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SWEDISH LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION BASED ON IMMIGRANT STU- DENTS' EXPERIENCES AT BRIDGE

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This thesis was carried out with the aim of finding out the effects of Swedish language courses at Bridge in the social integration of immigrants into Finland's Swedish speaking society. This study falls under the Empowering Work Research and Development Path of Laurea Applied University of Sciences (Otaniemi). It was carried out in collaboration with Bridge project, which is a new service centre catering for immigrants. Bridge is part of Luckan, the Finland-Swedish Information and Culture Centre. The target group were eight (8) immigrants who had studied Swedish language beyond level three (3) and participated in Bridge's integration programmes. Qualitative research design was used to conduct the study and semi structured interviews were employed in data gathering. Inductive content analysis was the selected method for data analysis.

The thesis findings showed that the respondents are now able to communicate in Swedish thereby increasing their self confidence. Consequently, this has led to the widening of their social networks and possibilities to acquiring citizenship as a result of the language course. Generally, the language courses have had positive effects on the respondents who now consider themselves to be on the path to integration.

Key words: Social integration, immigrants and Swedish language

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1 Introduction

Immigration is an increasing global issue and Finland is not an exception. Finland has been a closed country in respect to immigration. This trend changed in the 1990s when Finland received asylum seekers and refugees notably from Somalia, Iraq, Vietnam and former Yugoslavia. Immigrant numbers have been steadily increasing in Finland. For instance, from only 26,300 immigrants in 1990, the figure rose to 91,100 in 2000. This was a fourfold increment within a period of 10 years. As of May 2010, Finland had 155 705 immigrants (Statistics Finland 2010). This increase in the number of immigrants brought about the need to develop programmes that are directed towards their integration into the mainstream society.

Finland is a multilingual country with over 90% of the population using Finnish language as their mother tongue and about 6% using Swedish as their mother tongue. Finnish and Swedish are the two official languages of the Finland but Sami is another language spoken in some parts of the country. Immigrants in Finland are at liberty to study either Finnish or Swedish. This thesis, Swedish language as a tool for social integration based on immigrant students' experiences at Bridge is therefore trying to identify what role the Swedish language course plays in the social integration of immigrants into Finland's Swedish speaking society. It was conducted in collaboration with one of Laurea's working life partners, Bridge project. The main aim of Bridge is to narrow down the gap between immigrants and the Finnish Swedish society in terms of everyday realities, such as taking part in activities, working or studying. For immigrants, learning the language of the mainstream society is usually considered as a gateway to integration. In a country where there are two official languages, immigrants have an option of studying either of the two. For some reasons beyond the scope of this thesis, most immigrants in the metropolitan region of Finland have been studying Finnish language and not Swedish. The exceptions are those immigrants that are living in the Swedish speaking regions and a few others with different motives such as family or work related issues chose to study Swedish language.

Our interest in this thesis includes having a wider understanding of multicultural work and an understanding of language as an integration tool. These are important skills for us to have as future social workers. Knowledge of language as a tool for social integration will undoubtedly be a great asset to us in our future careers. The importance of language as a medium of communication in social work, as in all other professions, cannot be over emphasized. Therefore, it is worth knowing the role it plays in the integration process. For a social worker to work effectively there is need to know the level of impact the language used has on the clients and the interpretations attached to the language used.

2 Bridge project

Bridge is a new service centre catering for immigrants, and is part of Luckan, the Finland-Swedish Information and Culture Centre. Luckan is a partner in the Capital region's Swedish part of the project Osallinen Suomessa. The main aim of Bridge is to 'bridge the gap' between immigrants and the Finnish society in terms of everyday realities, such as taking part in activities, working or studying. It is a Finland-Swedish integration service in the Capital region that works to build up networks, to develop information and bring forward issues that are not functioning with respect to the possibilities to integrate in Swedish, if one should choose to do so. (Bridge, 2011)

Specific objectives include easing the integration process for their target audience with supervision, information and education via the front office activities. Bridge also lobbies for a change in attitude of employers towards immigrants as jobholders/jobseekers and also the society in general. In addition Bridge further strives to make Luckan, more embracing for immigrants and also to be able to offer customized services for the target group. Bridge offers guidance on how to successfully integrate into the Finnish, and Finland-Swedish society. In other words, offering an alternative to the integration process through information sharing and practical advice on questions related to integration. In addition, Bridge also assists immigrants in finding work, study possibilities and free time activities. Bridge conducts workshops and seminars in collaboration with other organisations (Bridge, 2011).

In 2009, Bridge has had its front office operating and also hosted more than six Finland-Swedish cultural programmes, two arts workshops, a seminar, films, co-operating with other projects, schools and employers. Bridge organised in cooperation with Hanken and Arcada, an information session for employers about the possibility of taking international students as trainees. Employers can now find information about the internship, and contact details of the institutions on Bridge's home page. So far the initiative has led to two Hanken students gaining trainee places. From Bridge, "you can book a time with an information officer to get started in Finland or to find out more. Bridge gives advice and support to find the right information, help and service corresponding to ones needs and to solve bureaucratic difficulties. Bridge also offers educational and cultural events". (Bridge, 2011)

Our cooperation with Bridge came as a result of them being one of the working life partners of Laurea University of Applied Sciences. They aim to integrate immigrants into Finnish Swedish speaking society. As a result, we cooperated with them to find out the role of Swedish language in the social integration of the immigrants. The findings of the thesis can be

used in the evaluation of the Bridge project's integration programme. In so doing, Bridge can be able to justify its existence to its benefactors/collaborating partners, solicit for more support and be used as a source of reference for future planning.

