

Service Design Approach to Improving Swedish Language Learning Opportunities for Immigrant Integration in Turku

Designing Better Swedish Learning Paths

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Abstract

This thesis aimed to utilize a service design approach to enhance Swedish language learning opportunities for immigrant integration in Turku. This study explored the broader complexities of immigrant integration within Finland's bilingual setting, highlighting the role of Swedish language learning as a potential pathway for adult newcomers in Turku.

This research used a qualitative and participatory approach based on the Double Diamond model. The Discover phase started with conducting an online survey and interviews, benchmarking other cities' services, and undertaking Stakeholder Mapping to understand the present situation. The Define phase analysis of findings through Thematic Analysis and Affinity Diagramming resulted in User Personas and Customer Journey Mapping to identify essential challenges. The Develop phase included a co-creation workshop followed by the development of solutions through the creation of a prototype for a unified digital platform. This research showed that Swedish is considered a desirable option, yet Turku immigrants encounter major obstacles because they lack practice opportunities and insufficient formalized Swedish integration structures.

The research findings led to the development of recommendations, which included adding intensive Swedish courses to the official integration plan and creating a centralized digital resource. The service design methods successfully revealed the detailed requirements and learning experiences of immigrant Swedish language learners in Turku. The proposed recommendations provide specific strategies to improve both accessibility and effectiveness of Swedish language learning for immigrant integration purposes.

Language: English

Key Words: Swedish language learning, integration, learning opportunities, Turku, design thinking

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1 Introduction

In the context of global migration, language learning has become a necessary aspect of integration. Effective communication enables immigrants to create social bonds while it provides them with better access to education, job opportunities and essential services in their host community (Sole, 2014). The process of immigrant integration consists of multiple complex elements which create special difficulties for immigrants as well as the host society. The growing immigrant population in Finland faces integration challenges because language barriers prevent them from accessing services, finding employment and building social connections (Nshom et al., 2022). The challenges become most critical in Finland's bilingual environment due to both Finnish and Swedish serving as official languages. The ability to speak either language serves as a requirement for integration yet many immigrants struggle with this process because language complexity, educational resource availability, and learning support systems play a crucial role in their ability to learn.

Turku City is located in southwestern Finland one of the oldest cities in the country with a rich experience of bilingual practice. In addition to this, the city has had Swedish influence in its culture and history (Turku, Finland, 2023). Turku City offers immigrants an alternative pathway to connect socially, culturally, and professionally into Finnish society. However, there is limited knowledge about the Swedish language learning dynamic among immigrants and their barriers, experiences, and motivations towards this choice.

1.1 Problem Statement

Immigrant integration depends heavily on language learning services because they deliver essential communication abilities and additional benefits. The process of integrating into a new society requires social networks, cultural exchanges and professional opportunities, but learning the host country's language remains the essential factor. Despite the rise of immigration in Turku and the presence of Swedish-speaking communities and organizations, many integration programs continue to be tailored only to Finnish (InfoFinland, n.d.). This creates a gap for those who might benefit from an alternative pathway through Swedish. The lack of an awareness, access and services adapted for Swedish language learning limits immigrants' opportunities of integrating into Swedish-speaking networks, education and employment.

This research establishes that improvement in language learning services stands as a crucial factor which strengthens immigrants' capacity to integrate into their new community. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the pathway of immigrants through learning the Swedish language. Focusing on how immigrants in Turku City experience learning Swedish and how this process contributes to social, cultural, and work integration. The service design approach, which is human-oriented and based on co-creation, is most suitable for this study. By analyzing these experiences, this study aims to identify possible new insights that may help in shaping better inclusive and supportive services.

1.2 Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives of this thesis, three research questions were addressed:

- 1) How does learning the Swedish language affect the integration of immigrants in Turku?
- 2) How can service design improve the accessibility and effectiveness of Swedish language learning services?
- 3) What challenges and opportunities exist in Turku City for Swedish language learning services for immigrants?

1.3 Scope of Limitations

This thesis focuses on Turku City and its local context, especially concerning Swedish language education and immigrant services. The scope of the research is limited to adult immigrants who are in the process of learning or have thought about learning Swedish. While research results may provide an understanding of broader insights, they are not designed to be generalized across Finland. Moreover, due to time and resource constraints, this research can only have a limited number of participants and methods. However, the focus is on generating deep, qualitative knowledge through targeted and participatory study.

1.4 Methodology

The study applies a qualitative and participatory research approach grounded in service design. It uses different methods including interviews, online survey, benchmarking, and co-creation workshop. Tools such as Customer Journey Map, User Personas, and the Value Proposition Canvas allow visualizing insights and identifying opportunities for further development and improvement of the service.

Qualitative data will be analyzed through Thematic Analysis and Affinity Diagram to generate key patterns, needs and opportunities. The Double Diamond model outlines the different steps involved in the research and design process.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1** introduces the research topic, context, and objectives.
- **Chapter 2** presents the theoretical framework, exploring key concepts such as service design, integration, and language learning.
- **Chapter 3** outlines the research methodology and methods used.
- **Chapter 4** presents the empirical findings from surveys, interviews, and workshops.
- **Chapter 5** discusses the findings and proposes possible service improvements.
- **Chapter 6** concludes the study, offering reflections on personal learning and future research.

1.6 My Position as a Researcher

The research topic is personally meaningful to me, not only from an academic perspective but also due to my lived experience as an individual navigating integration into Finnish society. The challenges I experienced alongside numerous other newcomers include difficulties with language integration, challenges in finding a sense of belonging, and obstacles to active participation. Overall, my experiences have motivated me to study how learning Swedish can help immigrants better connect with their new community through the Swedish language. Moreover, I have recently begun studying Swedish myself, and this choice was not accidental. For me, Swedish language seemed easier compared to Finnish, both in grammar and pronunciation, so I felt more motivated to start with it. Since Swedish is one of the official languages in Finland, I believe it can also open some doors in society, work and education. I also hope that all the knowledge I gained in the field of service design during my studies will help me to explore this topic more deeply. It gives me tools to look not only at the surface problems but also to understand emotions, motivations and journeys of the language learners. I believe this can result in useful insights, maybe even practical ideas or prototypes, which could support future research and even improve integration processes in real life.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Migration

Human migration functions as a natural and essential component of human historical development. The human civilization began its movements from initial places thousands of years ago. Throughout history, humans have relocated between geographic areas for social economic and political purposes since ancient times (Koser, 2016). The International Organization for Migration (2025) defines migration as the process of people moving from their established residence to another location which can be either international or domestic. Different contexts have developed multiple definitions of migration and migrant terms which are commonly accepted. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs defines a long-term migrant as someone who stays outside their nation of origin for at least 12 months. The two main types of migration exist as immigration which describes population entry into a host territory and emigration which describes population departure from a country during a specific period (Tsegay, 2023).

Types of migration can be classified based on various parameters, including direction, cause and duration. The main types of migration are discussed in the following subchapters:

2.1.1 Internal vs. International Migration

Migration can be both internal and international. Internal migration means people moving from one area like province, county, or municipality to another area within the same state (Tataru, 2019). People tend to move from one place to another in search of a better opportunity and living conditions. Economic incentives, including higher returns to skills in one region rather than another, are an important driver of migration flows. Also, internal migration responds to social and economic conditions at multiple geographic scales, showing changes in the population distribution (Borjas et al., 1992). According to Lucas (2016), internal migration has huge socio-economic effects like urbanization and regional development. The economic growth is tied to structural changes, disparities in productivity and the remittance distribution which influences inclusiveness.

On the other hand, international migration means moving people from one state to another state (Tataru, 2019). The international migration has macro, meso, and micro factors. Political, demographic, socio-economic and environmental conditions cause forced migration which is a macro factor. Meso factors are related to communication technologies and networks, and micro factors are related to personal features like education and personal attitude to migration (Castelli, 2018).

2.1.2 Voluntary vs. Forced Migration

Voluntary migration includes people who willingly move from one country to another to reside there permanently (International Rescue Committee, as cited in UC Berkeley Library, 2025). Various factors like economic, political and social either in the migrants' country of origin is determinant factors or "push factors". The other determinant factor is in the country of destination (attraction factors or "pull factors"). "Push-pull factors" are the reasons that push or attract people to a particular place. Negative aspects that provide the rationale for the emigration of people or the "push" factors. The push factors include unemployment in the country of origin and a lack of economic growth and social security. The push and pull factors although seemingly opposites are in fact two sides of the same coin and equally important. In general, voluntary migrants tend to emigrate to more developed countries because of the ethnic, religious and cultural tolerance, the perspective of higher wages, the opportunities for better employment and, often, the desire to escape the internal social and political situation of their country of origin. Mostly these migrants come from low or middle-income countries. Paradoxically, these people, who have an emigration perspective, are more interested in professional development (Tataru, 2019).

Contrarily, forced migration refers to circumstances under which people are displaced from their homes by violent conflict, infrastructure projects, natural disasters or climate change. Forced migration can occur either within the territory of a nation-state or across an international border, and it often involves a mixture of coercion and a lack of choice (Erdal, 2020). Over the years, the number of forced migrants has been increasing to such a level that today the concept of forced mass migration is starting to be used. In the last 200 years, forced migration has occurred in many places in the world.

The 19th century witnessed thousands of forced migrants, while tens of thousands more were displaced. The Balkan Wars led to hundreds of thousands of displaced people, while World War I resulted in millions of displaced individuals, and the post-World War II period saw tens of millions of people forced to migrate. Mass population movements throughout the world are mostly due to forced migration (Betts, 2009).

2.1.3 Temporary vs. Permanent Migration

Temporary migration means movement of people across regions and countries with a specific and limited purpose. Economic opportunities, environmental issues, and personal aspirations cause temporary migration. Temporary migration is divided into three dimensions which are duration, frequency and seasonality. These factors present methodological issues for studying temporary migration patterns that are fundamentally different from permanent migration. Temporary migration is diverse in nature and may be production related, or consumption related (Bell & Ward, 2000). Dustmann and Görlach (2015) found that temporary migration can have major economic effects on both sending and receiving countries. Temporary migrants generate revenue in the host country and are found to behave differently economically than permanent migrants. This situation may affect consequences for non-migrants in both home and host countries. Important social and policy issues arise out of temporary migration, especially concerning the status and settlement of temporary migrants. Many people disagree over whether temporary migrants should be given citizenship rights and pathways to permanent residency, whereas others believe that essential protection should be preferred over citizenship rights (Barry & Ferracioli, 2018). In Europe, there is a growing focus on temporary and circular migration to inform policy development, although the meaning and implications of those two words are still unclear (Geddes, 2015).

According to Chen (2023), permanent migrants are those who are expected to finally settle in host destinations, either based on the registration status or settlement intention. Permanent migration is the result of economic, social, demographic, climatic, personal and other factors. When compared to temporary migrants, permanent migrants have stable employment and higher income. People who are more educated and experienced are more likely to become permanent residents. Also, beyond a certain age, the likelihood of permanent migration decreases (Hu et al., 2011).

As discussed by García-Barrero (2023), permanent migrants may face difficulties in economic assimilation if they first engage in circular migration. This can restrict their capacity to acquire host-specific human and social capital, compromising their occupational attainment and income increase. Different countries have different standards when it comes to permanent migration policies – reflecting their different needs. One example is Australia that has a strong migration policy which is based on humanitarian and economic issues while able to recruit skilled migrants through the points-based system (Hugo, 2012). This approach has been effective in not only attracting high-skilled labor but also that migration policies do not discriminate on ethnic or national grounds. Canada also uses a point system which prioritizes the permanent migration of skilled workers (Boyd, 2013). People tend to migrate permanently due to their legal status, availability of jobs and family ties. Additionally, the economic status of the home and host countries shapes the intention to migrate. Research shows that frustration with the economy and politics in the home country can be a push factor causing permanent migration while positive conditions in the host country can be a pull factor (Pinger, 2010).

2.2 Theory of Immigrant Integration

Berry's Acculturation Model explores how individuals and groups adapt to a new cultural environment (see Figure 1). According to this model, people navigate their cultural identity and the identity of the dominant culture through four main strategies: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization (Nickerson, 2024). Berry believes that integration is when immigrants maintain their culture while also engaging in the culture of the host country. The first dimension concerns with the retention or rejection of the individual's original culture. The second aspect is whether to adopt or reject the host culture (Maricopa Community Colleges, n.d.).

Assimilation occurs when people take a dominant or host culture and abandon their culture in the process of that adoption. Many immigrants may adopt the language, customs, and social practices of their new country and leave behind the past. This could lead to a loss of cultural identity seen in cases where the second generation of immigrants finds it hard to relate to their heritage. Separation is when people keep their own culture but reject the dominant culture. In communities that want to preserve their culture, this strategy is evident as they prioritize cultural preservation, often isolating themselves from mainstream society.

The most balanced is integration, during which, individuals embraces both the original and new culture. This strategy can help one become bicultural and live and function properly in both cultures. Many bilingual people mix their traditions with that of the new culture with success. Marginalization is where people feel cut off from both their culture and the new culture, and lose their sense of identity. In situations where people suffer discrimination or lack support from either cultural group, which may lead to psychological distress and disconnection from the two cultures (Berry, 1997).

		Value and Maintain Native Culture	
		YES	NO
Value and Maintain Host Culture	YES	Integration	Assimilation
	NO	Separation	Marginalization

Figure 1: Berry's Model of Acculturation (Adapted from Maricopa Community Colleges, n.d.)

The integration theory of Ager and Strang (see Figure 2) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding integration of immigrants and refugees. Their model identifies critical domains that have the most impact on immigrants' processes of adjustment to a different environment, covering the structural and social issues. This framework is divided into four main concepts: Markers and Means, Social Connection, Facilitators and Foundation (Ager & Strang, 2008). The "markers and means" are tangible things in life – such as employment, housing, education and health - necessary to achieve the very basic building blocks for integration (Bronstein, 2019). The significance of these "markers and means" is underscored by empirical research which shows that the provision of housing, access to education, and job opportunities are not merely practical necessities but also fundamental aspects of broader psychological and social dimensions of integration.

Fostering employment opportunities is not only beneficial from an economic standpoint but also contributes to immigrants' and refugees' sense of identity and belonging within the new sociocultural context (Weidinger & Kordel, 2020).

The theory recognizes that the motive of integration is not just the satisfaction of basic needs but also the development of social relations. Ager and Strang's model suggests that the social connections are vital to integration. These may take the form of social bridges, social bonds, and social links. The term "social bond" is often used for the strong ties in the ethnic community. Nonetheless, such ties can restrict broader integration into society as they often isolate people in their own communities. (Gilmartin & Migge, 2013). On the other hand, social bridges, which represent connections with the wider community, are valuable for access to resources, networks and opportunities for successful integration. Many studies show how social bridges ease the refugee experience by creating a pathway for meaningful interactions with local communities (Strang & Quinn, 2019). Additionally, linking social capital, which refers to contacts with institutions and authorities – is equally important in helping immigrants to orient and integrate into their new societies. This part of social capital allows immigrants to better access healthcare, legal, job assistance, and other vital services that will help them make a living and stay financially stable (Fozdar & Banki, 2017). Furthermore, language learning is an important factor in the integration of immigrants. According to Mcloughlin (2023), getting to communicate successfully in a new environment is essential for accessing services and social connections for better integration. The use of Ager and Strang's model shows that language and culture are core elements that serve as a foundation for the broader contexts of integration and participation in everyday life. Furthermore, safety and stability within the context of immigrants' integration is necessary for understanding how they can achieve safety and stability in a new environment. Ager and Strang finally highlight how rights and citizenship can empower immigrants and refugees to actively engage in the economic and social life of their new communities. This framework demonstrates the successful integration of immigrants and refugees when they can access their rights (Ager & Strang, 2008).

A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration

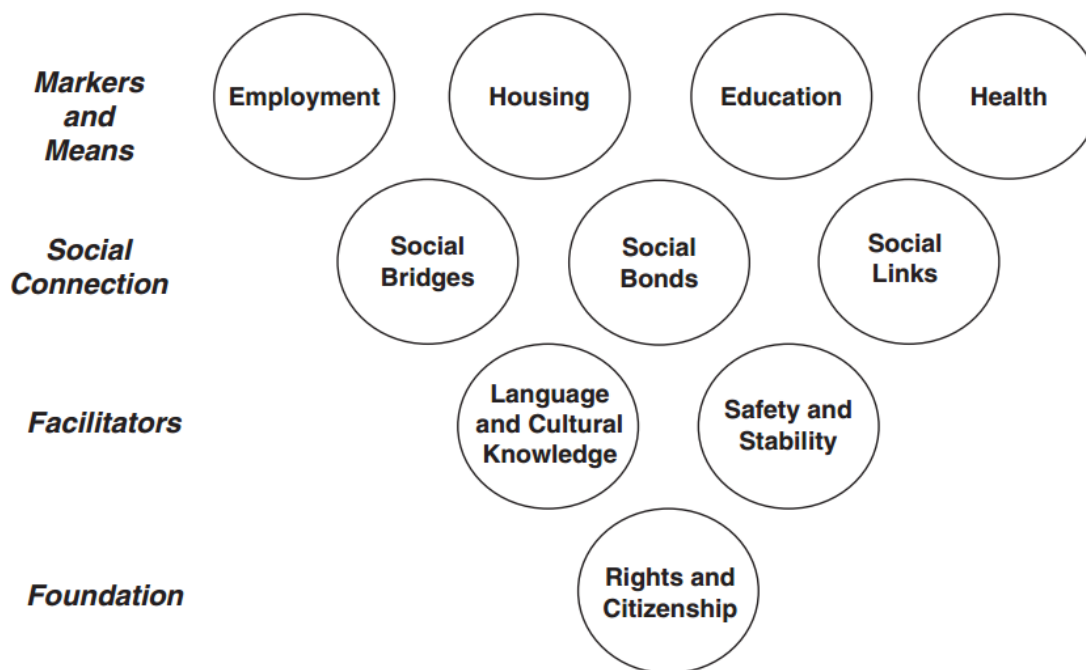


Figure 2: Ager and Strang's Conceptual Framework (Adapted from Ager & Strang, 2008)

2.3 Political Dimensions of Bilingualism

Finland's bilingualism, combining Finnish and Swedish as national languages, creates a multifaceted political environment influenced by historical ties, constitutional mandates, and persistent societal tensions. This bilingual arrangement has created unique political dynamics that continue to evolve in contemporary Finnish society. Although only 5.2% of Finland's population speaks Swedish as a mother tongue, the constitutional and political arrangements supporting this minority have wide-ranging implications on Finland's governance, education and culture (Strandberg et al., 2022). As stated by Frackman (2019), throughout history, the role and presence of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland have caused significant tensions in the functioning and maintenance of a Finnish national identity. Some Swedish-speaking Finns ('Finland Swedes' or Finlandssvenskar) feel harassed or disrespected due to their Finnish-Swedish heritage.

Some Finnish-speaking Finns think that Swedish-speaking Finns are being treated more favorably than they are. The bilingual nature of the country has caused, and still causes, friction between the Swedish and Finnish-speakers. Since the late 19th century Finnish nationalism, this tension has been present to various degrees in Finnish society. The mandatory status of Swedish language in education system is often the key part of the debate on Finnish bilingualism. This ongoing discussion is shaped by language ideologies, educational policies, and Finland's sociolinguistic context. The Finnish educational system has separate monolingual ways for Swedish and Finnish. This is considered as essential for the protection of the Swedish language. However, as language practices become more integrated, there is an increasing need for multilingual educational solutions (Greve, 2023).

