7. Can you describe any particular difficult experience you have had while seeking a career job in Finland?
8. What are your Finnish language skills?
9. What effort have you made to improve on your Finnish language skills?
10. While looking for job in Finland, to what extent do you consider yourself suitable for such job?
11. What personal effort have you made to find employment in your field of specialization?
12. Is there any other information you need to disclose in this interview?

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