3 Swedish language courses

Arbis is the only Swedish adult education centre in the metropolitan area. It is the main organiser and implementer of the Swedish language courses upon which this thesis was written. The Swedish language curriculum used at Arbis was developed by Folkuniversitetet in Sweden. Folkuniversitetet is an adult educational association that offers a wide range of adult education all over Sweden. The curriculum is simultaneously used by both Arbis and its developers. The curriculum consisting of six parts has been at the testing stage for the past two years. There are plans to modify and expand it into eight (8) parts by the year 2012. The planned expansion will increase the course book chapters from thirty to thirty-five.

Arbis conducts the course for a period of six (6) weeks per level and each level has 36 lessons. There are levels one to four. They recruit students six (6) times a year into different levels. The majority of the students so far have been immigrants with the exception of a few native Finns. There is a minimum of five (5) and a maximum of twenty (25) students per course. The lessons are conducted during the week days for a duration of two and half hours, two to four times per week. The duration and frequency of a particular course usually depends on the level and time of the year it is been conducted. Sometimes, the schedule of a particular teacher handling the course also affects the timing.

In level 1, commonly called Swedish for beginners, students learn to communicate in everyday life situations. As the name indicates, this course is intended for people who have never learned Swedish. It starts from scratch and moves on. The course teacher has the free will to implement different teaching methods that s/he thinks will enhance a better understanding for the students. This includes word games, role plays, describing pictures and reading. In this course, students are also guided to learn the basis of Swedish grammar and get some insight into Swedish culture. The title of the book used at this level is called Rivstart 1 (Helsingfors Arbis, 2010-2011).

Level 2 on the other hand is a continuation of the beginners' course. It entails a lot of grammar and vocabulary exercises with an emphasis on spoken Swedish. There is a closer look at the Swedish culture. Text and audio visual means are highly used during this course. A teacher for instance might decide to play a video tape for the students to watch without any

prior information as to why it is been played. At the end of the tape, students may be instructed to reflect on what they have seen. The reflection could be done either in pairs or in small groups. After debating on their reflections, students can present their final opinions to their fellow classmates. The aim here is to improve the students' reading, writing and discussion skills. Students are at liberty to ask the teacher for help in constructing words and phrases on a particular topic. For instance, a student who works in a pharmacy might want to know how to talk to clients in Swedish while the waitress may want to learn how to take orders from customers or at least be able to say few words in Swedish (ofcourse to the Swedish customers or speakers).The title of the book used at this level is called Rivstart 2 (Helsingfors Arbis, 2010-2011).

Intensive Swedish, the highest level offered by Arbis at the moment is divided into six parts. Each of the parts consists of 36 lessons adding up to 216 lessons. Students who have previously studied Swedish elsewhere have the opportunity to enrol in this course. Some parts of the Intensive Swedish course are conducted at Bridge.This does not mean that Bridge has its own teachers. It is the Arbis teachers who teach at Bridge. The book used in this course is called Svenska Utifrån. The book has an audio Cd which has a lot of excercises (Helsingfors Arbis, 2010-2011).

3.1 Arbis's cooperation with Bridge

Like all other courses, Arbis has been organising the Swedish language lessons within it's premises. The cooperation came as part of Bridge's outreach activities to sister projects or organisations working with immigrants. For its parts, Bridge provides a space in its premises for the lessons.This happens mostly when Bridge has a reasonable number of clients that are interested in learning Swedish. The said cooperation enables Bridge to involve the students in their intergration programmes/activities. These include, but are not limited to, study visits to Swedish speaking organisations like the Hufvudstadsbladet (HBL-Swedish newspaper), cooking in Swedish, seminars or discussions on intercultural encounters, watching Swedish theatres, mushroom picking, and having coffee together. In a way, Bridge tries to involve the students in the activities as much as possible. The aim of the activities is to provide an alternative to integration, into the Finnish Swedish speaking society. The activities/programmes are designed to open up the Swedish society to immigrants.

Students who are attending Swedish language lessons at Arbis are also not left out of Bridge's programmes. Bridge's cordinator keeps in touch with the Arbis teachers to make sure that students are aware of all the ongoing activities. Swedish language students at either Arbis or Bridge could agree on something they want to do together and request for help from the Bridge coordinator. Examples of such activities could be listening to music from a particular

country or discussing a topic of interest to them over coffee. The coordinator will book a venue for them and provide coffee for the event.

3.2 Swedish speaking society in Finland

Swedish speaking Finns are the largest minority group in Finland. As of 2010, Finland's population structure consisted of 5.43 % Swedish-speaking Finns of the total population (5.3 million) according to Statistics Finland. This figure has been dropping over the years. At the beginning of the 1900s it was about 13 % of the total population as cited by Statistics Finland. Swedish language has had a long history in Finland dating back to the Swedish rule over Finland. Finland was considered a province of the Swedish kingdom from 1150s to 1809. According to Lavery (2006) during that time the Swedish language was used as a language for administration and was regarded as a language of government, education and the elite. This is despite the fact that most Swedish speaking Finns at that time worked as farmers or fishermen. This common history is the basis of the similarities between the Finnish and Swedish societies - similarities that can still be seen in the culture as well as in the political and legal structures (Ministry of Justice)

According to Lavery (2006) at the time when Finland was fighting for its autonomy, there were discussions about language by Finnish nationalists. One particular influence cited by Lavery on the path leading to Finnish and Swedish languages, to be becoming co-official languages was undertaken by J.V. Snellman through the language Rescript. By the time Finland became independent, on the 6th of December 1917 it was agreed that the country would have two national languages, Finnish and Swedish. This was enshrined in the constitution of the new state as stated in the Finnish language act (148/1922). Section 14 specifically mentions Finnish and Swedish as official languages of Finland, (Ministry of Justice). This section also indicates that everyone has the right to use Finnish or Swedish in pursuing matters, which may fall under the legal system or the public authority. The constitution, language act and many other official government documents are available in the two official languages.