Moreover, due to increasing rate of immigration, Finland has become a multilingual society, putting pressure on its bilingual policies. Although the country has two official languages, the growing number of immigrant languages is causing to a reevaluation of language policies. This leads to discussions over the role of Swedish in a multilingual society and a disconnect between the population's lived multilingualism and the official bilingualism (Saukkonen, 2013).

2.4 The Multifaceted Nature of Immigrant Integration

The process of integration into a new society requires more than language proficiency alone. The integration of immigrants depends on social elements as well as cultural aspects and economic conditions and other important factors. Research indicates that community ties together with social networks serve as fundamental elements for integration success. People who stay active in social activities and build strong community ties tend to adapt better to their new environment. Through these networks migrants can solve their challenges while obtaining essential resources such as housing employment and healthcare in their new surroundings. Social networks function as a double-edged tool because they provide both opportunities and assistance yet limit professional movement. The constraint prevents immigrants from working in low-prestige positions within ethnic enclaves (Ahmad, 2015).

Furthermore, cultural inclusion is also a significant part of integration. Immigrants frequently encounter cultural diversity that requires more than just a strong proficiency of the language. They also have to adapt norms and values of the new society. This dynamic is illustrated in studies examining negotiations of cultural citizenship of the immigrants and the majority in Finland showing how there are different expectations on integration and participation in societal norms (Rissanen, 2012).

Employment and economic integration are other critical factors in the integration process. Immigrants often experience challenges accessing the labor market, including, insufficient language level, lack of industry networking or knowledge of recruitment practices. The qualifications and experience of highly-skilled migrants in particular may not be valued as significantly in the Finnish labor market as they would expect (Yamazaki, 2022). Moreover, according to Ndomo and Lillie (2022), many educated immigrants view professional integration as their most important way to integrate into Finnish society. The entry of immigrants into the labor market faces significant barriers because of structural discrimination and insufficient proficiency in local languages. The successful integration of immigrants depends on language knowledge but social networking and cultural knowledge and economically promising opportunities are equally important. Targeted policies and programs could improve the overall process of integration for immigrants by addressing those areas.

2.5 Language as a Key Factor in Immigrant Integration

According to Beißert et al. (2022), language is one of the most powerful tools for integration. It is more than a tool of communication, but also a bridge to understanding the cultural, social, and institutional structures of a new society. Speaking of the local language increases significantly the chances of immigrants finding work, engaging with local communities, and participating in public life. Additionally, language acquisition helps create feelings of belonging as well as identity, which are so important to adapt to the new environment emotionally and psychologically. Aktaş and Uğurelli (2023) explained that insufficient language skills in the host country create major challenges for social communication and access to opportunities.

Many newcomers face this main challenge because they cannot access vital services like healthcare and employment because of their limited language abilities. Research indicates that language barriers create feelings of loneliness which leads to negative isolation that results in mental illness. The host society needs language resources and programs to help newcomers integrate successfully ("Impact on Mental Health of Immigrants: When Will the World Stop?", 2023). When there are limited opportunities for the acquisition of language, this situation can lead to long periods of unemployment and underemployment which calls for timely access to language training as a measure for integration (Ghadi et al., 2023). Furthermore, society's views of language and immigration shape newcomers. The countries that favour multilingualism and inclusion getting better integration outcomes than countries with strong anti-immigration views. The relationship between language, integration and perceptions of immigrants and refugees is complex. It shows that policies need to create conditions where immigrants and refugees learn the language without feeling marginalized (Izquierdo et al., 2021).

Finland has undergone significant demographic changes in recent decades, primarily as a result of increasing immigration to the country. In many other parts of Europe, population structure has changed mainly due to changing policies, economies and global migration patterns. Finland, which historically had low levels of immigration, has witnessed a substantial rise in its foreign-born population since the 1990s (Kyrölahti et al., 2019). In 2023, Finland's immigration rate increased significantly, 72,236 immigrants moved to Finland, showcasing extensive immigration. This number is much higher compared to the previous record high of 49,998 newcomers in 2022. If this level of immigration keeps on same level, it is forecasted that Finland's population would rise up to 6.5 million by the year 2070. (Statistics Finland, 2024) This population increase is facilitated by immigration, showing how an important role immigrants will play in the demographic future of Finland. The host country language acquisition together with Finnish and Swedish language proficiency becomes essential in this situation. The acquisition of these languages helps immigrants to integrate better into Finnish society while also enabling them to become active members of the labor market and participate in community activities and public affairs. By supporting language education services, Finland allows immigrants to become part of society and contribute actively.

2.6 Swedish Language in Finland and Its Societal Role

The Swedish language has a deep history in connection with Finland. Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden until Russia conquered Finland in 1809. In the time of Russia, Swedish was the primary language of administration and education. After Finland declared independence in 1917, Swedish was given equal prominence to Finnish due to the long-standing history of both languages. The first data about language, statistically speaking, was presented in 1880 when Swedish speaking represented 14% of the population (about 295,000 people). At its peak, the number of Swedish speakers in Finland was 350,000 which occurred in the mid-1900s, before Swedish emigration to Sweden brought it down. In recent days, the Swedish-speaking population of Finland has stabilized at around 290 000 people (5.2 per cent of the total population of Finland) in 2021.

The Constitution of Finland provides strong legal supports to Finnish and Swedish as national languages of Finland. The Language Act provides that individuals are entitled to receive services in their language. State authorities and bilingual municipalities must provide public services in Finnish and Swedish languages. Municipalities can be declared bilingual if the percentage of the minority language is at least 8% or includes 3,000 people. Today, 16 percent of the municipalities of Finland are either bilingual or Swedish-speaking. Citizens can use Swedish language when dealing with health care, social services and the legal proceedings. Furthermore, services must be offered in Swedish by state companies. Swedish-speaking Finns are a distinct linguistic group. Their identity is influenced by language and culture, maintaining close relations with other Nordic countries. There are Swedish language schools from preschool to university due to cultural autonomy. There are Swedish schools as well as Finnish ones. There's existing Swedish-speaking media include newspapers and magazines, radio channels and a partly Swedish-speaking TV channel. Swedish culture is vibrant in Finland and includes literature, theater, cinema and music. Swedish-speaking Finns take part in associations and community organizations more actively than the Finnish-speaking majority (Folktinget, 2023).

The Swedish speakers have a strong political impact in Finland. The Swedish People's Party (SFP/RKP) has existed since 1906 and is the leading political party representing Swedish speakers and gets about 70% of Swedish-speaking votes. The Social Democratic Party most prominently represents the Swedish among all the other parties. The Swedish-speaking party organization was founded in 1899 and is the oldest of the currently active political parties in Finland.

Furthermore, the Swedish Assembly of Finland (Folktinget) helps protect and promote Swedish language rights. It was created in 1919. It works through all parties and is important for the drafting of legislation, reforms of laws, and awareness of bilingual status (Folktinget, 2023). Most Swedish-speakers in Finland are located in the coastal area of Nyland (Uusimaa), Åboland (Turunmaa), Ostrobothnia (Österbotten, Pohjanmaa), and Åland (Ahvenanmaa). Åland Islands are an independent part of Finland, and in 2017, they became the only municipality which is monolingually Swedish-speaking (Frackman, 2019).

3. Development Approach

3.1 Service Design Principles

Service design is a process that integrates a wide range of disciplines to help create different services. This approach focuses on creating sustainable solutions and optimal experiences for customers in unique contexts and for any service providers involved. Implementing design thinking as a creative way of solving problems to enhance user experience value (Interaction Design Foundation, n.d.). Design is a verb, so service design is often described as a process. The driving force behind the process is the design mindset as a desire to find elegant or new solutions to problems through iterative cycles of research and development. Practitioners actually iterate – which is working in a series of repeating, deepening, explorative loops endlessly. In this process, iteration is absolutely central, so they aim for short cycles from the start with early user feedback, early prototyping, and rapid experiments. As the process continues, prototypes iterate into pilots and pilots iterate into implementation (Stickdorn et al., 2018).

According to Stickdorn et al. (2018), service design is guided by five fundamental principles:

1. **User-Centered:** This principle emphasizes designing services with a focus on the needs and experiences of the end-users. It involves understanding and prioritizing the user's perspective throughout the design process.
2. **Co-Creative:** The design process for services requires participation from all stakeholders such as service providers as well as customers. Collaborative design processes between stakeholders who include customers and service providers generate effective and inclusive service solutions because they provide diverse perspectives.
3. **Sequencing:** Services should be visualized as a sequence of interrelated actions or events. It helps to organize and arrange the service process in a logical and consistent manner to enhance user experience.
4. **Evidencing:** Services must be made tangible through physical or digital evidence. It allows customers to understand and trust a service and transform an intangible experience more concrete and memorable.

5. **Holistic:** A holistic approach affects all parts of the service environment and touchpoints of use. This comprehensive view ensures that all elements of the service are aligned and contribute to a cohesive user experience.

3.2 The Double Diamond Model

The Double Diamond model (see Figure 3) is an adaptable methodology regularly employed in the design process. It includes four stages: **Discover, Define, Develop, Deliver**.

This approach helps designers understand problems deeply before developing solutions, ensuring that the final product meets user needs effectively. The double diamond model helps to save time in the design process as it allows both divergent and convergent thinking in a systematic way (Saad et al., 2020).

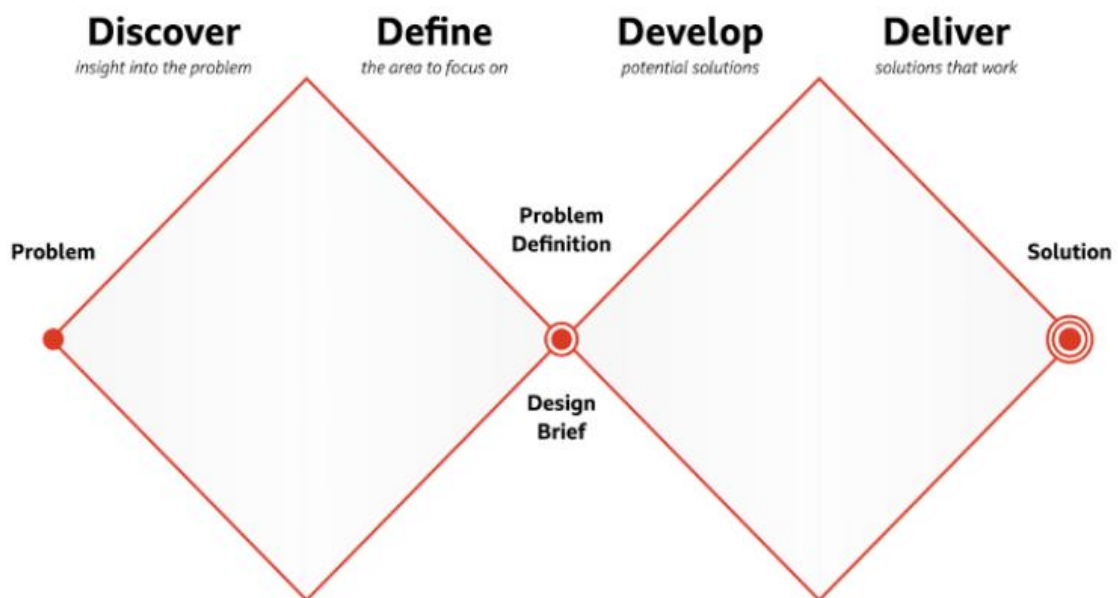


Figure 3: An illustration of the Double Diamond Model (Adapted from Ramsden, 2023)

The Double Diamond Model consists of the following steps:

1. **Discover:** The Discover phase is about understanding the problem by getting involved with the people. This stage is known for its divergent thinking to explore a broad range of possibilities and gather insights from various sources.
2. **Define:** In the Define phase, the insights gathered during the Discover phase are analyzed to clearly define the challenge. This phase transitions from divergent to convergent thinking, focusing on narrowing down the problem to a specific, actionable challenge.
3. **Develop:** Develop phase involves creation of multiple solutions to a defined problem. Seeking inspiration from different sources and sharing ideas with a variety of people, you can refine and improve potential solutions.
4. **Deliver:** The Deliver phase involves testing and refining the best solutions on a small scale, and delivering the best solution. The deliver phase is a crucial component of the process that ensures the final solution is effective and meets the needs identified in the earlier phases.

3.3 The implementation of the Double Diamond model in the Design process

This section explores the application of the Double Diamond framework in planning and improvement of Swedish language learning experience for the immigrants of Turku City. The aim is to make sure that the solutions designed are user-centered, iterative and flexible, that face real life problems of an immigrant learning Swedish.

Discover Phase

According to Zhao et al. (2023), the Discover phase helps to get an understanding of users' unique needs. Interviews and surveys are mainly used to obtain qualitative data, which can then be used to gain further insight into the problem. Moreover, the ability to produce insightful information during the Discover phase influences the effectiveness of the solutions proposed during the later phases.

The first stage of the design process forms the basis of the whole process. Discovery activities leading to innovative and informed solutions as a result of the understanding of the user landscape and context.

The research starts with interviews and surveys, stakeholder mapping, and benchmarking of Swedish language learning opportunities across Finland. Three qualitative interviews were conducted, first with a Swedish Language teacher who teaches immigrants, to get a better understanding of their learning journeys, challenges, and recommendations, second with an immigrant, who moved to Turku and later decided to move to Porvoo to access better Swedish learning opportunities, and third with Habiyakare Evariste, an Associate Professor at HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences who has successfully integrated into Finnish society. Furthermore, to understand the various actors influencing Swedish language education and how it plays a role in integration, a Stakeholder Map outlines the key institutions such as municipalities, educational institutions, and other organizations. Next, a benchmarking analysis is conducted, comparing Swedish language learning services available in Turku, and other Finnish cities. This comparison helps to understand best practices as well as gaps in Turku's language learning and integration approach, which may exist. The data collected from the Discover phase gives a holistic overview of the current situation, based on which we can analyze and iterate further.

Define Phase

In the Define phase, the insights and information from the Discovery phase are synthesized to create a clear problem statement that can be responded to on. This step requires assessment of the data collected, determining patterns among them and narrowing down to a particular problem (Saad et al., 2020). During this phase, Customer Journey Maps or Empathy Maps are usually designed by the designers to get the user experience clear and to highlight the major pain points and opportunities for innovation (Zhao et al., 2023). First qualitative data analyzed through Thematic Analysis and Affinity Diagram to generate key patterns, needs and opportunities. Then, a Customer Journey Map has been developed to visualize the process immigrants experienced in learning the Swedish language. In parallel, User Personas are developed based on research findings, representing different types of immigrant learners. To further structure the analysis, thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes in the qualitative data collected through interviews and surveys. This data is synthesized into a clear and actionable problem definition which serves as a strong basis for the Develop phase where ideas and refinements for potential solutions are ideated.

Develop Phase

The third phase of the Double Diamond model, is the Develop phase, which is an essential stage that helps in refining and developing concepts to produce multiple solutions. Brainstorming and prototyping are commonly used to come up with potential solutions. It is a creative and experimental stage where designers try to find many ways to solve the problem before settling on the most effective one (Vardakosta et al., 2023). During the develop phase, multiple iterations of prototyping are key. Prototyping allows ideas to be practically explored and enables a variety of solutions to be tested, modified and improved (Banbury et al., 2021). In this phase, a co-creation workshop is arranged for immigrants learning Swedish to brainstorm practical ideas to enhance learning Swedish. Participants are engaged in discussions and direct ideation exercises to design solutions to common barriers that were identified in the previous phases, such as increasing spoken language opportunities, accessibility of courses, effectiveness of digital learning, etc. Along with the workshop, a Value Proposition Canvas is created to align possible solutions with user needs and ensure that offered actions reduce pain points and enhance the learning pathway. One of the main solutions that emerged from this phase is the development of a digital prototype, such as a mobile app designed to help immigrants navigate better the Swedish language learning.

Deliver Phase

The Deliver stage involves testing practical solutions on a small scale to determine their suitability. This refers to eliminating ineffective solutions and improving on the successful ones. The objective is to make sure that the solution is practical and effective. It is important to collect user feedback during the Deliver phase. Feedback helps in making necessary changes to ensure that it caters to the needs and expectations of the users. Iterative testing and refinement are essential to achieving a successful outcome (Hidayat et al., 2024). The prototype testing phase is a small-scale trial of a mobile app. Selected users use the prototype to provide feedback on its usability, functionality, and value. The aim of this test is to identify what improvements can be made and where adjustments are needed before full implementation.

4 Project Implementation

4.1 Discover

During the Discover phase of the Double Diamond process, qualitative data was collected through an online survey, interviews to explore and define the immigrants' experiences and problem scope. Benchmarking was utilized to explore existing practices in language integration, while the stakeholder map facilitated clarification of various stakeholders' roles.

4.1.1 Online Survey

An online survey was conducted to examine how learning the Swedish language enhances the integration of immigrants. The purpose of this survey was to collect the insights of individuals who are studying Swedish and understand their motivations, challenges, and perceptions regarding language acquisition. A total of 62 respondents participated in the survey. The survey was designed to be completely anonymous, allowing them to share their experiences and opinions in full confidence. Although the survey emphasized Swedish language learners, the survey also included individuals learning the Finnish language. The inclusion of Finnish learners allowed to understand why some immigrants would rather learn Finnish than Swedish and what factors influence that decision.

The questionnaire was divided into various sections which focused on different aspects of the language-learning experience. These sections included details concerning the background information, motivation for choosing a language, the availability and accessibility of language learning opportunities, and the impact of language competence on their integration into the Finnish society. Even though this study targeted the case of Turku, the survey was open to participants from other Finnish cities. This broader scope enabled a comparative analysis between language-learning experiences in Turku and other cities, encouraging a better insight into the differences concerning the accessibility and availability of resources and integration experiences.

4.1.2 Detailed Examination of Survey Responses

Awareness and Decision-Making in Language Choice

The survey results provided valuable insights into the language-learning experiences of immigrants who seek better integration into Finnish society. Among 62 participants, 52% chose learning Swedish, 47% Finnish, and 1% some other language (refer to Appendix 1). This shows the presence of both language-learning paths among participants. Before choosing to study Finnish, 90% of respondents knew that Swedish is also an official language in Finland while 7% were unaware, and least 3% chose “other”. Despite this awareness, only 31% responded they were considered learning Swedish, but chose Finnish. Meanwhile, 24% reported feeling certain from the start that they would study Finnish, and 45% provided other reasons for their choice.

The selection of Finnish over Swedish was based on the following:

- Twenty-one percent stated that Finnish is the dominant language in daily life.
- Twenty-one percent cited better job opportunities in Finnish.
- Sixteen percent chose Finnish for social integration.
- Thirteen percent stated Employer or educational institution required it.

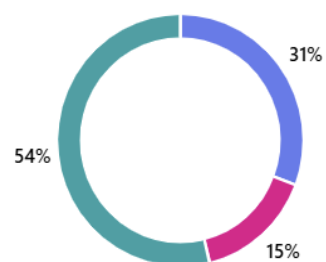
Experiences of Swedish Language Learners in Turku

Among those who chose to study Swedish, 41% are based in Turku, while 59% are in other cities. The primary focus of this study is on Turku city, and detailed results regarding Swedish learners in Turku are presented below. To maintain transparency, the survey results from respondents of “Other cities” are provided in Appendix 1, ensuring that all data remains accessible without overloading the main body of the thesis.