Most of the Swedish speaking population live along the west coast of Finland. Finnish and Swedish have the same status as national languages. One language takes precedence over the other, depending on how many of the people living in a given community speak Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue. According to Korkman (2004, 1), the language law of 2003 states that, "a municipality is bilingual if the Finnish or Swedish speaking minority consists of at least 3000 people or more than 8 % of the population". An example can be the town of Tammisaari which is a Swedish speaking town. The street names are given in Swedish first

then in Finnish unlike in Helsinki where the names are first written in Finnish then in Swedish. Åland, an island, which is part of Finland but Swedish speaking, is governed autonomously. The Swedish speaking society has been active in the political arena of Finland through the Swedish people's party. During the 2008 municipal elections, they amassed 4.7 % of the total votes. This is a decline from previous years. This has sparked an internal debate over how to protect the Swedish language in Finland. Lavery (2006) debates this point by saying that on one hand, some advocate for the maintenance of the country's Swedish language institutions such as schools for only those who consider themselves Swedish speaking. However, others argue for the opening up of these institutions to everyone. Some of these arguments can be reflected in organisations such as Arbis and Bridge. The former is offering language courses while the latter offers integration programme for immigrants.

4 Social integration

This section tries to highlight the theoretical framework of social integration through the use of Swedish language. Social integration encompasses quite a number of things, which often underestimates its relevance. Often, one is caught up in a dilemma of which definition to take, as various authors have defined it differently. "Social integration is such a state of society, where all parts are strongly connected with each other, creating a whole, clearly bounded from outside; individuals to different parts as the members of the society, families, social strata, groups, classes, unions, associations, and political parties. The societal subsystems fulfill the particular functions as well-economy, politics, justice, science, medicine, mass media, or religion" (Munch 1997, 66 as cited by Ragne 2004, 14). Hämäläinen & kurki 1997 referring to the word social stated it has different meanings each of which depends on the context of usage. Accordingly, Hämäläinen and Kurki (1997) claimed that the word social might refer to society and its structures, to community and communication between people or to solidarity and generosity among us.

Clearly, this means that there must be interaction among members of our societies, before social integration could be considered to have occurred or occurring. Interacting with the main society creates room for mutual acceptance and understanding of each other. Giddens (1984) as cited in Mortensen (1995) states that social integration involves the daily routines of day-to-day life. Mortensen (1995) also indicated that, in the daily activities, individuals encounter others who are physically present and co-present. This may lead to inclusion, equal opportunities and rights for immigrants. In this case, becoming more integrated implies improving life chances.

An important effect of social integration is to enable immigrants to be part of, and participate in, the society in which they have settled. In order for the integration process to

be effective, immigrants need to be empowered with the necessary tools to effectively function

in their new society. Zimmerman's work on empowerment theory provides a framework, focussing on processes and outcomes as cited in Fetterman.

“Empowerment processes are the ones which attempt to gain control, obtain resources and critically understand one's social environment. The process is empowering if it helps people develop skills so that they become independent problem solvers and decision makers” Fetterman (2001, 12).

Payne (2005), states that empowerment practice helps individuals and groups to overcome social barriers to self-fulfilment within the existing social structures. Social barriers include a whole range of issues like cultural differences, language, ethnicity and race. For instance, if someone does not know the main language of a country and needs a translator. This could be considered a language barrier, which in turn implies that the person cannot be able to communicate and interact with the society freely. Therefore, learning the language of the new country without the need for a translator could be considered as empowerment. This means that language as a social barrier has been removed.

Removing social barriers will undoubtedly lead to more social interaction. This is the basis for any meaningful social interaction and acculturation. Acculturation is said to have occurred when people from different cultural backgrounds make contact with each other and share cultural norms. Berry's acculturation model (1997) as cited in Hernandez-Plaza, Alonso-Morillejo and Pozo-Munoz (2006,1153) points out “four strategies immigrants may use to deal with the changes that take place as a result of migration: assimilation, separation or segregation, integration and marginalization”. These strategies, Hernandez-Plaza et al (2006) continued are relates to two independent dimensions. The first one is cultural maintenance- this is concerned about the extent to which cultural identity and characteristics are considered to be important and the level of maintenance fought for. The second one is contact and participation basically looking at the extent of the immigrants' involvement in other cultural groups or remains among themselves. The model was summarized as follows:

“Immigrants who are interested in having contact with the settlement society seek interaction with natives, avoid interaction with their own native community and do not maintain the cultural values of their origin society use the ‘assimilation strategy’. Those who emphasize their own values and culture, and avoid contact with the host society, use the ‘separation’ or ‘segregation’ strat-

egy. The integration strategy is used when immigrants are interested in both maintaining their own culture and having contact with other groups in the settlement context. And finally, the 'marginalization' strategy is used when immigrants have little possibility or interest in both maintaining their original culture and having relations with the host society" Hernandez-Plaza et al (2006, 1154).

The contact hypothesis also called intergroup contact theory by Allport (1954) as cited by Chrysochoou (2004) indicated four preconditions that have to be met in order to produce best condition for intergroup contact. These preconditions include equal status between the groups, social and institutional support, cooperative interdependence and acquaintance potential. Equal status according to Allport implies that the groups in contact are to be treated equally to avoid stereotypes. Social and institutional support on the other hand means that the contact has to be recognized by legal authorities and be supported by social norms to be beneficial. On cooperative interdependence, Allport opined that as long as the groups in contact are interdependent their relationships need to be cooperative devoid of internal competition. Acquaintance potential was the last of Allport's precondition in the contact hypothesis. "Contact has to be of sufficient duration, frequency, and closeness to promote the development of close relationships". (Allport 1954 as cited by Chrysochoou 2004, 68).