According to the survey, most of the respondents, 54% are students, while 31% are employed (full-time or part-time) and 15% are actively seeking work (see Figure 4). This suggests that many Swedish learners in Turku are engaged in academic pursuits rather than the labor market. Likewise, as shown in Figure 4, 54% of the respondents have a postgraduate degree and 15% have an undergraduate degree. The remaining 31% have completed their secondary education.

6. What is your current employment status?

● Employed (Full-time/Part-time)	4
● Unemployed and looking for work	2
● Student	7
● Other	0



7. What is your highest level of education?

● No formal education	0
● Secondary school	4
● Undergraduate degree	2
● Postgraduate degree	7
● Other	0

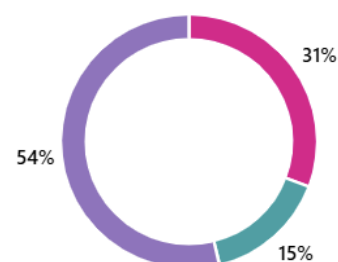


Figure 4: Employment and Education Background

The results of the survey show a variety of reasons for choosing to learn Swedish instead of Finnish. The most reported reason was that Swedish is easier to learn (28%). Other important factors included the requirement for Swedish proficiency in obtaining citizenship (21%) and to improve job opportunities (15%). Only 3% of the respondents replied that learning Swedish would help them integrate better into Finnish society (see Figure 5). These findings suggest that practical considerations, such as linguistic accessibility and legal obligations, have a greater influence on the decision to learn Swedish than aspirations related to social integration.

8. Why did you decide to learn Swedish instead of Finnish? (Select all that apply)

[More details](#)

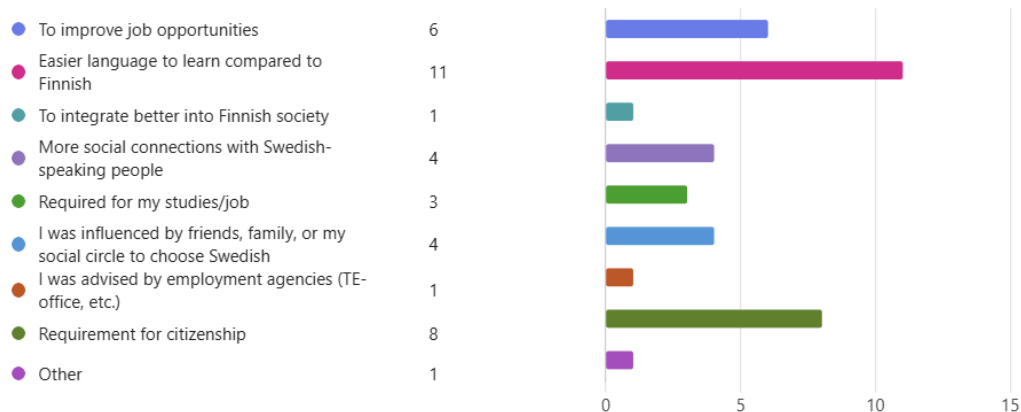


Figure 5: Motivations for Learning Swedish

The majority of the respondents (38%) cited friends or family as the main source of information about the Swedish learning courses (see Figure 6). Online search and social media (31%) was the second most common source of information. Notably, the Finnish employment services demonstrated no active involvement in supporting Swedish language learning, which indicated a lack of institutional guidance for language development.

9. How did you first learn about Swedish language learning opportunities?

[More details](#)



Figure 6: Awareness of Learning Opportunities

The survey also revealed that traditional classroom courses remain the most favored form of learning at 37%. This is followed by community-based language cafés or informal groups (19%). People prefer using apps (15%), online courses (11%), and private tutoring or self-study (11%). The lack of workplace training programs indicates that employers do not actively promote Swedish language acquisition which can reduce professional development prospects for employees (see Figure 7).

10. What type of Swedish learning methods do you find most effective? (Select all that apply)

[More details](#)

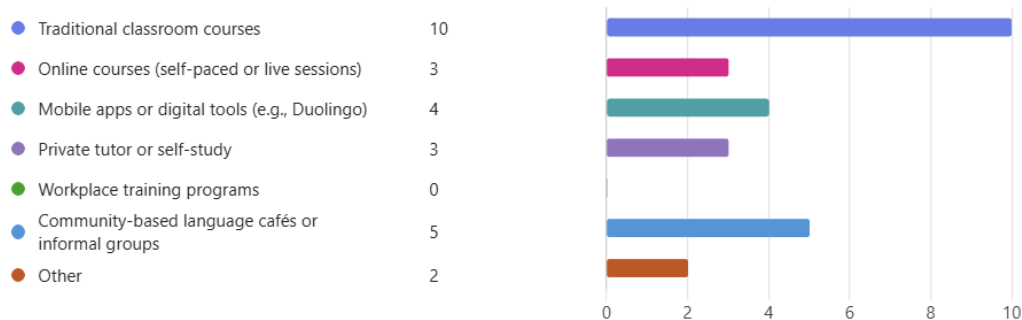


Figure 7: Preferred Learning Methods

For learners, the most significant challenge is the lack of practice opportunities outside of class (28%), followed by the lack of motivation due to the more dominant Finnish language (24%). In addition, pronunciation and fluency caused a challenge for 21%, while difficulty understanding native speakers (14%). These results emphasize structural barriers to Swedish practice and contribute to the view that Swedish plays a secondary role in Finnish society (see Figure 8).

11. What are the biggest challenges you face while learning Swedish? (Select all that apply)

[More details](#)

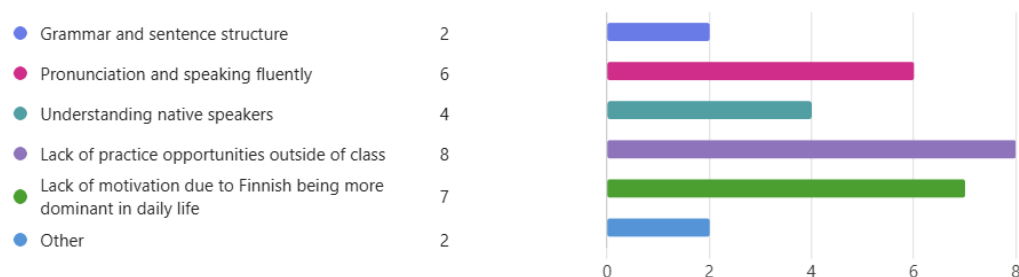
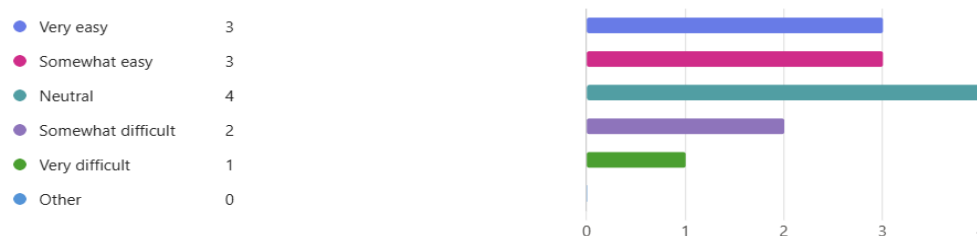


Figure 8: Challenges in Learning Swedish

Opinions on course accessibility in Turku were mixed. Finding Swedish courses in Turku was relatively easy or somewhat easy for 46% of people. On the other hand, 23% reported difficulty. Also, very few (8%) of people found Swedish resources very accessible. 38% of people found them somewhat accessible. Similarly, 23% of people found them somewhat inaccessible. According to the results, there are certainly Swedish learning resources available but they don't always meet the learner's needs (see Figure 9).

12. How easy or difficult is it for you to find accessible and suitable Swedish courses in Turku?

[More details](#)



13. How accessible are Swedish learning resources (books, conversation groups, etc) in Turku?

[More details](#)



Figure 9: Accessibility of Courses and Resources

The survey also identified a significant challenge for learners is a lack of opportunities to practice Swedish. Thirty-one percent of respondents stated they do not have enough opportunities, while another 31% do not feel confident to speak. Furthermore, 15% indicated that when they try to speak Swedish, the conversation changes to Finnish or English (see Figure 10). The results show that even acquiring adequate Swedish skills, societal attitudes and linguistic habits that make it more difficult in practicing language in daily life.

14. Have you encountered challenges in practicing Swedish in daily life?

[More details](#)



Figure 10: Opportunities for Practicing Swedish

To improve their Swedish skills, respondents indicated the need for more opportunities to practice speaking (30%). Followed by more free or cheap courses (19%). More social and cultural events in Swedish (22%) and Swedish language support at the workplace (19%) were other services participants wanted (see Figure 11). The replies provided suggest that, while there are structured courses available, respondents would like more opportunities for interaction and immersive experiences.

15. What support services would make it easier for you to learn and use Swedish? (Select all that apply)

[More details](#)

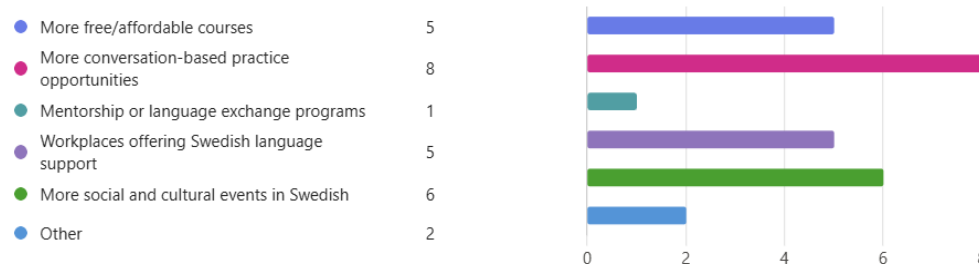


Figure 11: Desired Support Services

Nearly half (46%) want to become fluent and use Swedish regularly, while 23% are looking for a basic level of Swedish for daily life. Twenty-three percent will continue learning as long as they are required to at work and for social life (see Figure 12). No respondents indicated plans to stop learning Swedish. This indicates that many students see Swedish as a long-term investment, but the level of commitment varies according to personal and professional needs.

16. How long do you plan to continue learning and using Swedish?

[More details](#)

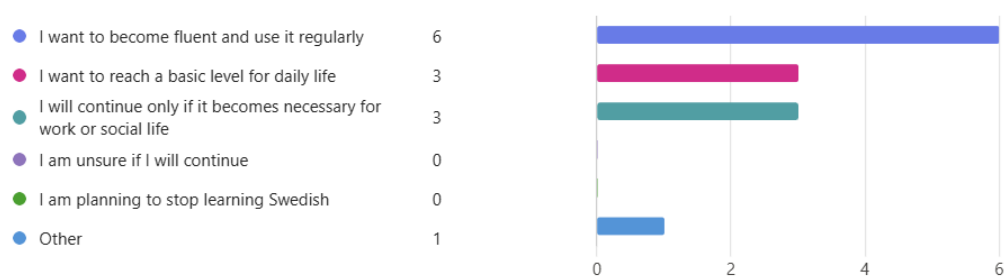


Figure 12: Commitment to Swedish Learning

Thirty-eight percent of respondents believe Finnish is more important for integration into Finnish society. While 23% stated Swedish also significantly helps in integration. Fifteen percent think that Finnish is the key language for integration, while 8% remain uncertain (see Figure 13). The findings show that Swedish may have some value for integration. However, Finnish is still believed to be the dominant language.

17. Do you think knowing Swedish will improve your integration into Finnish society?

[More details](#)

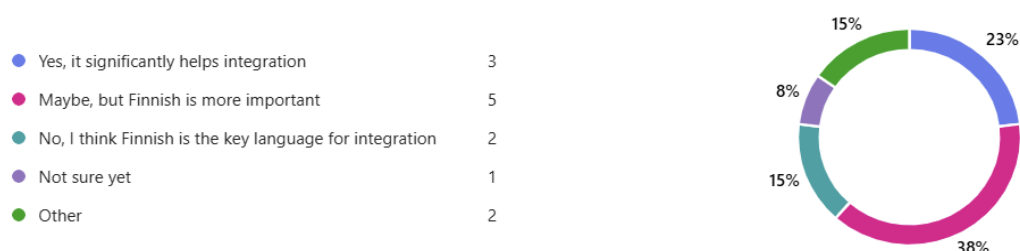


Figure 13: Perceived Impact of Swedish on Integration

The final open-ended question aimed to understand how the participants themselves define “successful integration into Finnish society” (see Figure 14). An analysis of the responses indicates that integration is a process that requires language skills, social networks, economic stability, and adaptation to culture. A number of participants cited the ability to easily navigate daily life and communicate well as an important integration component. Several participants mentioned that the Finnish language is necessary for deeper integration and that the Swedish language is good for Swedish-speaking institutions. Some participants defined integration as the pathway to achieving equal rights, opportunities, and a worthy life. Overall, results showed that integration success needs more than language learning since it also depends on a feeling of belonging and building social connections.

18. How do you personally define 'successful integration' into Finnish society?

[More details](#)



Figure 14: Definition of Successful Integration into Finnish Society

4.1.3 Interviews

An interview is a systematic technique mostly used in qualitative research to enable a dialogue between an interviewer and an interviewee, aiming to extract detailed narratives and in-depth understandings of specific subjects. The primary nature of an interview enables researchers to investigate deeper into participants' views, experiences, and feelings (Alshenqeeti, 2014). As part of the Discovery phase, on February 27, 2025, an interview was conducted in person with a Swedish language teacher who has more than 10 years of experience mostly teaching immigrants. The purpose of the interview was to obtain qualitative information regarding the motivations, difficulties and experiences of immigrants learning Swedish in Turku. Another face-to-face interview was carried out on March 22, 2025, with an immigrant who moved from Turku to Porvoo to access better Swedish learning opportunities. The objective of this interview was to understand why the immigrant selected Swedish instead of Finnish, what difficulties faced in Turku, and how moving to Porvoo influenced their learning journey and integration process. In addition, on April 1, 2025, I had the chance to interview Habiyakare Evariste, an Associate Professor at HAAGA-HELI University of Applied Sciences. He is someone who has successfully integrated into Finnish society through the Swedish language and has built a strong academic and professional life in Finland (refer to Appendix 2).

4.1.4 Benchmarking

Benchmarking refers to measuring and improving productivity and performance using the “best practices” of other organizations. As competitive pressure has increased and many companies have achieved success through this analysis, benchmarking has become a common practice among many leading companies across the world (Watson, 2021). This research measures the Swedish language learning services in Turku against those in Helsinki, Vaasa and Porvoo, which have a strong Swedish-speaking population and active integration programs (see Figure 15). This comparison provides insight into how municipalities differ in their approach to Swedish language education.

1. Service Providers and Course Formats

In Turku, Swedish language courses are mainly provided by Åbo Akademi University, Arbis Swedish Adult Education Center, Aurala Civic College, and the University of Turku. These institutions offer contact teaching through day and evening courses held twice a week. However, Turku does not have the diversity of learning formats like other cities. Compared to Turku, Helsinki provides a broader range of courses, such as Arbis Helsinki, Luckan Helsinki, and Arcada UAS, offering more intensive and diverse teaching schedules. In Vaasa, Evangeliska folkhögskolan, the Alma and Vamia Education centers provide intensive Swedish courses, while the Porvoo Adult Education Centre offers similar courses at flexible times during the day, intensive programs or in the evening. These cities have more options with respect to course intensity and frequency to allow learners to align programs better with their daily lives.

2. Tuition fee

Helsinki, Vaasa and Porvoo have free municipal programs for integration learners. In these cities, some private courses charge a fee, but these cities offer more accessible, affordable Swedish language learning options. The importance of this variation is crucial in creating equal learning opportunities and encouraging participation in language education. Contrarily, in Turku there are no free Swedish courses for immigrants; they have to pay for themselves.

3. Teaching Focus and Support Services

Although all cities emphasize practical and functional Swedish for everyday use, Helsinki, Vaasa, and Porvoo incorporate professional vocabulary and employment-oriented content. Turku is more general in its approach. Courses in Helsinki, Porvoo, and Vaasa are included in the formal integration plan, and they support transition to vocational or higher education, thus strengthening the learners' future prospects.

Support services play a key role in successful integration, like municipality advisors, employment guidance, as well as student counseling. For example, Helsinki, Vaasa and Porvoo have a strong emphasis on municipality advisors, employment services and mentoring.

4. Recognition of Learning Path

Swedish language courses are approved as part of the official integration plan in Helsinki, Vaasa, and Porvoo. Many programs enable learners to take the next steps towards a vocational qualification or further studies, which is a meaningful step in long-term integration. This acknowledgement helps boost the confidence of learners and offers a clearer pathway toward work or further studies. In Turku, this recognition is less supported in current offerings. The only available option is called Immigrant's independent study, requiring immigrants to search for Swedish language courses on their own.

5. Distinctive Strengths

Helsinki has a diverse range of classes and programs targeting immigrants. A primary strength is its connection to municipal employment and education support services, which help speed language acquisition while simultaneously preparing immigrants for further education and the labor market. The Vaasa integration services support both Finnish and Swedish equally, offering parallel learning pathways. Moreover, the city stands out for its strong institutional support and inclusive governance. The Swedish-oriented intensive integration programs in Porvoo offer specific advantages that provide valuable alternatives for immigrants who want to start a new life in Finland. Turku has a rich historical Swedish heritage and the presence of Swedish-speaking universities.

	Turku	Helsinki	Vaasa	Porvoo
Main Service Providers (contact teaching)	Åbo Akademi University, Arbis Swedish Adult Education Center, Aurala Civic College, University of Turku	Arbis Helsinki, Institute of Adult Education in Helsinki, HANKEN, Helsinki Summer University, University of Helsinki, Arcada UAS, Luckan Helsinki,	Alma Adult Education Center, Vamia Adult Education Center, Evangeliska folkhögskolan	Porvoo Adult Education Centre, People's Academy Akan, Luckan Porvoo
Course Format	Day/evening courses twice a week	Intensive day programs, part-time day/evening courses, flexible format, online	Flexible format, intensive day programs, part-time evening courses, online and blended learning	Intensive day programs, flexible format, part-time evening courses, online and blended learning
Cost / Tuition	60-75 e	Free municipal integration programs; some private courses may have a fee	Free if under integration support; some private courses may have a fee	Mostly free through municipal programs, some private courses may have a fee
Teaching Focus	Swedish for daily life, communicative approach	Functional Swedish, professional vocabulary, integration and employment	Functional Swedish, professional vocabulary, integration and employment	Functional Swedish, professional vocabulary, integration and employment
Support Services	Municipality advisors, guidance and counseling services, employment services	Municipality advisors, employment services, guidance, student counselling	Municipality advisors, Mentoring, integration path planning, employment services	Municipality advisors, employment services, mentoring
Recognition of Learning Path	Part of Immigrant's independent study plan	Part of formal integration plan, supports transition to vocational studies	Part of formal integration plan, supports transition to vocational studies	Part of formal integration plan, supports transition to vocational studies
Language Level Path (CEFR)	A1 to C1 (depending on the course)	A1 to B2, some even C1 for professionals	A1 to C2 (basic to intermediate/advanced levels)	A1 to C1, depending on the learner pathway
Distinctive Strengths	Well-established Swedish-language institutions, Swedish heritage	High variety, tailored programs, personalized support	Community oriented learning, bilingual support, strong institutional support	Holistic integration beyond language acquisition, individualized integration planning

Figure 15: Benchmarking of Swedish language learning courses

The benchmarking reveals several areas for potential development in Turku. The effectiveness of Swedish language education could be significantly enhanced by integrating free municipal intensive language programs and expanding flexible course formats, and embedding support services like mentoring and peer support groups. More complex integration pathway programs in Swedish, as in Helsinki, Porvoo, and Vaasa, may also strengthen the immigrants' further education and employment opportunities.

4.1.5 Stakeholder Map

A stakeholder map shows the people, groups or institutions that are involved in the service or context of the problem. Stakeholder maps assist us in identifying the stakeholders within this ecosystem, reveal the current relationships between these stakeholders and the informal networks or frictions between stakeholders and assist us in identifying business opportunities that we may not have seen before (Stickdorn et al., 2018).

The stakeholder map identified the following contributors:

- Immigrants
- Turku City Municipality, Monitori, International House Turku, Family and local community
- Arbis Swedish Adult Education Center, Volunteer language mentors/Conversation partners, Åbo Akademi University, University of Turku, Kela, Luckan Åbo, Language schools
- Swedish Assembly of Finland (Folktinget), Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Local Swedish-speaking employers and communities, Swedish Cultural Foundation, Finnish society, Media and public opinion

The stakeholder map presented in Figure 16 reveals three primary stakeholder groups who participate in immigrant Swedish language integration in Turku. The main service users are immigrants who occupy the central position. The direct stakeholders who offer vital support form the second circle around immigrants, including Turku City Municipality services and local educational institutions, and the family. The outer layer consists of national ministries together with cultural organizations and the Finnish and Swedish-speaking societies. The coordination between stakeholders' functions as a critical element for creating effective user-centered language integration services.

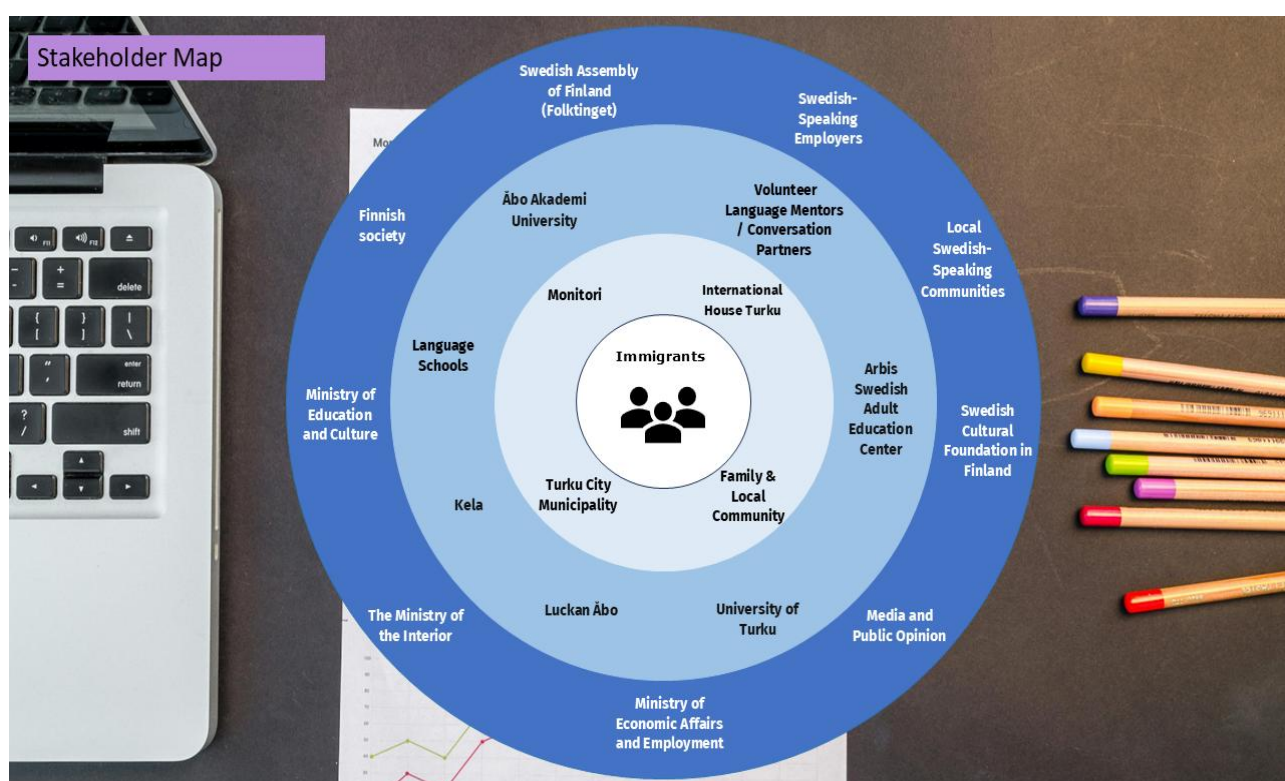


Figure 16: Stakeholder map presents a layered view of the different actors involved in the integration journey of immigrants in Turku

4.2 Define

The Define phase of the Double Diamond model involves analyzing Discovery phase data for interpreting and synthesizing key challenges and needs related to Swedish language learning for immigrant integration in Turku. The phase connects problem identification to solution development. The primary goal during this phase is to extract valuable insights from survey and interviews data while creating an organized framework which will guide human-centered improvements for Swedish language learning opportunities.

4.2.1 An Affinity Diagram of Survey

The Affinity Diagram analysis (Figure 17) reveals important themes about immigrant Swedish language learning in Turku. The main reasons for learning Swedish include obtaining better employment opportunities, easier integration into society, fulfilling citizenship requirements, and establishing relationships with Swedish-speaking communities. Several obstacles emerged during the analysis, including insufficient practice opportunities beyond classroom learning, Finnish language prevalence in everyday life, limited course selection in Turku city and difficulties understanding native speakers. The participants showed different preferences for learning methods, but most chose traditional classroom courses. Then preferred more flexible options, including online learning, language cafés, and private tutoring with self-study. The participants wanted support services to provide free or affordable courses, various mentorship programs, cultural exchange opportunities, and more conversation-based practice opportunities. The data shows that immigrants perceive 'successful integration' in a more holistic manner. It includes more than language proficiency and encompasses functional independence, robust social connections, a sense of belonging, and the ability to participate actively in host society while maintaining cultural identity. These findings serve as the basis for developing human-centered improvements in Swedish language learning services.

Affinity Diagram

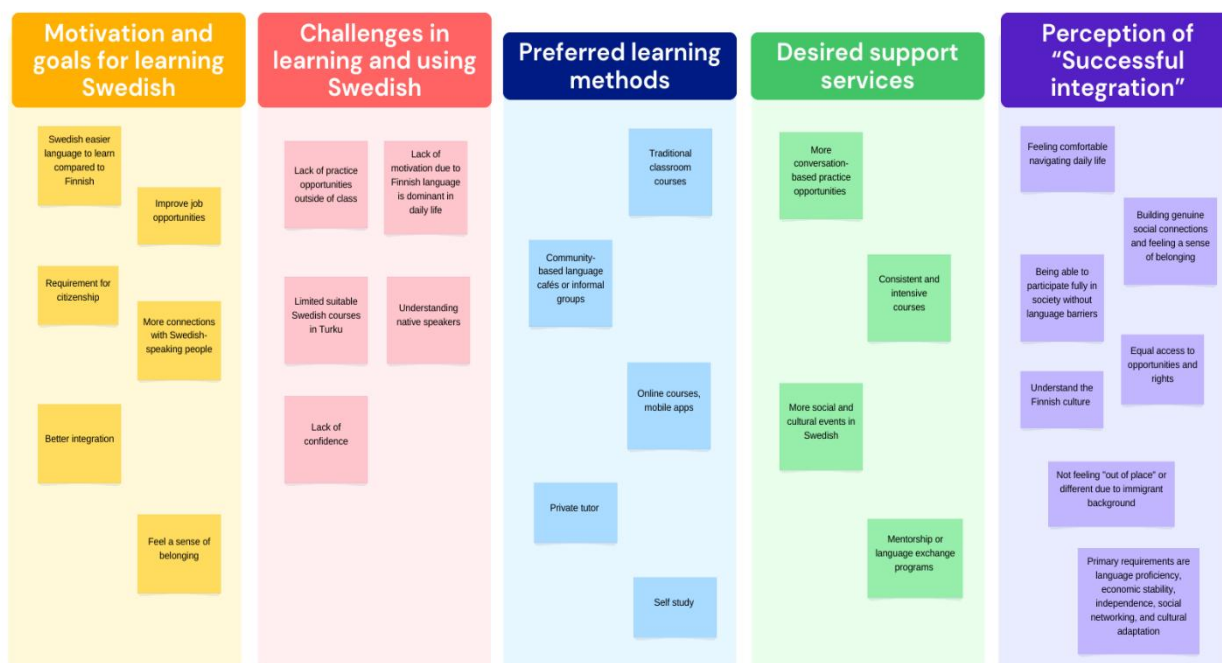


Figure 17: The Affinity Diagram analysis

4.2.2 Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

Thematic analysis is described as a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. It enables researchers to interpret collective or shared meanings and experiences (Herzog et al., 2019). The thematic analysis revealed many insights into the immigrants' experiences of learning Swedish in Turku. Some of the arising themes include the following:

1. Motivations for Learning Swedish: The interviewees identified multiple factors which motivate immigrants to pursue learning the Swedish language. A local Swedish-language teacher mentioned that many assume Swedish is "easier because it's closer to English," suggesting some learners pick it for linguistic comfort. He also noted personal connections can stimulate interest: "maybe somebody has a Swedish-speaking boyfriend or girlfriend... or maybe they study at Åbo Akademi... to be closer to the Swedish community." The immigrant highlighted this community aspect, explaining he "wanted to learn Swedish in an environment where I could hear and use the language more often."

The move from Turku to Porvoo became beneficial for him because Porvoo has many Swedish speakers, which made everyday practice possible. Another participant, an academic professor, described being influenced by the people around him: when he arrived in a Swedish-speaking area, he “started going to school there and I learned Swedish.” In his case, contacts from a Swedish-speaking municipality led to immersion in the language. He later reflected that for him “learning Swedish... was much easier than learning Finnish” because, as a French speaker, “Swedish is pretty similar... many words are the same.” In short, interviewees offered a range of explanations for their choice, which included ease of learning, prior exposure to the language, getting citizenship, social contact and career aspirations.

2. Challenges and Barriers: Across interviews, participants highlighted significant obstacles in learning Swedish in Turku. A language teacher emphasized that the difficulty of Swedish varies with one’s native tongue: “pronunciation can be difficult... if the languages you speak are very different from Swedish, then the whole structure can be difficult.” Moreover, a language teacher pointed to external factors: a high dropout rate in courses, observing that “you might have around 15 students, but by the end, 8 remain.” He explained this to non-linguistic challenges: “some realize they don’t have enough time... others struggle with motivation, life circumstances, like work or family commitments, also play a role.” Structural barriers in Turku’s educational offerings were also pronounced. The immigrant complained that he “struggled to find intensive and consistent Swedish courses” in Turku. He noted that local classes tended to be “*shorter and less frequent*,” without a clear progression from beginner through intermediate. Crucially, he observed a lack of integration of language learning with everyday life: “there were no Swedish courses that combined language learning with integration into Finnish society,” making it “challenging to improve my Swedish in a real-life context.” The combination of language barriers and institutional limitations, like insufficient courses and immersion, creates obstacles for immigrant learners in Turku.

3. Immersive Environment and Practical Opportunities: The main theme was the difference between environments where Swedish is common and where it is rare. The immigrant who moved to Porvoo described a remarkable change in opportunity. For example, in Porvoo “Swedish much more often in public places” – on street signs, in shops and cafés – so “constant exposure helps feel more connected to the language.” He added, “I’ve had more chances to use Swedish... I often hear people speaking Swedish, and I try to use it when ordering food or asking for help.”

This immersion, he said, “forces me to practice in real-life situations.” Another participant reflected on small Swedish-speaking communities in Finland, where everyone tends to know each other. He remarked that in such communities “you build connections very easily.” In his case, learning Swedish led directly to social bonds: “I created a really strong social network... these people were like my friends”. The closely related nature of Swedish-speaking areas (especially in smaller towns) means newcomers can be quickly linked into family-friend circles and even supported in education or housing. In contrast, Turku’s bilingual environment offers fewer of these available immersion experiences. Interviewees implied that simply being surrounded by Swedish on a daily basis, as in Porvoo or Swedish-majority municipalities, made the language come alive and accelerated learning.

4. Social and Professional Integration: The interviewees confirmed that Swedish proficiency helps integration, particularly within the Swedish-speaking community of Finland. The professor explained that Swedish Finns tend to be “a bit more open” and welcoming to foreigners. He observed “they are more ready to discuss... even with... the immigrant, compared to Finnish-speaking people.” Speaking Swedish, in his experience, unlocked access to helpful networks: because he could speak Swedish, “I was always talking to them [my Swedish-speaking contacts], and they gave me... advice when I was looking for a job.” He also noted practical gains – for example, some scholarship foundations at Åbo Akademi specifically recognized his achievement in learning Swedish, awarding him substantial financial support for his studies. He summarized that “knowing the Swedish language has been very good for me and has really helped quite a lot” in building a career and settling in Finland. The teacher similarly remarked that any local language helps integration, noting “knowing the local language always helps – it can give you more opportunities.” In general, learning Swedish provides immigrants in Finland with tangible opportunities to expand their social and professional connections.

5. Recommendations for Educational and Policy Improvements: A clear suggestion was to offer more intensive, structured courses in Turku. The immigrant who moved to Porvoo contrasted Turku’s offerings with the comprehensive Helsinki/Porvoo model: “courses in Turku seem to be shorter and less frequent... In contrast, the courses I am attending in Porvoo are more intensive, with classes five days a week and a more structured progression from beginner to intermediate levels.” He recommended that Turku programs adopt this intensity and continuity.

He also urged that courses incorporate cultural and practical integration: “offering more flexible and regular courses with a focus on integration and practical experiences... would really help immigrants learn the language more effectively and integrate.”

This included ideas like an internship (‘praktik’) period or community immersion built into the curriculum. The teacher’s one of suggestions was to have more courses and opportunities, especially during the summer. Many international students would like to take part during their holidays when they have more time to practice and learn. The policies could also focus on increasing the awareness of Swedish learning opportunities for immigrants and on building relationships with the Swedish-speaking community (volunteer conversation partners, social programs, etc.).

4.2.3 User Personas

User Personas refer to the creation of fictional characters that rely on thorough research to represent a possible user type of the service. Creating personas helps get to know your users’ needs, experiences, behavior and goals. Understanding people can assist in realizing that not everyone has the same expectations and needs. Using personas makes design task less complicated, and guides ideation processes (Dam & Teo, 2025). Two distinct User Personas were developed to represent typical immigrant learners of Swedish in Turku based on the survey and interview findings (see Figure 18 and 19).

Persona 1 - Olena Kovalenko represents immigrants who choose Swedish primarily because they perceive it as linguistically easier than Finnish, especially given its similarity to English. She was aware Swedish is an official language before choosing it. Her decision was influenced by the long-term goal of obtaining citizenship. Olena is highly educated and is currently studying. Olena found that Turku municipality does not offer any free and structured Swedish integration program oriented towards immigrants. She finds learning opportunities mainly through online search and her social circle (see Figure 18).

Persona 1

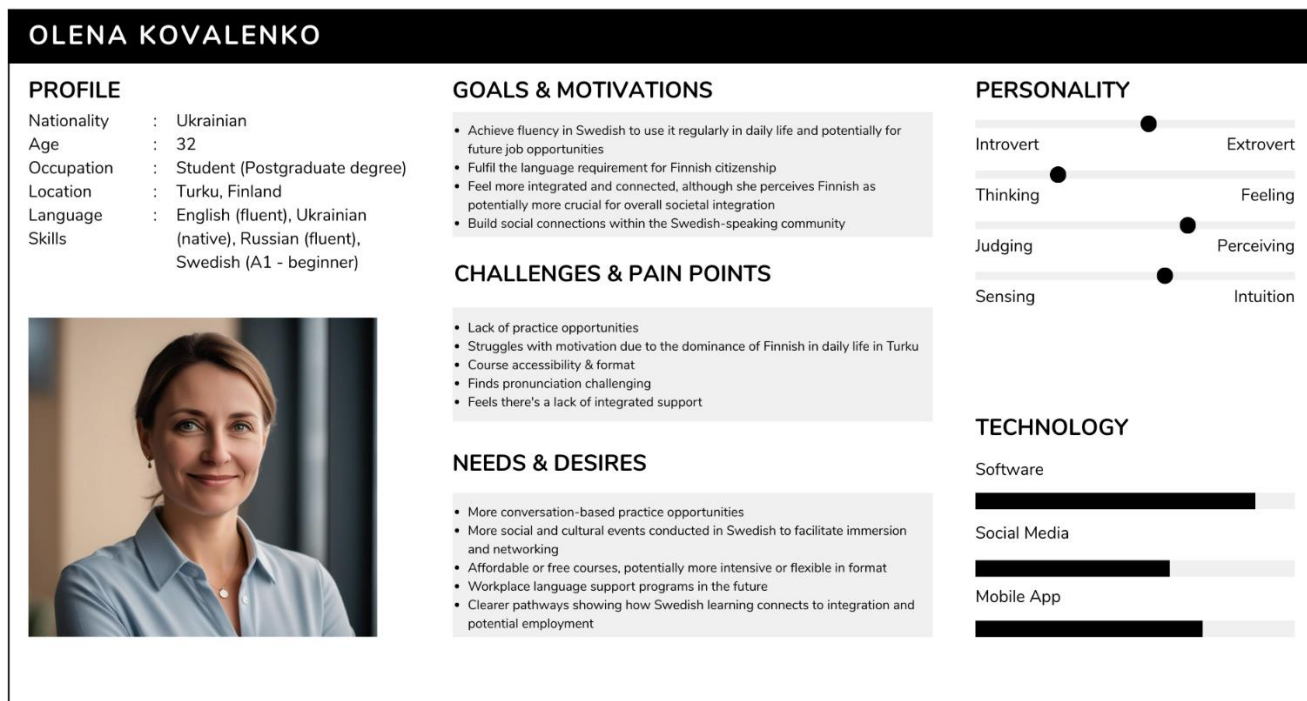


Figure 18: Persona 1

Persona 2 - Patok Sharma, a 40-year-old from India, is a software engineer who moved to Turku with their wife and two little children for long-term security and a better quality of life (see Figure 19). Despite his fluency in English, professionalism, and a thriving career, he believes that knowing Swedish will ease his integration into Finnish society and provide prospects for his family's future. Patok struggles to use Swedish at work or in his neighborhood, most colleagues and neighbors speak Finnish. He speaks Hindi with his family at home and practices Swedish only through self-study apps and Swedish TV news, which he finds too fast to follow. He is studying Swedish at the Arbis evening classes, but finds the pace too slow and lacking professional relevance. Even Patok faces multiple challenges but remains committed to developing his Swedish abilities while looking for better flexible learning options.

Persona 2



Figure 19: Persona 2

4.2.4 Customer Journey Map

Stickdorn et al. (2018) define Customer Journey Maps as a visualization to help understand current and future human experiences. Journey Maps differ from process-oriented diagrams, such as Service Blueprints, in that they focus on the actor's perspective, showing the actor's experience as a series of steps and stages.