In reference to the intergroup contact theory preconditions, Finland has associations/organisations like Caisa (International Cultural Center) and Multicultural Finland (Intercultural Association) that either directly or indirectly helps in the integration of immigrants. According to 2008 annual reports, Multicultural Finland as an intercultural association works for an open dialogue and inclusive attitude regarding integration and work policies. This is because Finland does not only have laws and acts that support the integration process but also recognises and gives support to organisations that works in the integration sector. The act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers aims "to promote the integration, equality and freedom of choice of immigrants through measures which help them to acquire the essential knowledge and skills they need to function in society, and to ensure the essential livelihood and welfare of asylum seekers by arranging for their reception" (493/1999). The act defines integration as the personal development and participation of immigrants in work life; the measures taken and resources provided by the authorities to promote such integration. The resources provided could be used directly through integration programmes by the government or channeled through organizations or projects like Bridge, which are involved in integration work. In addition to the act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers, there is also the alien act. Promoting good governance and legal protection for aliens are the corner stones of the act. The act also seeks

to promote effective management of immigration and provision of international protection of human and basic rights in accordance to international agreements binding on Finland. Furthermore, the

Nationality Act (359/2003) lays down the procedures needed for the acquisition, retaining or loss of Finnish citizenship. Acquiring citizenship gives one the legal possibility to identify oneself as a national of the country.

4.1 Previous studies

At the moment there has been little research on the role of Swedish language in the integration of immigrants in Finland. Research involving immigrants mostly looks at their perceptions, or perceptions of others on them, their expectations, experiences and needs. According to Korkman (2004), Immigrants in Swedish language regions have been studied by Nyholm (1993), Haapamäki (1995) and Söderman (1997), but they have only focused on the situation of the Kurds. Söderman (1997) stated in his findings that informants who had a good command of Swedish or Finnish had an integrative attitude to the Finnish society. The Swedish speaking Kurds identified strongly with the Swedish speakers. Informants with higher education seemed to be more motivated to learn both Swedish and Finnish Söderman (1997) as cited in Korkman (2004).

Korkman's studies also identified some challenges being faced by immigrants' in the integration process. This includes maintaining contacts with the majority population as well as adjusting to the new environment and culture. At the same time they still have to maintain their own cultural characteristics and identity. They then have to live with their original identity and their adapted identity. This may lead to overlaps and sometimes to the development of a third sub culture or identity (a mixture of their own culture and that of the host country). To enable immigrants to function effectively in the host society, Berry (2002) as cited in Korkman (2004) points out that it is vital that the members of the majority population interact with the immigrants and are active as conversational partners in everyday life situations such as at work, school, peers and friends. Being active conversational partners in daily situations may help to reduce prejudices and hence facilitate social integration. By talking and interacting with others who are different, one gets a better understanding of the other. From then, unfamiliarity will be reduced. Trankell (1975) study on immigrants in Sweden indicated that Swedish people who have had contacts with immigrants usually have a more positive attitude towards them as compared to those who do not have such contacts, Jaakkola (1983). He further points out that Finnish immigrants who had more knowledge of the Swedish

language were more confident in themselves and more outgoing as compared to those with less language skills in Swedish. Those who had less language skills tended to be more closed up and only interacted mainly with their fellow Finnish friends because they could easily communicate and understand each other.

A study conducted by Valtonen (2002, 115), revealed that “the attainment of satisfactory relation between new groups and the receiving society is one of the challenges of integration”. The study also indicated that the immigrants’ relations with Finnish people vary from friendship ties to minimal informal social interaction. According to Valtonen (2002), the immigrants, although in different ways, all reported to, have had supportive experience with the Finns they interacted with. Immigration and multiculturalism are new concepts in Finland when compared to neighbouring countries like Sweden and Norway. This implies that opportunities facilitating the meeting of the mainstream society and immigrants are limited.

“Cultural encounter is still a novel phenomenon and interaction areas are limited although educational and recreational programmes provides for interaction for those individual who participate in these activities” Valtonen (2002:116).

This all goes to show, that there are needs for immigrants and members of the mainstream society to meet, in order to facilitate interaction which consequently opens the door to social integration. Integration cannot take place in isolation, immigrants must be willing to take part in integration activities and the members of the mainstream society must also be willing to accept the immigrants.

4.2 Language in the social integration process

A number of barriers exist that can prevent or hinder adult migrants’ destination language acquisition, some of the most commonly acknowledged being migrants’ educational background, gender, cultural and religious beliefs, and income level. As highlighted in the previous studies section, Söderman (1997) as cited in Korkman (2004) discovered that informants with higher education seemed to be more motivated to learn both Swedish and Finnish. Haapamäki (1995) as cited by Korkman (2006) has studied the language proficiency of immigrants’ in Swedish and had interesting results relating to language and integration. Among the adults, those who had the best proficiency in Swedish were found to be young men possessing a high education, a regular contact with Swedish speaking people and those who actively read news-

papers and books in Swedish. This shows how language proficiency and higher education helps in the integration process of immigrants. The educated or highly educated immigrants find it easier to learn new languages compared to those who are not.

Language and social integration are two closely related concepts. There cannot be any meaningful social integration devoid of language. That is why it is often argued that language is one of the most vital social barriers for most immigrants especially those in communities that speak a different language than them. Language as defined by Jandt (2004) is a set of symbols shared by a community to communicate meaning and experience. Social integration on the other hand encompasses everything that is meant to enable immigrants to be part of, and participate in the society in which they have settled. Immigrants learning the language of their new community could therefore be considered as taking a step in the right direction towards their social integration. Apart from learning the language, immigrants also learn about the social norms and values of the society through interaction with the mainstream society. The possibility to communicate is an important aspect of being part of the society and its culture. Jandt (2004) points out that when people learn their native language, they also unconsciously learn their culture. Similarly, Redmond (1995) also indicated that cultural information is general information about language, dominant values and norms that can be attributed to someone from a different culture. Jandt further indicated when a person grows up knowing more than one language, then there is a possibility that the person will be aware of the different ways to perceive and describe reality in both languages.