Figure 20 presents the Customer Journey Map developed for this study, showing the experience of immigrants learning Swedish in Turku. The map indicates five primary stages: Awareness, Consideration, Enrollment, Course participation and Daily practice, Integration and Employment. This visualization captures the actions, touchpoints, pain points, and emotions of the user on his language learning journey.

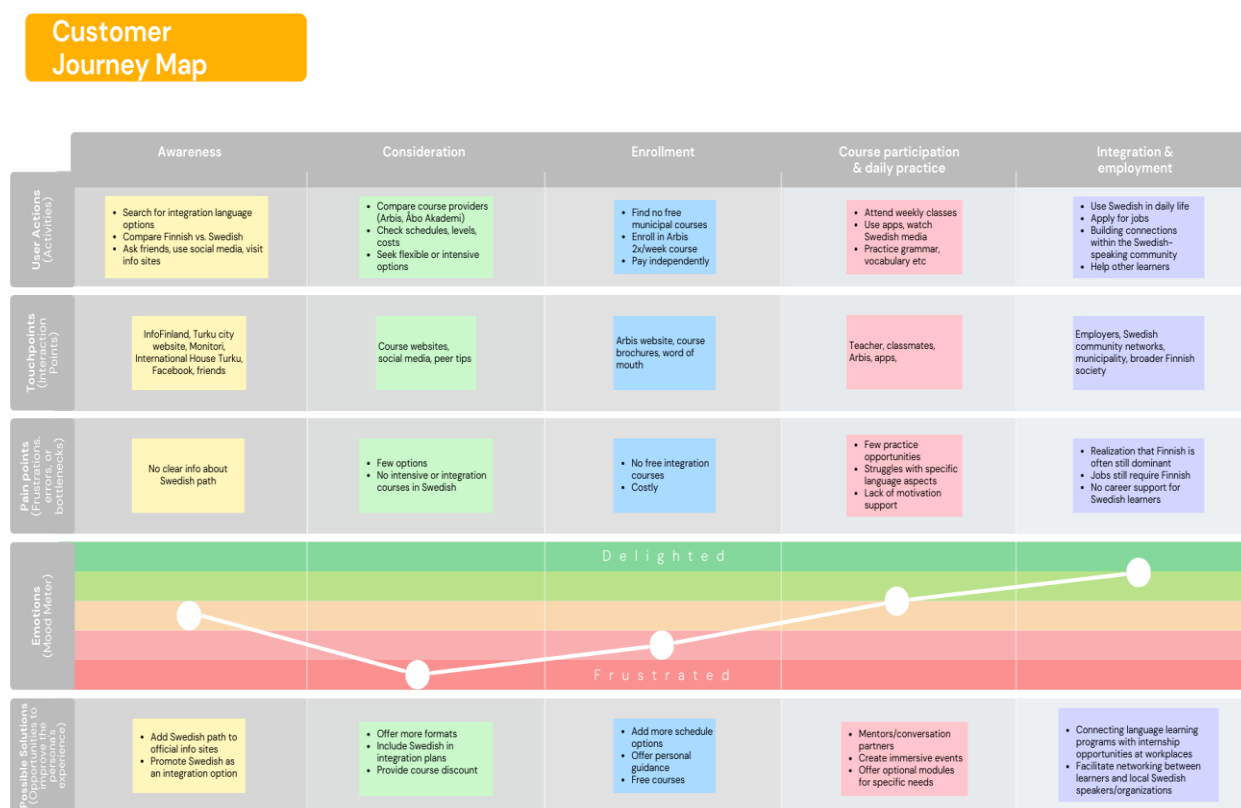


Figure 20: Customer Journey Map

4.3 Develop: From Insight to Solution

The Develop stage in the Double Diamond model represents the transition from problem definition to the problem-solving process. During this stage, insights and findings from the Discover and Define phases are transformed into early-stage concepts and ideas for improving the service. In the context of this thesis, the Develop phase refers to the generation and improvement of service ideas addressing the particular challenges faced by immigrants learning Swedish language in Turku. These challenges include - no clear pathway to integration in Swedish, no intensive integration programs in Swedish, limited Swedish language courses, lack of motivation, lack of practice opportunities, minimal support for practical language use in daily life and at workplaces. The objective of this phase is co-creating and exploring potential improvements with a human-centered approach. They make sure that the ideas align with the actual needs, motivations, and experiences of the immigrant learners. Using service design tools, such as co-creation workshop, Value Proposition Canvas and Prototyping, make it easier to translate user insights into tangible ideas that can improve Swedish language learning experience overall and enhance integration process in Turku.

4.3.1 Co-Creation Workshop

A co-creation workshop took place on 4 May 2025 to involve immigrant Swedish language learners in developing more effective learning services. Eight participants were invited; six actively studying Swedish at various levels attended (see Figure 21). The workshop followed the service design “Develop” guidelines of the Double Diamond model, emphasizing divergent and convergent thinking through collaborative activities.



Figure 21: Participants engaged in a brainstorming session

The main goal was to collaboratively generate practical, engaging, and effective solutions to the challenges and to improve Swedish language learning opportunities in Turku city context, thereby facilitating better immigrant integration. The focus was on moving from problem identification to actionable service concepts. The workshop used a structured yet flexible approach, facilitated to encourage open dialogue and creative thinking.

Introduction: The session started with a summary of the research results from the Discover and Define phases, which gave participants a complete understanding of the current complex obstacles regarding learning the Swedish language in Turku city.

Ideation - "How Might We...?": The participants engaged in individual and group brainstorming activities which started from "How Might We..." questions based on the main challenges (e.g., "How might we create more opportunities to practice Swedish daily?", "How might we make finding relevant courses and resources easier?"). Brainwriting and round-robin discussions were used to produce numerous initial ideas.

Concept Development: Participants grouped their promising ideas into thematic categories. Then divided into smaller groups to develop chosen ideas by thinking about target users, essential features, anticipated obstacles and expected results.

Prioritization and Feedback: The developed concepts were presented, discussed, and collaboratively prioritized based on perceived impact, feasibility, and desirability from the user (immigrant learner) perspective.

Workshop Outcomes: Key Solutions

The co-creation workshop produced valuable solution ideas. Following concepts emerged as particularly impactful from the perspective of immigrants navigating life and integration in Turku with shared experiences and aspirations:

Concept 1: Centralized Mobile Application Prototype - The workshop participants developed a mobile application concept which would assist Swedish learners in Turku. The application would contain a searchable database that allows users to find available courses based on level and schedule, location and cost. The application would also provide study materials, learning tips, and useful online resources. For instance, the "Swedish in Finland" section would provide information about cultural norms and legal aspects of integration and bilingualism. The application would connect learning to practice by showing users the locations of language cafés, events, libraries, volunteering opportunities and language exchange possibilities. As one participant expressed, "Finding reliable information feels scattered right now; we rely so much on friends." The ability to access all necessary information, including courses and practice locations, through a mobile phone would reduce both time consumption and anxiety levels. This tool will make learning more approachable while reducing feelings of overwhelm.

Concept 2: Structured Swedish-Language Integration Pathway - The workshop participants strongly emphasized the need to support comprehensive integration programs through Swedish language. As the facilitator, I noticed how many participants felt that Swedish could be a more approachable starting point than Finnish, particularly for those who found Finnish very difficult.

The participants clearly demonstrated their needs in programs which would teach language while providing knowledge about Finnish culture, daily life and connecting with Swedish-speaking community. There was even hope that it could benefit the next generation by fostering connections between Swedish-speaking schools and immigrant children. The group believed that proper implementation of this support system would attract immigrants who wish to establish their lives in Turku through Swedish.

Concept 3: Linking Language Learning with Real-Life Use and Inspiration - Another important discussion was about finding ways to connect language classroom learning with actual life experiences. Several participants strongly supported the idea of short internships or volunteering in Swedish-speaking environments as highly beneficial. The opportunities could include assisting at local events and visiting elderly homes, and supporting cultural activities. Linking studies to volunteer work, even short-term, would provide that crucial practice and maybe even open doors for jobs later. The actual success stories about immigrants who built their lives in Turku through Swedish proved to be another strong concept. The participants believed that these stories would motivate others.

Concept 4: Making Swedish Learning Easier and More Flexible - The participants who work, study or take care of families explained that they struggle to schedule language courses. The group investigated the possibility of running classes during weekends and introduced the concept of regular, informal "språk café" which are language cafés located in libraries and community spaces. They would provide spaces to practice speaking in low-pressure situations. The summer season was also suggested as a time when many immigrants, especially students, might have more free time to engage in intensive, in-person contact courses to improve language skills and fluency.

4.3.2 Value Proposition Canvas

The Value Proposition Canvas is a strategic instrument which helps organizations develop distinctive value propositions for their products and services. The tool contains two essential parts - the customer profile and the value map (Osterwalder et al., 2014). The Value Proposition Canvas contains two essential parts, which include the customer profile section with jobs, pains, gains and the value map section with products/services, pain relievers, gain creators.

The tool functions to establish precise alignment between customer requirements and business offerings which leads to improved product/service development and business strategy. The tool works across different industries while allowing users to customize it for handling particular specific needs or obstacles.

Customer Segment

As described in Figure 22, the right side of the Value Proposition Canvas shows that immigrant learners want to learn Swedish for their studies, work, regular practice, social integration and career advancement. The "Pains" include insufficient practice opportunities, struggle in finding appropriate and affordable courses, inflexible or unstructured course offerings, low motivation (due to Finnish language dominance), insufficient institutional support. Conversely, "Gains" include enhanced integration through social/professional networks, confidence in using Swedish, language fluency for better social integration, a sense of belonging, cultural competence, and achieving goals like citizenship.

The Value Proposition

On the left side, Products and Services include a centralized digital platform, a structured Swedish-language integration pathway, flexible courses, mentorship programs, arranging cultural workshops, links between learning and real-life/employment, and bilingual cultural events. These directly addresses pain points through its centralized information and integrated practice opportunities (like volunteering, language partner) and flexible and varied learning formats. The Gain Creators which include fast-track courses, industry-specific skill modules, progress tracking with certification and cultural events organization align perfectly with learners' needs for structured development and professional relationships.

The VPC functions as an essential instrument for creating specific programs which can boost language learning and help immigrants integrate socially and economically in Turku.

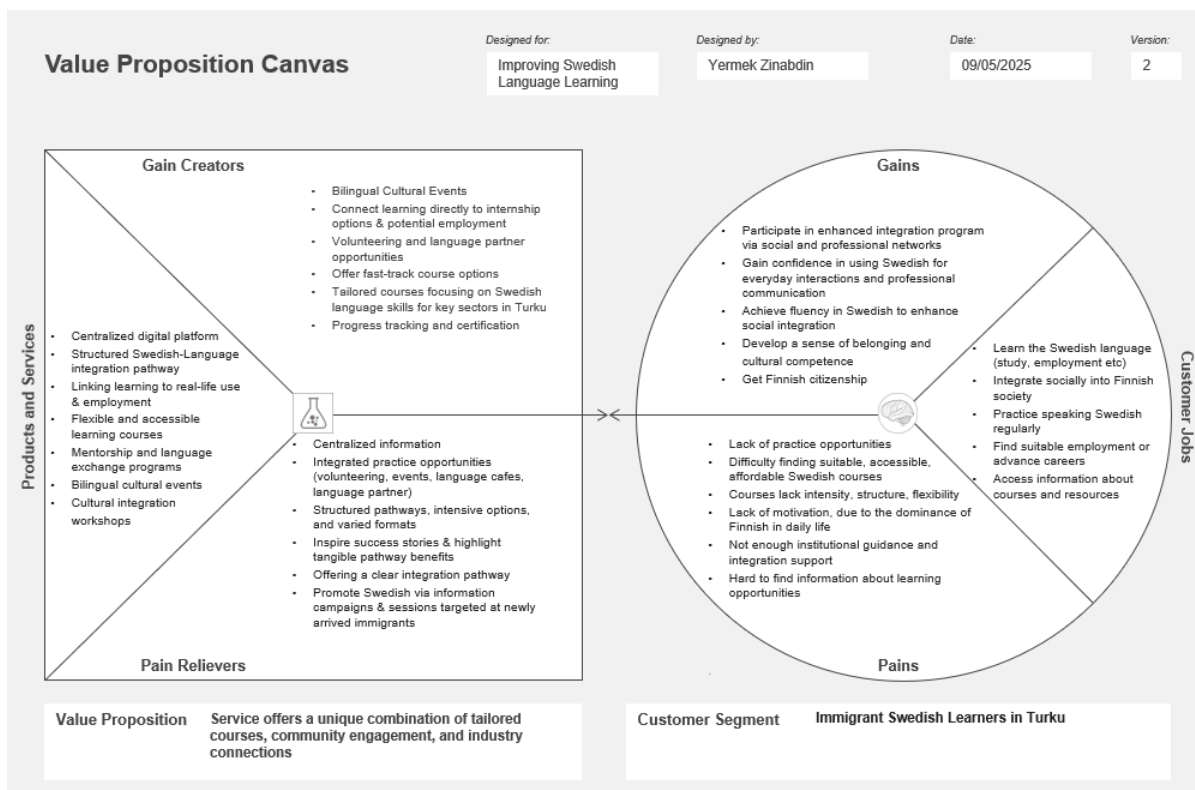


Figure 22: Value Proposition Canvas

4.3.3 Prototype Development

The research findings revealed that the official webpage of Turku city does not have a reference for learning the Swedish language or clear info about integration pathway in Swedish. The lack of a centralized platform creates substantial obstacles to integration because immigrants face challenges when trying to access language resources and navigate a clear pathway of integration through the Swedish language. The development of the mobile application prototype "Svenska Turku" was initiated to solve this challenge (see Figure 23). This section explains the development process of the prototype which includes the design objectives from initial research and an explanation of the mobile application structure and functionality and its solution to the main obstacles immigrants face when learning Swedish in Turku. The Figma program is used as the design tool for creating interactive and visually representative mock-ups because of its powerful features. The application uses blue and white as its primary colors, representing trust and clarity, while yellow accents highlight important elements. As well, the combination of blue and yellow was based on the Swedish flag design.

The traditional way of finding language courses, cultural events, and support services is often scattered across different websites, physical locations, and word-of-mouth channels, which can cause confusion and missed opportunities. The "Svenska Turku" mobile application unifies all available resources into a simple, user-friendly platform.

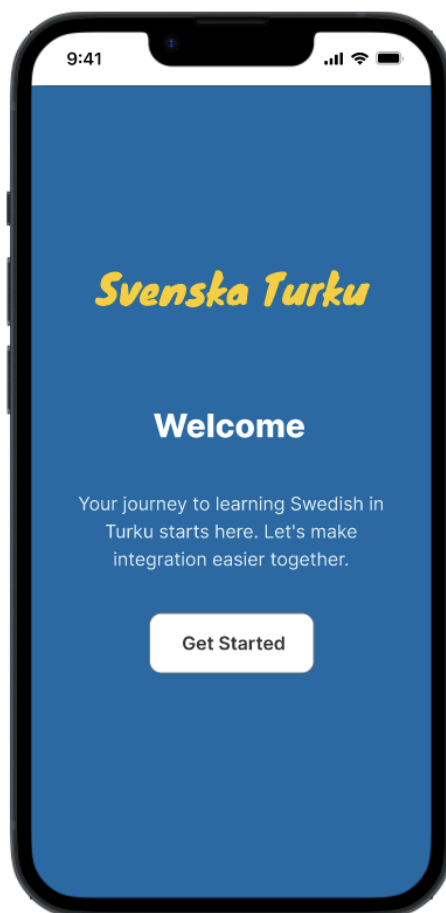


Figure 23: Svenska Turku design prototype

Design Goals Based on Research

Several main objectives of designing the "Svenska Turku" app were based on the research on needs and issues of the target user group:

- 1. Centralization:** Create a digital platform tool that contains all information about learning Swedish in Turku, including the courses, events, self-study materials, and support services.
- 2. Accessibility:** Design an intuitive and easy to navigate interface, ensuring users with varying levels of digital literacy can effectively utilize the app.

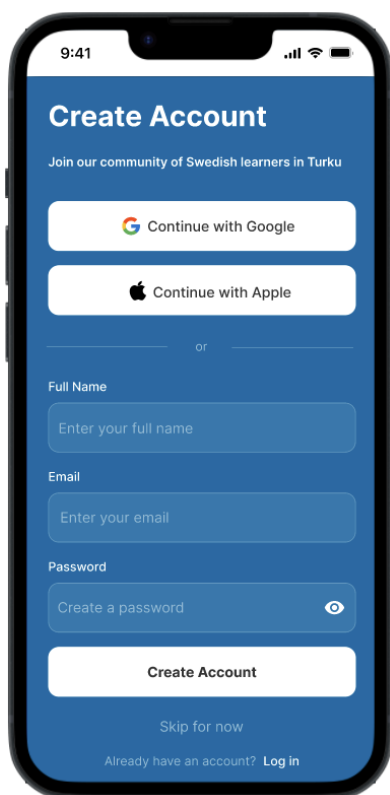
3. Engagement: Develop a sense of community and drive through such features as success stories, event listings and opportunities for language practice.

4. Practicality: To give actionable information that can truly aid the integration process, such as information about the enrollment of courses, participation in events, and access to relevant services.

5. Personalization (Future Scope): The current prototype delivers basic features, but future versions will add personalized learning paths and recommendations.

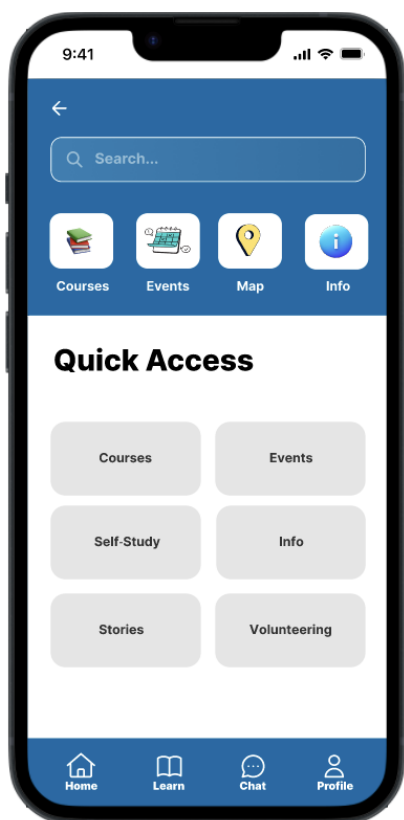
Features and Navigation

The mobile app follows a structured design which enables users to move smoothly from onboarding to accessing particular resources.