A study at Tampere University by Clark (2005), gives a clearer picture of the interdependence of social integration and language. The immigrant groups targeted were Somalis, Afghans, and Iranians. The study on the Somalis was based on accessibility to primary health care system. The results showed that gaining access to the health services was a monumental task especially for the women. The difficulties cited were inadequacy in language skills, cultural differences and racial discrimination. According to the research, the inadequacy in language skills led to some health service providers to develop the tendency of feeling that Somalian clients were difficult. The research also shows that the Somalians on the other hand felt that the health service workers were biased. This research shows that language plays a major role in the accessibility and integration of the Somali community into the Finnish health system. By having inadequate language skills, it became apparent that some clients were reluctant to access these services thereby preventing them from getting the benefits of the health sector. The Afghan immigrants who participated in the research also expressed similar challenges in integrating into the Finnish mental health sector. One of the major reasons was the inadequate language skills. Although there was a provision for interpreters, the respondents still felt that it was more difficult for them to express their feelings and emotions through a

third person. From this, it can be seen, how language becomes an important aspect in the integration process for immigrants into a society or access to services being offered in that particular society.

Communication being the most common use of language makes it a central issue in social integration. According to King (1974), the most important characteristic of communication is the assignation of meaning to behavior. Gore (2007) states that people are connected to one another through communication, forming a kind of community. The communication in all its forms, particularly when language is used as a medium, eases the integration process. The probable reason being that the two people communicating are able to assign meaning to each other's behavior and understand each other better. The beauty of it is that they are able to ask for clarifications in the common language while communicating. Common language in this sense refers to a language spoken and understood by two or more members of a particular group or society. Therefore language plays an important role in social integration.

From the above, one can realise that it would be very difficult if not impossible to integrate someone into a new community without the use of language. In this regards, it also means that the barriers to language learning are also barriers to social integration. Some of the most common barriers to immigrants' language learning include educational background, gender, religious and cultural beliefs and social class (income level). These barriers vary from one immigrant to another. For example some immigrants are highly educated while others are not. Those with low education may encounter difficulties in learning new languages especially in the west where computers and technology are more commonly used. Without adequate language skills of the host country, one can ask: how immigrants can become part of society? How do they find work and housing? Are there possibilities to access public services of various kinds, especially welfare and educational services? The very broadness of the integration process makes it hard to define in any precise way. Integration of newcomers to a society takes place at every level and in every sector of society. It involves a wide range of social actors: public officials, political, decision-makers, employers, trade union officials, fellow-workers, service providers, neighbours and so on. The immigrants themselves play a crucial role in the integration process. Developing the human agency needed to function effectively in a new environment requires the individual and collective initiative of the newcomers. Where restrictive rules and rigid systems confine them to a passive role, integration may be slow and incomplete.

4.3 Social networks in the integration process

Social networks could be considered as an inter-connection of people who keep in touch for

various reasons. Milroy & Milroy (1992) referred to social network as a boundless web of ties that reaches out through a whole society, linking people to one another, however remotely. From the above definitions it is clear that effective functional social integration is closely related to social networks. When immigrants join social networks with members in their new community, the exchange of ideas and information vital for both groups starts immediately. Members of a social network usually depend on each other's support whenever the need arise. Hernandez-Plaza et al (2006, 1161) wrote:

“Existing sources of support in the social network are particularly useful for the provision of precise information of key issues (e.g. employment opportunity, housing access, legal requirements and opportunity to get and maintain resident rights), including the formal support system (organization, programmes and services, target population, services access conditions).

Although the shared information and ideas might be more beneficial to the immigrant, members of the host society also benefit by been more positive about immigrants as a result of the contact, Trankell (1975) as cited in Jaakkola (1983).

As networks develop, it is also expected that there would be a corresponding increase in trust and confidence among the members. In addition to trust and confidence, social networks also have the potential of increasing accessibility to each other. Froland, Pancoast, Chapman & Kimboko (1981), Cowen (1982), Litwak (1995), Litwat, Messeri & Silverstein (1990) and Heenan (2000) all indicated that:

“When people need support, they usually turn to accessible and trustworthy sources-frequently someone who understands their personal situation, whose help has a minimal cost and a reduced stigmatizing potential” Hernandez-Plaza et al (2006, 1155).

This is particularly important for immigrants as they might have a limited number of people that they can trust or interact with. Berry (1997) and Shen & Takeuchi (2001) as cited by Hernandez (2006) stated that informal networks and social support plays vital role in the adjustment and acculturation of immigrants. Unlike informal support, immigrants might find it difficult to access institutionalized (formal) support due to unawareness of its existence or the complex nature of getting it. Hernandez-Plaza et al (2006) stressed that formal support is less attractive as compared to an informal one, due to its bureaucratic nature and possible stig-

matization. For example it will be quicker and easier for one to seek advice on drug related issues from a trusted friend than walk into a counseling centre. In the former case, there will be no need to sign papers or make an appointment. However, if credible community members, within the social network, give the information about available social resources, then there is a possibility of increasing usage of the formal services.

In order to enable immigrants to integrate into their new society, there should be the enabling environment for social interaction of the two groups. The said interaction is bound to start and depend on communication within a social network and consequently extend to the individual connections. One of the simplest forms of communication within the network could be conversation. Duke (1976) as indicated in Rolof (1987) defines conversation as “the foundation for self disclosure, bargaining, psychotherapy, and relationship development, and it is essentially an information exchange process”. James (1951) and Wheeler & Nezelek (1977) explained it further:

“The form, the purpose, the outcome and the participants in social interaction may vary; communication remains the vehicle. Conversation is the form of communication occurring most frequently in social interaction: one half to three fourths of our interactions, with others occur in a dyadic conversational context”. (Rolof, 1987).