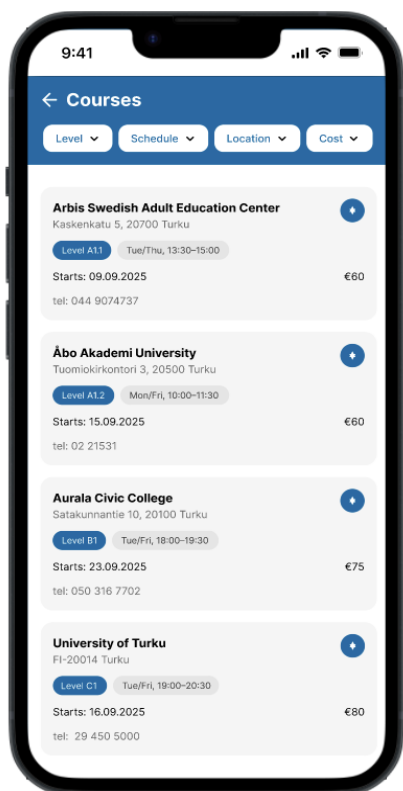
Onboarding Process: Upon launching the app for the first time, users are greeted with a "Welcome" screen that briefly explains the app's purpose: "Your journey to learning Swedish in Turku starts here. Let's make integration easier together." The "Get Started" button directs users to a "Create Account" screen. Users can choose between signing up quickly with Google or Apple accounts or creating a full account with their name and email address and password. Users can skip the sign-up process by selecting "Skip for now" to access certain features right away.

Figure 24: Onboarding Screen



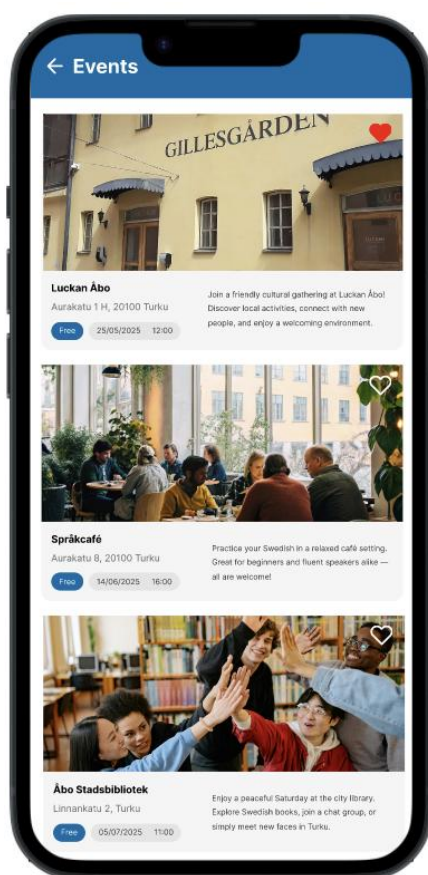
Home Screen and Main Navigation: The Home screen functions as the main interface which includes a large search bar for immediate searching capabilities (see Figure 25). Below this, key sections like "Courses," "Events," "Map," and "Info" are accessible via icons. A "Quick Access" panel further provides direct links to "Courses," "Events," "Self-Study," "Info," "Stories," and "Volunteering". A persistent bottom navigation bar enables users to move between "Home," "Learn", "Chat" and and "Profile".

Figure 25: Main navigation panel with search and quick access



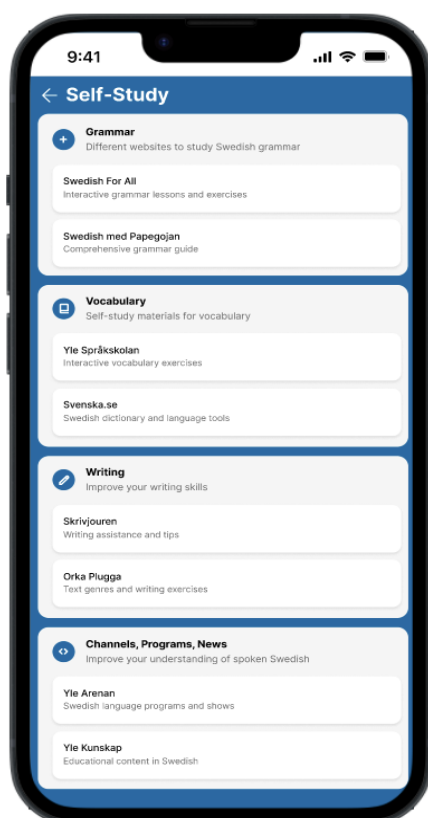
Course Search: The "Courses" section allows users to search for Swedish courses (see Figure 26). The interface enables users to filter courses by "Level," "Schedule," "Location," and "Cost." The course listings contain detailed information about the organizing institution (e.g., Arbis Swedish Adult Education Center, Åbo Akademi University), address, specific language level (e.g., A1.1, A1.2, B1), class timings, start dates, cost, and a contact telephone number.

Figure 26: Course search filters by level, location, and cost



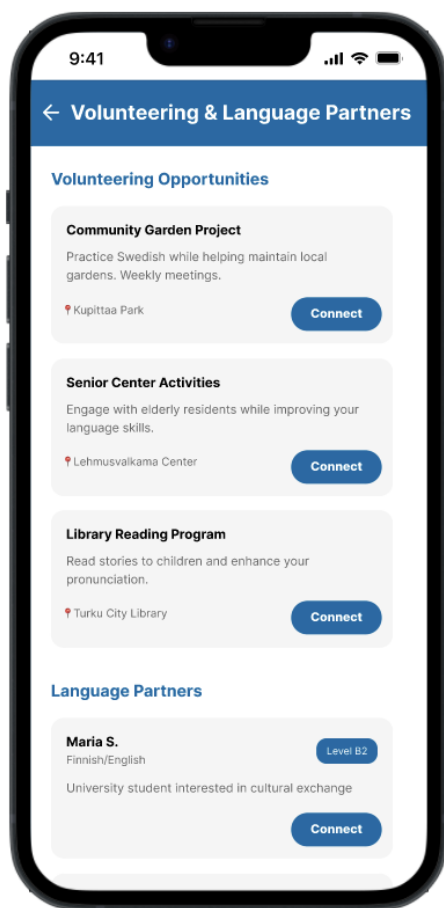
Events: The "Events" section contains relevant cultural and language practice events (e.g. "Luckan Åbo," "Språkcafé"). Each event includes an image, a brief description, location, date, and time. Some events are marked as "Free," and a heart icon suggests a "favorites" or "save event" functionality (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: Events listings



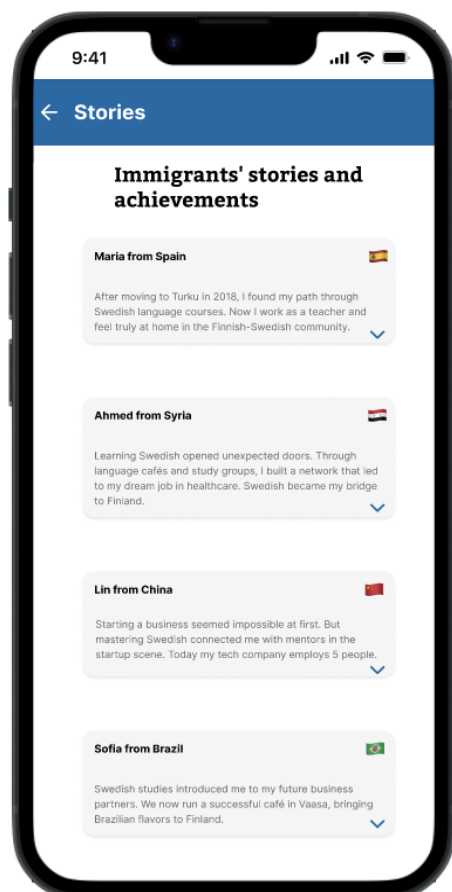
Self-Study Resources: The "Self-Study" section offers a selection of external resources which are grouped by skill into "Grammar" (Swedish For All), "Vocabulary" (Yle Språkskolan), "Writing" (Skrivjouren) and "Channels, Programs, News" (Yle Arenan). This feature is useful for learners who want to enhance their learning through additional resources or independent study (see Figure 28).

Figure 28: Self-Study resources



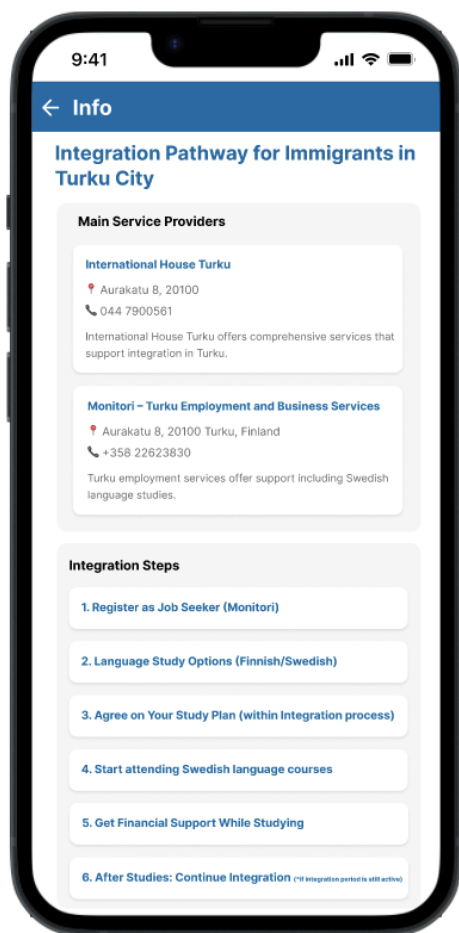
Volunteering and Language Partners: This section aims to facilitate practical language use and community integration (see Figure 29). The section includes “Volunteering Opportunities” with descriptions and “Connect” buttons and a “Language Partners” feature which helps users find cultural exchange partners by showing their language level (e.g., Maria S., Level B2).

Figure 29: Volunteering and Language Partners



Immigrant Stories: The “Stories” section of the app presents “Immigrants stories and achievements” to inspire users by sharing successful integration experiences (see Figure 30).

Figure 30: Immigrant Stories section



Information Hub: The "Info" section contains vital details about the "Integration Pathway for Immigrants in Turku City" (see Figure 31). The section includes "Main Service Providers" such as International House Turku and Monitori with their addresses and contact information. The section describes "Integration Steps" which provides step-by-step guidance for newcomers.

Figure 31: *Integration info page*

How the App Solves Key Challenges

The "Svenska Turku" app prototype directly addresses several key challenges faced by immigrants:

- The app unifies various resources into one platform which eliminates the need to search through multiple sources.
- It proactively shows users courses, events and support services that users might otherwise not discover.
- The categorized structure and search functionality simplify the process of finding relevant information.
- The app features, like success stories and language partner connections, can help users prevent feelings of isolation and stay motivated.
- Understanding integration processes.

4.4 Deliver

4.4.1 Prototype Testing

In order to test how the “Svenska Turku” mobile application prototype is going to be accepted by its target group of users, I have organized a feedback session with four immigrants who are actively learning Swedish at different levels in Turku. The main goal of the session was to evaluate the app's user-friendliness and detect any initial navigation problems while collecting first-hand feedback about the centralized Swedish language learning features. The participants received a short overview of the app's function before performing tasks that included account creation, searching for beginner Swedish courses, cultural events, and accessing self-study resources, etc. I watched their interactions with the prototype to see where they hesitated or got confused, and asked them to think aloud as they moved through the different sections, such as the home screen, course search filters, and the information hub. After the task-based exploration, we had a group discussion to capture their overall feedback on the app's design, functionality, and potential impact on their language learning journey in Turku.

Users' feedback is organized below by theme:

1) Navigation and Design

- “I love how clean and simple the home screen is – I always know where to tap next.”
- "I really liked the design is; the blue and yellow colors are nice and make me think of Sweden!"
- "Finding the courses was quite easy with the filters for level and location. “That would save me a lot of time compared to searching different websites.”

2) Clarity of Information

- "The course listings are clear: level, time, location, and cost are all right there."
- "I nearly missed that this event was free because the tag was so small; it could stand out more."
- "At first, I wasn't sure if I had to create an account, but then I saw the 'Skip for now' option, which was good."

3) Feature Relevance and Engagement

- "The 'Stories' section is a great idea! Reading about others who have succeeded would be very motivating."
- "The self-study resources grouped by skill (grammar, vocabulary, writing) are exactly what I need to study on my own."
- "I like that there's an 'Info' section about the integration pathway. That's confusing for many newcomers."
- "Having all the information in one place – courses, events, and those self-study links – is exactly what we need."
- "The step-by-step integration guide is great, but I'd love more detail on how to register for official language tests."
- "The volunteering and language partner features might be very helpful for practicing Swedish not of the class."

4) Requests for Future Development

- **Calendar Integration:** "Please let me sync courses and events directly with my phone calendar so I never forget."
- **Personalized Notifications:** "I'd like reminders when a new B1 course opens or when an event matching my interests is coming up."

- **Interactive Chat Functionality:** “A live chat with volunteers or other learners would help me practise in real time.”
- **Map:** “It would be great if, when I find a course, I could click a button to see its location directly on the map in the app.”

This feedback session provided valuable guidance on the future app’s development to ensure that it reflects improved everyday needs of users. The suggestions indicate the areas in which functionality can be enhanced – not only to make something more usable, but instead, to make it more intuitive, personally tailored experience.

5. Key Findings and Recommendations

5.1 Key Findings

The following section presents the most important research findings.

How learning Swedish connects to integration

The research shows that Swedish language learning affects immigrant integration in Turku, but it is not the sole determining factor. Learning Swedish provides immigrants with opportunities to build relationships with the host society and access better employment and study opportunities, and attain social inclusion within the Swedish-speaking community of Finland. Many Turku immigrants believe Finnish language skills are more essential for daily life and complete social integration.

Limited Institutional support

Unlike other cities in Finland (Helsinki, Vaasa, etc.), Turku is lacking structured pathways that formally recognize Swedish as part of the process for integration. Participants observed that the integration programs and employment services tended to value and prioritize learning the Finnish language. Moreover, under the integration program, the only option to learn Swedish is called “Immigrant's Independent Studies” which requires that immigrants find and pay for courses on their own. This approach can be demotivating in learning Swedish among immigrants and lead to decreased perception of Swedish language learning value and accessibility.

Motivation to learn Swedish is often practical, not integrative

According to survey results, the majority of learners selected Swedish because of its perceived simplicity, or they selected Swedish to fulfill citizenship requirements, yet only 3% chose it for social integration purposes. The results indicate that Swedish could have been presented as a valuable option for integration into Finnish society.

Main barriers to effective Swedish language learning

The most frequently reported challenges included having few opportunities to practice Swedish outside of class, and difficulty with finding accurate language resources and navigating a clear pathway of integration through the Swedish language. Many learners found Swedish language opportunities through friends and family members, rather than official channels. Another challenge is that Swedish language learning in Turku lacks direct connections to employment or educational advancement opportunities. Additionally, there are currently no intensive courses in Swedish – in contrast to Finnish, which exists in various full-time formats as part of integration plans. The absence of intensive options hinders the speed at which learners are able to make progress, while making it difficult for motivated learners to maintain consistent learning.

Cultural and Institutional Heritage

The research showed that Turku already possesses valuable resources which could be used to support Swedish language learning. The institutions of Åbo Akademi University, Svenska Teatern, Novia UAS, Arbis, Luckan Åbo, etc, have a great potential to promote the Swedish language. The support they provide to language learners in integration programs remains limited or informal. The historical Swedish heritage of Turku visible through its architectural design, traditions, and cultural events. The city maintains proximity to Mariehamn and Stockholm through frequent ferry services. The city's ferry connections create opportunities for exchange programs and cultural visits and virtual collaboration with native Swedish speakers.

5.2 Recommendations: Using Service Design to make Swedish learning better in Turku

In order to make Swedish language learning services in Turku easier to access and more beneficial for immigrants, service design thinking offers practical approaches. We can develop greater services by concentrating on the demands and experiences of immigrants.

The design of better services requires a complete understanding of immigrant needs and experiences.

Based on key insights from the empirical study and co-creation activities, the following recommendations are proposed for developing Swedish language learning for immigrant integration in Turku:

1. Intensive and structured Swedish courses within the Integration plan

It is highly recommended that the Turku city municipality and educational institutions, such as Åbo Akademi University and Arbis Swedish Adult Education Center, establish intensive and free Swedish language courses as a certified part of the official integration plan. These programs should perform the following actions:

- Provide a step-by-step learning path from beginner to intermediate levels (e.g., A1-B2 CEFR), similar to successful models in other Finnish cities.
- Provide practical content like vocabulary for professional settings and daily life should be incorporated in classes. They could also be linked to brief internships or volunteer work in Swedish-speaking workplaces. In addition to assisting learners in boosting language proficiency, this would expand their professional networks.
- Create an engaging learning environment by utilising Turku's Swedish-speaking community and historical connections to Sweden.

- Secure the student numbers, funding and prolonged vibrancy of Swedish-medium schools by accentuating the direct benefit of guiding immigrant families towards them. Both immigrant integration and the sustainability of bilingual framework are backed by this proactive approach.

2. Develop a Centralized Digital Platform (for example “Svenska Turku”)

A key idea is to develop a central platform for immigrants to find all the information about the available Swedish learning opportunities in Turku. A mobile app, similar to the "Svenska Turku" prototype I developed, could save time and reduce frustration by listing courses, events, self-study materials on one easy-to-use platform. This application could also aid in finding suitable language partners or volunteering opportunities for learners to practice Swedish in real-life situations.

3. Turku’s Bilingualism through Enhanced Information

Proactive, multilingual information campaigns should be carried out by the City of Turku and its integration services (e.g., Monitori, International House Turku) in order to clearly express Turku’s true bilingual essence. This could involve the following actions:

- Producing and distributing different types of materials (online content, printed flyers at immigrant service points, community centers) in multiple languages widely used by immigrants. The content should elaborate on the social, cultural, economic, and educational advantages of learning Swedish in Turku.
- Introducing Swedish as a feasible and valuable integration pathway by arranging focused information sessions for newly arrived immigrants. The sessions should demonstrate real-life examples of immigrants who have successfully integrated through Swedish.
- Supporting employment services and ensuring that they are equipped and encouraged to promote Swedish language learning as a favourable option. This would address the current lack of formal institutional direction in this area.

4. Foster a Supportive Ecosystem for Practical Language Use

Learners often face a significant challenge due to the lack of opportunities to practice Swedish outside the classroom combined with low confidence in speaking. Attempts to use Swedish are sometimes met with replies in Finnish or English, further discouraging practice. To address this, stakeholders should cultivate a more supportive ecosystem. A more supportive ecosystem could be achieved by the following actions:

- Strengthening and promoting current initiatives while also encouraging the development of new informal gatherings in accessible and welcoming public places like libraries, community centers, and cultural events.
- Developing Mentorship and Tandem Programs can create structured connections between learners with native or fluent Swedish speakers to facilitate consistent conversation practice and cultural exchange, as aligned with the desire for mentorship programs.
- Promoting and encouraging "Swedish-Friendly" spaces, encourage public services and local businesses to positively promote and support the use of Swedish language, perhaps through simple signage or staff training.
- Cooperating with employers to facilitate Swedish language support in the workplace and create structured opportunities like volunteering or short internships where people can use the language in practice.

6. Conclusion

The improvement of Swedish language learning opportunities in Turku requires comprehensive strategies that extend beyond basic language instruction. The society needs to address multiple factors to create an inclusive environment which supports immigrants. This research explores how learning Swedish, a language chosen for its alternative pathway, could act as a bridge to deeper community connection and enhance integration into society. The key aim was to learn about the current situation, discover problems, and recommend human-friendly solutions. The research used service design methods and tools to analyze language learners' experiences by studying their emotional responses and motivational factors and life journeys. Empathy served as an essential element for this research to produce valuable findings and practical solutions. The human-centered strategic approach in Turku can improve Swedish language services to provide immigrants with an alternative path for integration. This thesis presents both operational guidelines and essential knowledge to enhance Swedish language learning services. As language-driven integration continues to evolve, this study aims to support future research with its findings and contribute to practical improvements in real-world integration processes.

6.1 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could pursue several possibilities. Cross-comparisons with other bilingual Nordic cities facing similar integration challenges could reveal further insights and effective practices. It would also be beneficial to investigate the distinct motivations and obstacles experienced by different immigrant subgroups in selecting and succeeding in Swedish language learning based on factors like country of origin, educational background, or family status. Additionally, another valuable area for research could be a deeper investigation of the extent to which employers and workplaces contribute to Swedish language acquisition for their immigrant employees. There is potential in investigating digital and blended learning models in facilitating Swedish language learning within the Finnish setting which may lead to innovative solutions.

6.2 Critical Analysis

The process of completing this thesis revealed both successful elements and areas for improvement. The participatory methods proved to be the most effective aspect of this process. The direct conversations with immigrants along with their involvement in co-creation activities revealed information that academic research and benchmarking methods would have missed. The Double Diamond approach proved effective in maintaining both clarity and structure throughout the work. The approach enabled me to transform general research questions into particular concepts which could be tested and improved. The workshop and prototype testing provided actual feedback which influenced my final recommendations. Moreover, my personal connection to the topic motivated me while deepening the empathy needed for service design.

At the same time, some aspects of the process might have been improved. While the qualitative research method delivered in-depth findings, a larger participant number would have generated more extensive statistical data. Additionally, the co-creation workshop could have been more effective if it had included teachers, employers, and integration service professionals in addition to the six learners. Their experiences would have brought fresh perspectives and a complete understanding of Turku's integration processes. Finally, the prototype needed testing over an extended period with actual users using the app for weeks or months to demonstrate its functionality in real-world scenarios.

6.3 Personal Learning During the Process

The research process transformed my learning experience into something that exceeded academic theories. It has also expanded my understanding of the challenges of immigrant integration on a personal level. The mixed methods employed for qualitative data collection, including interviews and co-creation workshop, allowed me to broaden my capacity for listening empathetically and to develop my facilitation skills. The entire process of managing this thesis from start to finish has given me essential project management skills and critical thinking abilities. The experience has both reinforced my service design expertise and deepened my dedication to solve meaningful social problems especially those affecting immigrant integration and language accessibility.

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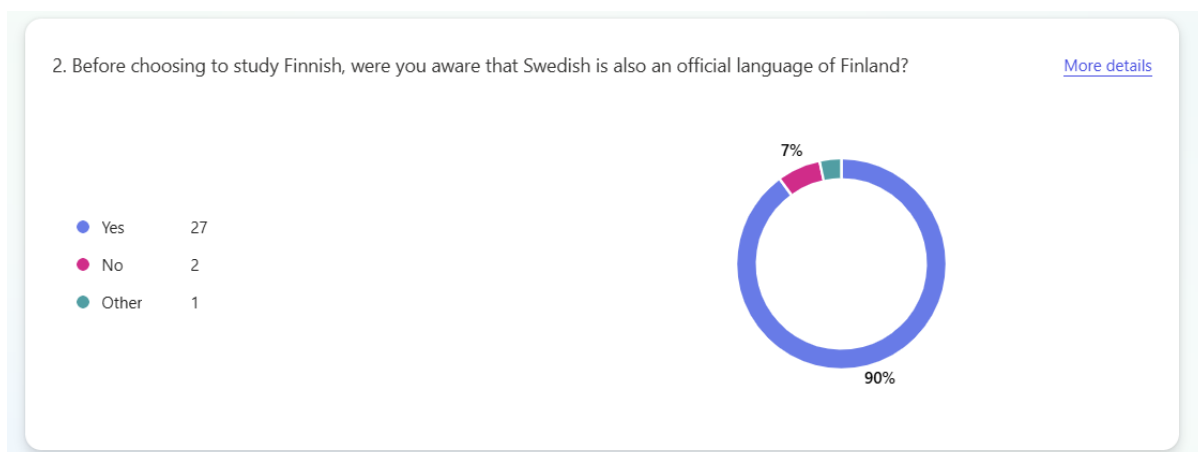
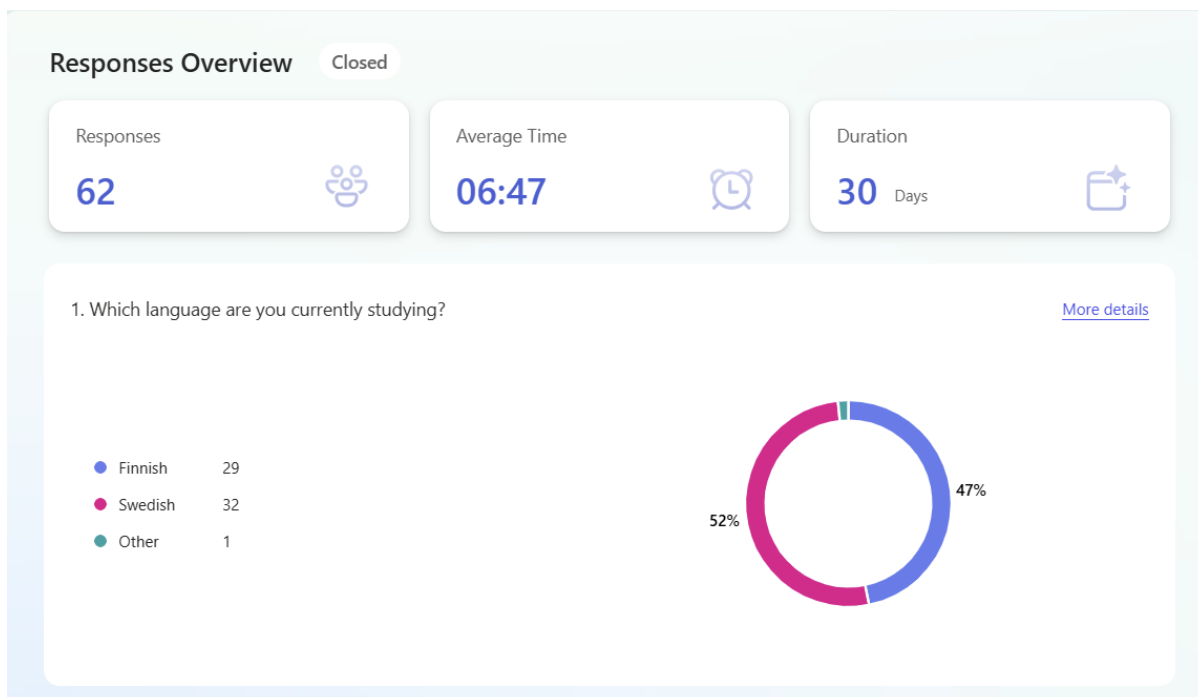
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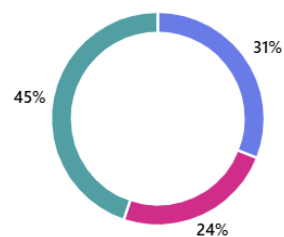
Appendix 1: Survey Results



3. Did you consider learning Swedish instead of Finnish?

[More details](#)

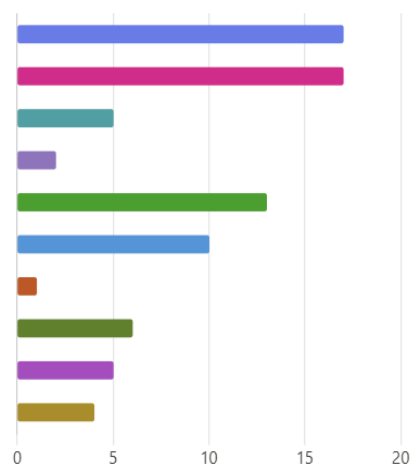
● Yes, but I chose Finnish	9
● No, I was certain about Finnish from the beginning	7
● Other	13



4. What was the main reason for choosing Finnish language? (Select all that apply)

[More details](#)

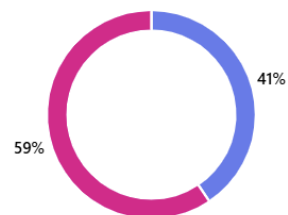
● Finnish is the dominant language in daily life	17
● More job opportunities in Finnish	17
● More Finnish courses/resources available compared to Swedish	5
● Requirement for citizenship	2
● Social integration (friends, family, community)	13
● Employer or educational institution required it	10
● Swedish was not offered as an option in my integration program	1
● I was advised that Finnish is more useful	6
● Personal preference	5
● Other	4



5. In which city are you learning the language?

[More details](#)

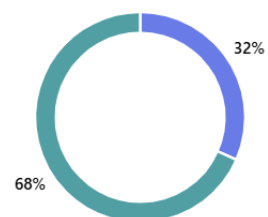
- Turku 13
- Other city 19



19. What is your current employment status?

[More details](#)

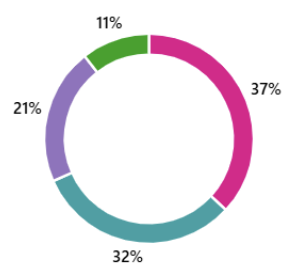
- Employed (Full-time/Part-time) 6
- Unemployed and looking for work 0
- Student 13
- Other 0



20. What is your highest level of education?

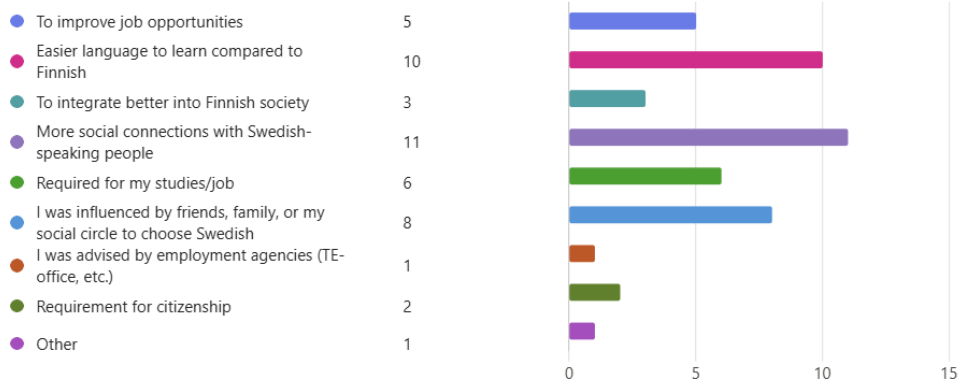
[More details](#)

- No formal education 0
- Secondary school 7
- Undergraduate degree 6
- Postgraduate degree 4
- Other 2



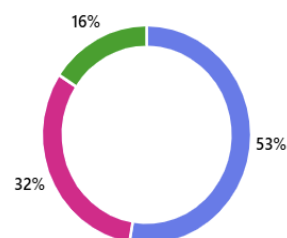
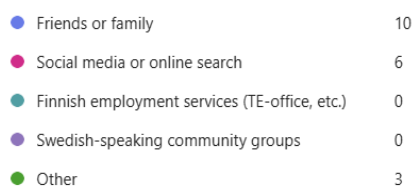
21. Why did you decide to learn Swedish instead of Finnish? (Select all that apply)

[More details](#)



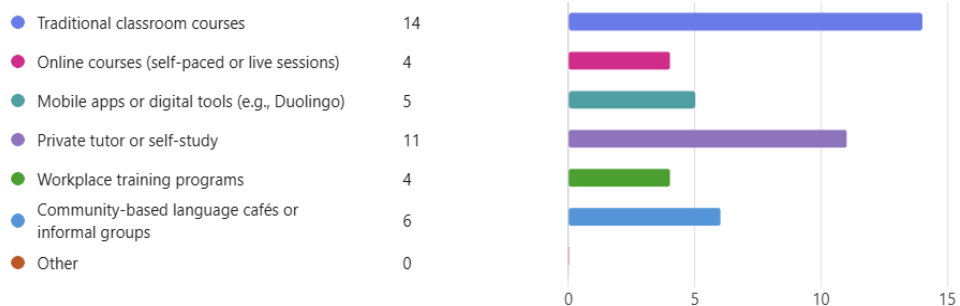
22. How did you first learn about Swedish language learning opportunities?

[More details](#)



23. What type of Swedish learning methods do you find most effective? (Select all that apply)

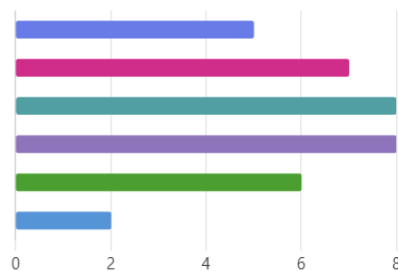
[More details](#)



24. What are the biggest challenges you face while learning Swedish? (Select all that apply)

[More details](#)

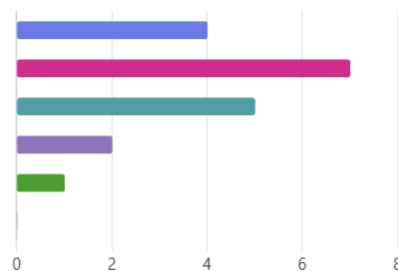
- Grammar and sentence structure 5
- Pronunciation and speaking fluently 7
- Understanding native speakers 8
- Lack of practice opportunities outside of class 8
- Lack of motivation due to Finnish being more dominant in daily life 6
- Other 2



25. How easy or difficult is it for you to find accessible and suitable Swedish courses in your city?

[More details](#)

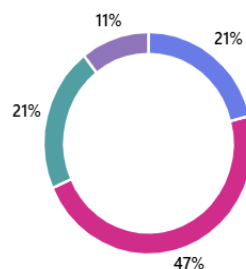
- Very easy 4
- Somewhat easy 7
- Neutral 5
- Somewhat difficult 2
- Very difficult 1
- Other 0



26. How accessible are Swedish learning resources (books, conversation groups, etc) in your city?

[More details](#)

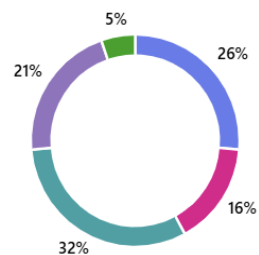
- Very accessible 4
- Somewhat accessible 9
- Neutral 4
- Somewhat inaccessible 2
- Very inaccessible 0



27. Have you encountered challenges in practicing Swedish in daily life?

[More details](#)

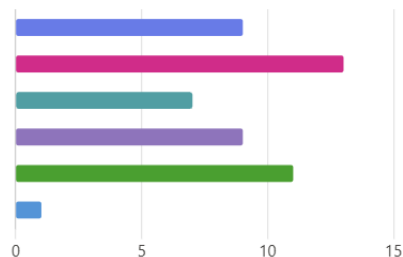
● Yes, people switch to Finnish or English when I try to speak Swedish	5
● Yes, I don't have opportunities to practice	3
● No, I can practice Swedish regularly	6
● I don't feel confident enough to speak Swedish	4
● Other	1



28. What support services would make it easier for you to learn and use Swedish? (Select all that apply)

[More details](#)

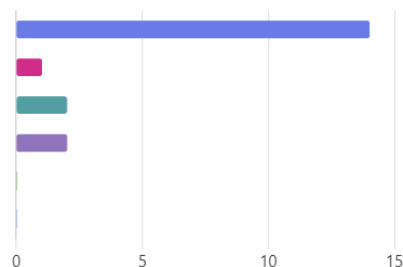
● More free/affordable courses	9
● More conversation-based practice opportunities	13
● Mentorship or language exchange programs	7
● Workplaces offering Swedish language support	9
● More social and cultural events in Swedish	11
● Other	1



29. How long do you plan to continue learning and using Swedish?

[More details](#)

● I want to become fluent and use it regularly	14
● I want to reach a basic level for daily life	1
● I will continue only if it becomes necessary for work or social life	2
● I am unsure if I will continue	2
● I am planning to stop learning Swedish	0
● Other	0





How do you personally define 'successful integration' into Finnish society?

ID	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	It is to understand the Finnish culture and be able to communicate and make connections with the Finnish community. Also, finding work or studying in Finland. Successful integration is feeling like you belong in the society just like everyone else.
2	anonymous	Understanding the culture and getting along with the society
3	anonymous	Me personally don't have motivation to do that, I think importance of "integration" is overrated. But I don't want to stay here, so probably that's why, even though I moved here to live permanently..
4	anonymous	When I can get by using the language in everyday life, enjoying local events, participation in local hobby programs, making friends and having swedish being the main language. Not feeling like I am missing something or missing out.
5	anonymous	Building strong personal connections (friends etc) in the native language (Swedish)
6	anonymous	When you have a Swedish speakears group of friends (Finnish people who speaks Swedish) and they accept you in the group. When you feel welcome among them and make plans with them regulary.
7	anonymous	Fining a job in Finland, can participate in daily activities without using English
8	anonymous	I aim to integrate into the swedish speaking finn community; they are more outgoing somehow closer to my own culture. To be successful integrated in Finland means, for me, to hang out with native people and take part of those rare social events, also to know and respect their culture and festivities.
9	anonymous	Having friends for exploration and knowing more about the country's culture.
10	anonymous	To be able to function in society as an individual

ID	Name	Responses
11	anonymous	Becoming a part of Finnish society, in my opinion, is more than just learning the language or getting a job. It's about truly feeling like you belong, being able to take part in the community and finding a balance between Finnish culture and your own identity in a way that feels natural and comfortable. Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, this should mean that both languages are equally respected. However, I'm Swedish speaking in Finland unfortunately feel that Finnish dominates in many situations, it feels like rights or language choice are not taken seriously. It is not fair that i should have to explain yourself or feel pressured to speak Finnish, especially when Swedish is also an official language by law.
12	anonymous	Not feeling out of place due to the fact that I do not come from Finland, whether it is at school, home, workplace or in public places. Being able to function at my best in a Finnish work environment without the need for assistance (translation of language).

ID	Name	Responses
13	anonymous	It's when you feel comfortable navigating daily life
14	anonymous	Being able to interact with neighbours and colleagues, participate fully in events without language barrier
15	anonymous	I believe that Finnish language must learn for integrating into Finnish society also their culture society.
16	anonymous	I'm living in Finland since 16 years and I have no idea what successful integration in any society would be.
17	anonymous	Equal access to rights and protection, opportunities and a dignified life.
18	anonymous	This is a good question since it is relative - I am currently working at Åbo Akademi University which is the Swedish speaking university and so knowing Swedish is a great advantage. It would open up teaching opportunities and ways to connect with the students. As my department is very international and most are bilingual, I haven't experienced any kind of lack of integration due to not speaking either language, but I do feel those in Finland really appreciate it if you are trying to learn the language and so I find it helps to build relationships - which can be more challenging in Finland!
19	anonymous	In my opinion, the primary requirements are language proficiency, economic stability and independence, social networking, and cultural adaptation.
20	anonymous	Successful integration means being able to communicate effectively in daily life, finding stable employment, feeling included in the local community, and understanding Finnish cultural norms. While learning Swedish has helped me understand Finland's bilingual culture, I feel that Finnish is still the key language for deeper integration.

ID	Name	Responses
21	anonymous	Successful integration into Finnish society means to understand Finnish culture and communicate in Finnish or Swedish. It's about feeling like you belong while still respecting your own background and participating in the community.

Appendix 2: Interview questions

Interview with a Swedish language teacher

1. Could you shortly share about your experience teaching Swedish?

Answer: I taught Swedish as a second language or third or fourth language for a bit more than 10 years, and have students who are Finnish speakers, and then also foreign students. Swedish is my mother tongue, Finnish is my second language, my third English and fourth German.