In every conversation, there must be an exchange of information without which social networks and integration may be meaningless. Taylor (1979) as stated in Rolof (1987) indicated that social penetration occurs through a process of information exchange. In social networks, there is usually a two- way traffic flow of information (conversation). This will facilitate mutual understanding in the network. Self- disclosure in a conversation will enhance relationship building and development through the information exchange process. Allen & Guy (1974) as quoted by Rolof (1987, 189) claimed “that conversation constitutes a reciprocal and rhythmic interexchange of verbal emissions”. Allen & Guy (1974) also added that the core of the conversational dyad consists of the mutual transfer of information between the two communicators. Members of a social network must interact and communicate with each other in one way or the other. It is through that interaction and communication which enables members to appreciate and cherish each other’s culture and way of life. If social integration were a car, interaction and communication would be its fuel.

5 Methodology and data collection

5.1 Purpose of the study and research question

The aim of this study was to find out the role of Swedish language as a tool for social integration in Finland. This was implemented by looking at the experiences of immigrant students studying at Bridge. The study had one main research question: “What are the effects of Swedish language courses at Bridge in the social integration of immigrants into Finland’s Swedish speaking society?” From the responses to this question, we got an understanding of what effects the Swedish language course has had on the respondents.

5.2 Research Method

Qualitative research design was used in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used as a method of data collection. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the help of a questionnaire designed in advance. This was used as a guide for conducting the interview. Inductive content analysis was the selected method for the data analysis. Despite the fact that quantitative researches are often seen as providing more reliable and precise measures, qualitative design was selected because it gives a deeper understanding of human behaviour and aims at investigating the why and the how. Therefore the task we had led us to consider the use of qualitative research design. “The initial question is not what is the methodology but what needs to be investigated and why”. (Bell 2006, 115). This is further supported by Silverman, (2006) who states that the choice between different research methods should depend upon what you are trying to find out. The identification of a suitable method to use entails critical analysis of the task at hand. Therefore in selecting the best research design to use, one can consider three critical questions as stated by Denscombe (2010): Is the method being selected suitable? Is it feasible or is it a method, which will allow ethical issues to be taken into consideration? When considering our task, we looked at these points and came to a conclusion that qualitative research design would be the most suitable.

In doing qualitative research smaller but focused samples are more often needed rather than large random ones. By having these smaller but focused samples, an opportunity develops for engaging each other more closely between the researcher and those being researched. This can be seen in the words expressed by Silverman. “In the qualitative approach exists an intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied; there is a yearning in observing how social experience is produced and provides meanings”. (Silverman 2005, 10). This point was important in making a choice for the type or research method to use. The method used for collecting information was a face-to-face semi structured interviews with the respondents. In doing so there was the direct interaction through the dialogues held. Through these dialogues, respondents were seen as equal partners and were able to express in their own words what certain phenomena means. This is one strength of qualitative research which we recognised, in that it uses data to find the meaning from the participants view. The respondents were given an opportunity to express themselves and through doing this, it was possible to get a better understanding of their situation and environment. The

semi structured interview questions were designed to be open-ended rather than closed, in order for them to bring out the perspectives and voices of the respondents. Kvale (1996) supported this statement when he stated that qualitative research is sensitive and takes into consideration the human aspect and it involves a dialogue with the respondent leading to better interaction and empowerment.

Qualitative research deals more effectively and efficiently in understanding the outcomes of certain programmes or projects. Silverman (2006, 349) goes further to emphasise this point by stating that “qualitative research is flexible, studies what people are doing in their natural context and also examines processes and outcomes”. This can be in terms of what was achieved, how it was achieved, how the key players were involved, impacts or any other effects of the program on the target group. By using this research method, it became apparent for us to understand the linkages and roles of the different players in the usage of Swedish language as a tool for social integration. Furthermore qualitative research design also gives an opportunity to critically examine the role of the person(s) undertaking the research. This helps in striving to produce a research that is reliable and valid and lessens the possibilities of the researcher having their personal bias affect the outcome of the research. This was vital point for us. As immigrants, conducting a research on other immigrants, we had to make sure that personalities did not influence the research or its outcome.

5.2.1 Participants

The target group for this thesis were immigrants who have studied or are studying Swedish language. There were a number of criteria used in selecting the participants. One was that they should have studied Swedish language at Bridge up to level 3. This was to ensure that they had enough Swedish language skills for use in everyday life. They should have stayed in Finland for at least 2 years and used Swedish language for at least six months after the end of level 3. This was to ensure that there was a reasonable time period for them to experience the usage of the Swedish language. In addition to that, the length of stay in Finland would give them an opportunity to compare their daily lives before and after the language course. Another important requirement was for them to have adequate English language skills. The reason being, that our studies are conducted in English, and the research, was therefore, designed to be implemented in English. This was important to us as immigrants as we can only converse comfortably in English. By targeting only those immigrants that have adequate English language skills meant that language will not be a hindrance during the data collection and interpretation.

A consent letter was drafted in which contained information concerning the study’s aims, the

working life partner, the University of Applied Sciences, details of the students undertaking the study and confidentiality issues. The consent letter together with a description of the study including our personal details was sent to potential respondents using the client's register obtained from Bridge. Unfortunately, not everyone responded to our e-mails. Others who responded were either out of the country or in places where it was not possible for us to interview them.

In order to get more respondents, we resorted to using the snowballing method to get other respondents. Snowballing is a method for identifying a research sample where existing respondents identify others to take part in a study. Denscombe (2003, 16) states that snowballing emerges from a system where one person refers another to the study. This was not our initial idea as we had planned on using the existing register at Bridge. This only became relevant when we could not get enough respondents for our target sample. Due to the nature of snowballing in that it is an effective technique for building up a reasonable sized sample Denscombe (2003, 16), it was therefore imperative that we use this technique when we could not get enough respondents. The total number of respondents in the study was eight and they were from six different countries. Six of them were males and two females. Their ages ranged from 21 to 46 and all had lived in Finland between three to thirteen years.

5.2.2 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as a tool for obtaining data. This tool was used because unlike structured interviews, which have tight control over the format of the questions and answers, it is flexible in the order of the questions and allows the interviewee to speak more widely on the issues raised. The questions asked were open-ended and more emphasis was placed on the interviewee to elaborate points of interest. "Allowing interviewees to speak their minds is a better way of discovering things about complex issues and leads to the exploration of personal accounts of experiences and feelings". (Denscombe 2003, 167).

Before the interviews were conducted, we had to go through the consent letter together with the respondents to make sure that they understood what the whole study was about. We emphasised the issues of privacy and confidentiality to them. It was made clear that signing the consent letter was not binding. This means they could discontinue their involvement at any point in time. Upon agreeing, the respondent signed the consent letter as well as the two students undertaking the study. Two copies were signed, one for the respondent and the other for us.

The interviews done were “one to one” interviews. One to one in this case is being used despite the fact that there were two interviewers. We are taking the interviewers as one entity and the respondent as the other. Denscombe (2010) describes four advantages of this type of interview. One is that it is easy to arrange and only two people’s diaries need to coincide. The second one is that the views expressed come from only one respondent. The third one is that it is easy to control and fourthly it is easier to transcribe information coming from one source. These advantages were experienced during the study process. Once a respondent

agreed to a specific time and place, it was easy on our part, as we had already dedicated our timetables for the interviews. The average time period for each interview was from 30 to 45 minutes.

Respondents were given a choice to choose a place and time conducive for them. We did not want to make the choice on their behalf unless they gave us a choice to do so. This was in order to ensure that the respondents would feel comfortable with the place. The only preconditions attached to the choice of venue were to ensure privacy and a quiet atmosphere. All but one of the venues met the attached criteria. Nevertheless, we managed to conduct the interview. We could not change the venue as a result of wanting to respect the respondent’s choice. In addition we also ensured that the seating arrangement was in such a way that it offered interaction whenever possible. Denscombe (2010) stresses that it is important to set up the seating arrangements in a way that allows interaction between the researcher and the interviewee.

All the interviews were recorded using a tape recorder. The advantages of audio recording are that it “offers a permanent record and one that is fairly complete in terms of speech that occurs”. (Denscombe (2010, 186). However, Denscombe also illustrated the downside of it by stating that audio recordings only capture speech and misses the non-verbal communication. This was taken care of because one of us asked questions and the other took notes and made observations. The respondents were asked before the interview started whether it was fine with them for us to record the interview. In all cases they agreed that we can record the interviews.

Before the interviews, we agreed on who takes the first set of questions. This was done to avoid confusing the respondent. The other one took short notes and asked questions whenever necessary. The interview did not exactly follow the questionnaires rigidly but took advantage of certain responses to ask new questions which were not initially on the questionnaire but which were deemed relevant to the topic. This point is supported by

O’Leary (2010) who states that interviewers may also deviate from the original plan to make a follow up on relevant or interesting points raised during the interview. At the end of the interview, respondents were given an opportunity to talk about any other issues, which we may not have mentioned, but which they felt were relevant to their experiences of learning Swedish language. O’Leary (2010) emphasises it in this way, winding down an interview, involves questions that round off an interview and asks respondents if there is still something else that they would like to say or cover relating to the interview.

5.2.3 Data Analysis

The data produced during this study was in recorded and written form. Inductive content analysis method was used for data analysis. This is a method which enables one to examine data and observe what themes emerge, how they are related and evaluate issues which are present but not visible. Krippendorff (1980) as cited in Bell (2006) defines content analysis as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context. Denscombe (2010) also goes further to explain that inductive data analysis has a tendency of dealing with issues from the detail to the general. By this, he was trying to explain that from the detailed analysis of the data collected, an attempt is made to reach a more generalised statement of the subject. This was also in our study as the detailed questions which were used during the interview where a basis for arriving at a general overview of the experiences of immigrant students studying Swedish language at Bridge. Punch (2009) has the opinion that the inductive analysis is often used for the systematic analysis of what the similarities are in order to develop concepts or themes.

The first task done in the data analysis was listening to the recorded audio tapes. There were two sets of tapes available. Each of us had to listen and transcribe one of the tapes word for word. Transcription is a process of preparing the interview data for analysis Kvale (1996, 88). The transcription process involved listening to audio tapes and writing it down into text. After that we had to listen to both the tapes together to ensure that there was a common understanding of the recorded audio tapes. The data was then categorised according to the main themes which emerged from the interviews. These categories were reached at after using the colour coding. Coding was a very useful tool as it assisted in breaking the data into manageable units. The coding was done for frequency of usage of words rather than occurrence.

The idea was to find either the existence or frequency of concepts within a text. Reference was made to the research question and the data before selecting words or phrases for analysis. Upon choosing the words or phrases, the text was coded into manageable themes. Kvale

(1996) stresses this point when he states that when interviews are coded into categories, then long statements are broken down into simple categories. In this way it becomes possible to pick out useful data needed for answering the research question. It was noted that the frequency of a particular word/phrase mentioned by a respondent could be an indication of the importance of the said word or phrase. This raises the question? What happens if a respondent mentions the same word or phrase 10 times but in different formats? For instance, immigrant and foreigner may be two different words but in the context of our respondents it means the same. We therefore categorized immigrant and foreigner to mean the same.

Therefore, knowing the frequency of their utterances was vital in helping us draw conclusions.