2. Based on your experience, what are the main motivations for immigrants in Turku to learn Swedish instead of Finnish?

Answer: I don't really know, but I think that some people think Swedish is easier because it's close, more close to English, for example, maybe some other language, which is then on the top. Maybe that's one reason. Maybe somebody has a Swedish speaking boyfriend or girlfriend or something. Or maybe they study at the Abo Academy, or work at or Abo Academy me to be close with this, more close to Swedish community, yes. So I don't usually, I don't know this, but this is my guess that these are the reasons for example.

3. By your opinion, what are the most common challenges international students face when learning Swedish, both inside and outside the classroom?

Answer: It depends on different things. I mean to some people, pronunciation can be difficult, depending on your own mother tongue. If the language or languages you speak are very different from Swedish, then, of course, the whole structure can be difficult. I can't really say, I don't know what would be the most common challenges.

4. Do you notice any patterns in student retention—do most students continue learning Swedish long-term, or do some drop out? What are the main reasons behind this?

Answer: Usually, some students drop out during the course. When you start, you might have around 15 students, but by the end, 8 or 9 remain. It varies—a few might leave after the first week, while others drop out halfway through. This pattern is quite common. The highest level we offer here is a conversation course, which corresponds roughly to B2–C1 in theory. In this group, most participants are Finnish speakers who learned Swedish at school but want to improve their fluency. However, we also have some international students. I don't always know their background, but some of them have likely started from the beginner's level and then taken the different levels, and they continue.

What are the main reasons behind this?

Answer: There are many reasons. Some students realize they don't have enough time to continue, while others may struggle with motivation or find the course too difficult. Life circumstances, like work or family commitments, also play a role.

5. In your opinion, how does learning Swedish contribute to an immigrant's integration into Finnish society, particularly in Turku?

Answer: This is something I don't really know for sure. I can only guess or speculate. But I suppose that knowing the local language always helps—it can give you more opportunities.

6. Have you observed any differences in integration experiences between students who learn Swedish and those who learn Finnish?

Answer: This is also something that I don't know. I can't say actually.

7. Do you have any success stories about immigrant students who have successfully integrated into Finnish society through learning Swedish?

Answer: Not so much, but usually, when students finish the courses, they sort of disappear from my life, and I don't really know what happens to them. However, some students keep coming back, especially for the conversation courses. They take part year after year because they still want to improve and keep up their Swedish. Some of them work or study in Swedish, usually at Åbo Akademi or maybe Novia UAS.

8. Are there enough opportunities for students in Turku to practice Swedish outside of class?

Answer: I think there are possibilities, but you have to be active and find ways to use the language. You can read in Swedish, listen to Swedish radio, watch Swedish TV—things like that. And, of course, if you have friends, colleagues, or other people who speak Swedish, that's a great opportunity to practice. One challenge, though, is that many Swedish speakers also speak good English, so conversations might switch to English instead. But there are definitely opportunities. For example, there's a place called Luckan, which promotes Swedish culture. It exists in several cities, including Åbo. They offer "Speak Swedish" moments—not formal classes or courses, but open sessions where people can practice their Swedish at specific times. So, if you're active and seek out these opportunities, you can certainly find ways to improve your Swedish.

9. Do you think there are enough resources, courses, and institutional support for immigrants wanting to learn Swedish in Turku? What could be improved?

Answer: Yes, there could definitely be more courses and opportunities, especially during the summer. Many international students and other international residents would like to take part during their holidays when they have more time to practice and learn. In many places, language courses are mostly offered in autumn, winter, and spring, but then there's often a long summer break. So maybe someone could arrange more courses during the summer as well. I don't know the details of the integration program, and I'm not sure if you can go through it in Swedish in Åbo. However, I think it's possible in the capital, Helsingfors, as well as in Vaasa, Jakobstad, and Mariehamn. That's something many people would likely be interested in.

10. If you could create something to help immigrants with Swedish, what would it be?

Answer: It could be a kind of social meeting where Swedish speakers and international people meet and actually speak Swedish. Maybe cultural events organized by the Swedish-speaking community—like going to the theater or other entertainment activities. There are definitely possibilities, but someone has to take the initiative to organize them.

11. What are your recommendations for learning the Swedish language quickly?

Answer: I think one of the most important things is having strong motivation. If you are really motivated, it makes a big difference. Another key factor is using Swedish as much and as often as possible. If you take courses once or twice a week, participate actively, do your homework, and engage in class, you will certainly learn. But if you also do something extra in Swedish every day—reading, listening, speaking—you will learn even faster and more effectively. So, the key is to use Swedish in different ways as much and as often as possible. I think that is a key factor.

Interview with an immigrant

1) What main reason and motivation led you to move from Turku to Porvoo for learning Swedish?

Answer: I wanted to learn Swedish in an environment where I could hear and use the language more often. In Turku, Swedish is spoken by some people, but Finnish is much more dominant. Porvoo has a larger Swedish-speaking community, which makes it easier to practice in daily life. Additionally, I couldn't find a long-term Swedish course in Turku that started from a beginner's level and would help me progress steadily, like the ones available in Helsinki or Porvoo.

2) When you lived in Turku, how did you try to find opportunities to learn Swedish? What difficulties did you face with Swedish courses there?

Answer: In Turku, I struggled to find intensive and consistent Swedish courses. Additionally, there were no Swedish courses that combined language learning with integration into Finnish society, which made it challenging to improve my Swedish in a real-life context.

3) Since moving to Porvoo, have you noticed any difference in how Swedish impacts your integration compared to when you were in Turku?

Answer: Yes, I've noticed a big difference. In Porvoo, I hear Swedish much more often in public places, and I also see it in signs, stores, and advertisements. This constant exposure helps me feel more connected to the language. I also feel that Swedish is more present in daily interactions, so I have more opportunities to practice, which makes me feel more engaged with Finn-Swedish culture and the community in Porvoo than I did in Turku.

4) Have you had opportunities to communicate the Swedish language in everyday life and how does the presence of a large number of Swedish-speaking residents in Porvoo affect your language-learning process?

Answer: Yes, I've had more chances to use Swedish since moving to Porvoo. In stores, cafes, and public places, I often hear people speaking Swedish, and I try to use it when ordering food or asking for help. This has been really helpful because it forces me to practice in real-life situations. Having so many Swedish speakers around also makes it feel more natural to use the language instead of switching to Finnish or English.

5) In your opinion, how could access to Swedish language learning be improved for immigrants in Turku?

Answer: I think a way to improve Swedish language learning for immigrants in Turku would be to offer more comprehensive courses, like the ones in Helsinki and Porvoo. In Turku, the courses seem to be shorter and less frequent, with some only meeting a few times a week, which makes it difficult for many people to progress quickly. In contrast, the courses I am attending in Porvoo are more intensive, with classes five days a week and a more structured progression from beginner to intermediate levels. I think offering more flexible and regular courses with a focus on integration and practical experiences, like a praktik (internship) period, would really help immigrants learn the language more effectively and integrate into Finnish society.

Interview Dialogue with Dr. Evariste Habiyakare

Date of Interview: April 1, 2025

Interviewer: Yermek Zinabdin (YZ) **Interviewee:** Dr. Evariste Habiyakare (HE)

YZ: So, could you please briefly introduce yourself? Where are you from, and what brought you to Finland?

HE: Thank you very much for your interest. I think it is very important and very good to bring to light the Swedish language, and that it could be possible to integrate in that language in Finland. I was born in Rwanda. I moved to Finland in '89. I came to Finland as a private student to do studies. Before coming, I didn't know what language I was going to choose. But the people I had contact with were from a Swedish-speaking municipality, Närpes, near Vaasa. So, when I arrived there, I found that people were speaking Swedish. I started going to school there and learned the Swedish language. I spent one year learning only Swedish, and then after that, I moved to Turku to study economics at Åbo Akademi University. As you know, Åbo Akademi University is Swedish-speaking. I could also learn more Swedish there, but at the same time study in Swedish, and at a later stage, also work there in Swedish, but also in English. I completed my Master's degree, Licentiate degree, and PhD in Economics and Business Administration from that same university. I was working at Åbo Akademi from 2000 up to 2006. Then I moved to work at Haaga-Helia University in Pasila, and also in Porvoo.

YZ: At what age were you when you came to Finland?

HE: When I came to Finland, I was 24. I had completed my equivalent to, let's say, the Swedish *lukio* (upper secondary school). So I was ready to start university studies. When I came here, I took one year just to study Swedish.

YZ: In your opinion, what are the main reasons why immigrants might choose to learn Swedish for their integration in Finland ?

HE: Yes, in Närpes, while I was living there, I saw there were people also from Bosnia, for example, who came a little bit after, and then there were Vietnamese people. All of these people who were living there went and studied Swedish, and most of them were able to integrate without any difficulties.

YZ: I also heard about the city of Jakobstad. It's also a Swedish-speaking city.

HE: Yes, there are several municipalities in Finland which are Swedish-speaking, on the west coast of Finland. For example, Närpes, these are kind of Swedish-speaking. And then when you go up to Vaasa, and after Vaasa, you have, for example, Jakobstad and other small municipalities around; they are Swedish-speaking municipalities. When you go there, you find that people speak Swedish.

YZ: Why did you choose to learn Swedish instead of Finnish, and what factors influenced your decision?

HE: For me, it was not the same as for someone who moves here and gets contacted by authorities who present a choice. I was not a refugee; I was not having any kind of formal integration process. I just chose Swedish because the people I had contact with were from a Swedish-speaking municipality. So, it was natural because all the people in that municipality were speaking Swedish, and the schools there were Swedish-speaking. I didn't have alternatives. No one asked me if I wanted to choose Finnish or Swedish. It was natural; I just took Swedish. For example, I see that people who come to Porvoo, say immigrants who come through the asylum process, are given courses to take in Finnish. They don't choose based on the availability of courses; the most available courses are Finnish language courses. In that way, for me, it was because of the municipality where I was living; it was Swedish in a natural way.

YZ: How has learning Swedish helped you in your integration professionally and socially?

HE: I want to say that it has helped a lot. What I have realized so far is that maybe Swedish-speaking people are a bit more open and more ready to discuss, even with an immigrant, than Finnish-speaking people. That is my personal view. So, anyway, when I was in Närpes, I created really strong social networks with the people there. These people were my friends, and some of them were my sponsors. Even when I moved to Turku, I still had contact with them, and whenever I was, for example, looking for a job, I was always talking to them, and they gave me some kind of advice. In that sense, I would say that speaking Swedish became really very good for me. First of all, if you think, for example, about Åbo Akademi, when I was studying there, most of the other foreign students were studying in English. We had very few foreign students who were studying in Swedish, attending classes like other students.

So that also, I think, helped me. Later on, when I was applying for a job, I was just evaluated as any other applicant because the requirement was speaking Swedish and having the required competencies. Even moving to Porvoo was through relationships and networks. One person called me and said, "Look, there is an open position in Porvoo at Haaga-Helia University. Why don't you apply for that?" I was working at Åbo Akademi at that time, but it was a temporary position. So, when this person told me that, I just applied. You can see that these relationships somehow have helped quite a lot for integrating. Another aspect that I also find very interesting for my case was when I was studying at Åbo Akademi, I saw that I was able to get scholarships quite a lot because I didn't have any financing from the government or any other place. I was using private means but at the same time also applying for scholarships. And Åbo Akademi was very good for me because some foundations found that I was very successful in my studies, and I got a substantial amount of money from these foundations. So, I would say that knowing the Swedish language has been very good for me and has been really helping quite a lot.

YZ: What were the biggest challenges and advantages of learning and using Swedish as an immigrant?

HE: First of all, I want to start with the advantages. The first advantage is that learning Swedish for me was much, much easier than learning Finnish because, as a French-speaking person, when I came to Finland, I saw that Swedish is pretty similar.

Many words are the same or similar to French. So it was somehow very easy for me to learn. I learned Swedish very fast, but I was also young and very motivated, and at that time I had energy, and I could learn very quickly. So it has been a bit easy for me to learn Swedish, that's number one. And as I said, the advantage also was that the Swedish-speaking communities are not very, very big as such, so people tend to know each other. When someone meets you and you talk about something, you find out they refer to someone else, and then you find that you build connections very easily in that way. Disadvantages, of course, I would say that it hasn't been any disadvantage for me. I haven't seen any disadvantage, but I assume nowadays that Swedish has been losing a little bit of its status. There are many Finnish people who do not want to speak Swedish anymore, for example, and even some politicians are fighting to say that Swedish will not be compulsory. So it has lost the weight it had at the time I came. So if, for example, I go to a city like Helsinki or other places where they don't speak Swedish, then I find that a disadvantage because I don't communicate really much in Finnish, so I have to speak English.

Since I already completed my studies in Swedish, I was very fluent in Swedish already. So before applying, of course, I had to pass a language test. It was very easy for me to pass the test, and I had been living here for so many years, so it was not a big problem.

YZ: Now most immigrants consider learning the Swedish language as an opportunity to get citizenship quickly.

HE: I don't know if that would be the only motivation for learning Swedish because you can also learn Finnish and get citizenship without any problem. But it depends on each and everyone's background and what you want to achieve. Because again, one has to also think a little bit... Of course, in most of the places where you go, you will find that the Finnish language is spoken everywhere. So, I don't know if my success story would be repeated again by many immigrants expecting to get the same result. I'm not sure. But I could say that all my family members who came to Finland, most of them integrated through Swedish. And they have been doing very well, a very successful kind of integration. So without any big problem, they got positions in big companies and other organizations. So there is no big problem if you decide to choose the Swedish language. And then, of course, you have to see where job opportunities are, for example, and then you just apply. But if you, for example, say that you stay in Helsinki, it might be difficult to get a position.

But if you say, "OK, now I just complete [my studies] and I move, for example, or apply, for example, to Vaasa, or Jakobstad as we were saying, or Åland," you find that they are looking for people who speak Swedish and who have competencies and skills. Åland is completely 100% Swedish-speaking, and they don't have a big population, which means they have availability of jobs. If people want to move there, Åland would be an option. If, for example, I didn't have a job here in Finland, I would just move to Åland. And also, the other advantage, of course, is you could also move to Sweden if you want, or even Norway. The Norwegian language is pretty similar to Swedish, so you could also move to Norway and work there. So that is like a huge opportunity if you really speak Swedish.

YZ: From your perspective, how could Finnish society and institutions better support immigrants who choose Swedish as their integration language?

HE: I don't think that there is any need to make it so specific or special. It's just, first of all, that they need to make the alternative available, like the availability of Swedish language courses. So if someone comes and then you say, "OK, it's a country where you can choose Swedish or choose Finnish." OK, if I decide, for example, to choose Swedish, where are the Swedish language courses? Because you find, for example, the integration authorities, they have already courses for people who want to study Finnish, but there are no courses for those who want to study Swedish. If you want to study Swedish, you do it on your own or you just go to some evening classes, and so on. So that is not good. It should be possible to have two alternatives and say, "OK, if you choose this, then these are the available courses." Then, of course, if someone goes through this kind of training and gets good knowledge of Swedish, I wouldn't say that you would get any kind of treatment which is different from what the one who chose Finnish gets. Because availability of jobs and so on are advertised also in the Swedish language, so you can also apply in that way. And I would say also that actually, if you choose, for example, to learn Swedish, you have... people don't see it, but much more opportunities. Imagine, for example, almost all kinds of schools, even professional schools, are in Finnish, but Swedish-speaking people also have their own schools. And since it is a small community, it means that it might be easier to get into these schools because they need applicants. So, I would say, for example, as an immigrant, instead of spending so many years trying to study this and you're not getting in, if you study Swedish, you might get in easily to some of these professional studies. And then you learn what you want to learn.

Other than that, I don't know if there will be any specific kind of help from authorities. You're going to be integrated the same way as the others are integrated. You get support from Kela or any other institution the same way they support others. Of course, now maybe information is getting less and less in Swedish. So if, for example, someone chooses the Swedish language, then the support would be to get a bit more information about where the opportunities are, and so on.

YZ: What advice would you give to other immigrants considering Swedish as a pathway to integration? What key factors should they consider?

HE: First of all, I want to say that one has to be open and know that this is a minority language that you're going to learn. But Swedish, even if it's a minority language, it's not like in some other countries. Most people tend to think that when they come from countries where, for example, a minority has been having problems, they think it's the same. But what they don't see is that Finnish law and constitution give a very good position to Swedish-speaking people, in a way that they can use the language like any Finnish person is using their own language. And also, there are schools and other services which are given in Swedish. So, in a way, it's not like you are afraid that you're going to lose something. So, number one is to think that Swedish also offers opportunities for integration. Then, of course, if you decide to choose the Swedish language, then you should be ready to move to maybe small places where Swedish is spoken. But I have seen that most immigrants tend to think that it is better to move to big cities like Helsinki, and then when you move to the big cities, then of course you find that Swedish is almost non-existent. So if you choose to take Swedish, then you should also be thinking, "OK, where am I going to use it?" Then identify these different places where it is used, for example, and then start to create networks around these places. Then, of course, one should also be realistic and think that if you want to be fully operational and you want to have all the opportunities, even if you have completed your Swedish language studies and you are, for example, working, you could also learn Finnish as an additional skill. Maybe not on the same level as Swedish, but you can also learn Finnish a little bit so that you have at least this knowledge of the two languages. That will give a huge advantage. As I said, you shouldn't be afraid of moving to maybe smaller places. And you should not be afraid of reactions because sometimes you meet some Finnish people, and when they see that you speak Swedish, some of them may not even like it. For example, for me, when I meet people who start to wonder why I speak Swedish, sometimes they think that I actually came to Finland from Sweden. So one should not be afraid of these kinds of comments.

HE: Many people, sometimes when they come, they don't even know about the existence of the Swedish language. They are just put into Finnish [courses] immediately, and these are the available kind of language courses. I see, for example, in Porvoo, Porvoo is like 50/50 [Finnish/Swedish], if they choose Swedish, then there is no one who is offering Swedish courses. So what do you do? You will be naturally forced into learning Finnish. But otherwise, if you really learn Swedish, there are opportunities. Think that Swedish-speaking people, I don't know what the number is now, but it used to be maybe 500,000, now it is maybe less, but they have all services and things in their own language, which means that they also need people to work in these different organizations.

HE: Just one thing I could add before we end, so that you also understand a little bit that my situation may be very, very different from other situations. When I was in my country, I went to school in French. And when I came to Finland, of course, I could speak some English at that time, but it was not so advanced. We were given a choice: if you want to go and study at Åbo Akademi, either you study in Swedish or in English. For example, students who had studied secondary school in English, say from Kenya or from Nigeria, or from other English-speaking countries, they were studying in English. But for me, because I studied in French, that was not an option. So I had, already from the early beginning, a high level of motivation because I knew that this was my only chance to study economics; I had to first learn the Swedish language so that I could get a study place at Åbo Akademi and then study what I wanted to study. That kind of motivation was really high. And you could see later on, now when I go back and look in my books, I find that I created even my own dictionary. Yes, I created my own dictionary because each and every day I decided I was going to learn a certain number of words, for example, and then how to use these words. And I created, you know... now when I look at it, I just start to figure, wow, how was I able to do this? And sometimes I even gave what I had created to some other people who came a little bit afterwards, and they found it very helpful because I created my own dictionary, created my own system.