After the colour coding process it was easy to pick out the main points which arose from the data. The table below shows the procedure used to derive the themes:

EXACT QUOTES	SUMMARY	CRITERION USE	DERIVED THEMES
<p>“It means a lot with my children. It helps and feels more integrated in Finland because we are able to talk about Swedish and we are able to talk in Swedish and now I can be able to talk about their school thing and that helps a lot”</p> <p>“I communicated with officials like at the health centre, terveys asema, my son’s päiväkoti, and other official places”</p>	<p>Able to communicate with children in Swedish</p> <p>Communicates with public officers</p>	Contextual meaning	Communication
<p>“I think it is giving me more confidence when am out if I can’t explain something in Finnish I might be able to do it in Swedish particularly if I can’t use English. I feel confident and I will feel more confident if I will say something in Swedish”</p>	<p>Feeling confident after been able to speak Swedish</p>	Contextual meaning	Confidence
<p>“The only thing that I get. Now that am more active with the Swedish part of the population I get to meet a fully different type of people....., I have been talking to a lot more people in the Swedish side. I have been blogging as well in some Swedish think tanks. Participated and talked at events where the Swedish community ponders how it gonna integrate the immigrants so that sort of things. But is mostly</p>	<p>Active networking with Swedish speaking people and involved in improving immigrants chances of learning Swedish</p>	Contextual meaning	Social Networkin

because am involved in a lot of issues related to improving the immigrant's kind of getting the chance to learn Swedish but other than that it wouldn't change anything"			
"Then they gave my citizenship exam in Swedish and I passed it. Apart from that I can read Swedish newspapers (Hufvudstadsbladet), know what is going on in Finland, so I feel a bit integrated than before"	Acquired citizenship and is able to follow news in Finland	Specific word meaning	Acquiring Citizenship

These themes were derived from the various quotations from our respondents. But through the process of categorisation as stated above, it was possible to get relationships with other similar quotations.

6 Findings

This chapter discusses the analysis of the data collected during the interviews. Four major themes emerged after the data analysis. These are communication, confidence building, social networking and acquiring citizenship. Generally, all the respondents found the course to be helpful and a good experience for them. They expressed feelings of how the language skills had an effect on their daily social life. Some mentioned that they are able to communicate in Swedish language with their family members and the Swedish - speaking people at large. Others became more confident in their daily interactions because they became aware of what is going on around them. This ability to be active participants in the society also gave them the feeling of being part of the community. This further meant that they increased their network of friends especially among the Swedish- speaking people. The ability to read and write in Swedish was also a gate way to some of the respondents to acquiring citizenship in Finland by taking the citizenship exam in Swedish language.

The findings from the themes were overlapping at some points. However, all the themes were vital steps towards answering our research question: "What are the effects of Swedish language courses at Bridge in the social integration of immigrants into Finland's Swedish speaking society?" The overlapping nature of the themes came as a result of the closeness of the gathered information.

6.1 Communication

Meeting new people sometimes means having to adjust your language skills. Some of the res-

pondents had Swedish speaking families which motivated them to learn Swedish in order to be able to communicate with them. For a better daily communication and interaction in the family, there has to be a common language spoken and understood by all. Being fluent in different languages most of the time does not guarantee a better understanding of each other. The language course was able to empower the respondents to start communicating with their family members in Swedish, as that was the main language spoken by them. That means it increased the flow of information among them (the respondent and the family).

“It means a lot with my children. It helps and feels more integrated in Finland because we are able to talk about Swedish and we are able to talk in Swedish and now I can be able to talk about their school thing and that helps a lot”(R.2).

The above respondent previously started with Finnish but found it difficult to comprehend and therefore changed to Swedish. After the Swedish course, the respondent was able to communicate with the family. The respondent explained that the possibility to communicate in a language means learning the humour that goes with it. In that way, one learns why people think in a certain way. More understanding of each other is a step to being more accepted. All this goes to show how important it is to speak the language of the people around you especially if they are your close family like in the case of this respondent.

“But very good role when I need to communicate with my boy friend’s sister’s children. They are 3yrs old, 2yrs old and they don’t speak any language expect Finnish or Swedish. And is very good and very important to understand them” (R.4).

Communicating in Swedish opened new possibilities for some respondents. For instance, it enabled one of them to do joint hobbies with the partner while the other intends to do some voluntary community work with the church and teach music. As mentioned earlier, not learning the language of the people around you is like putting a barrier to some of the things one is able to do. However, this does not mean that not communicating in Swedish creates a barrier to life chances, but it means that one cannot do those things that are meant for Swedish speakers or done in Swedish. Others also expressed that one of the positive things about Swedish speaking people is that they are very helpful when they realise that an immigrant is able to speak the Swedish language.

“The positive side is that the Swedish speaking persons when they see us foreigners who have learnt Swedish and speaking Swedish they are very helpful

and they go out of their way to help you”(R.8).

In addition to communicating with families, others expressed that they are able to use their Swedish language skills at other places. This includes KELA, their children’s kindergarten, health centers and work places. This has happened mostly in situations where the officer cannot speak English and the immigrant cannot speak Finnish. In such instances, Swedish language becomes the alternative. The fact that Swedish is one of the official languages in Finland means that the respondents were able to get services from some public offices in Finland in Swedish. Public officers in Finland are obliged by law to serve clients in either Finnish or Swedish.

“I communicated with officials like at the health centre, terveystieteiden keskus, my son’s päiväkoti, and other official places” (R.6).

Apart from using the language in public offices, other respondents mentioned that they have had an opportunity to use their newly acquired Swedish language skills to communicate at their work places. One of them was able to use it when working on the boat which cruises between Helsinki and Stockholm with passengers and fellow workers. This made the respondent very approachable to the Swedish-speaking passengers and workers especially the native ones. Another respondent who works in collaboration with biological stations located in Swedish speaking areas mentioned having used Swedish language there. Most of the staff in these stations are Swedish speaking. This made it possible for this person to have a better working environment and be able to communicate with fellow workers.

Another issue that was pointed out in the interviews was the possibility to use Swedish language outside Finland. It was mentioned that Swedish language is close to Danish and Norwegian, meaning speakers of these languages can communicate with each other. Therefore the respondents felt that the newly acquired language skills can be used for communication outside Finland as well.

Even though most of the respondents expressed satisfaction with how they can now communicate using the acquired language skills, there was general consent amongst all of them that it would be more useful to learn Finnish first before Swedish. It was stated that Swedish language can be a very useful language in certain parts of the country but overall it is not very much used in the capital region. This came out strongly when the respondents mentioned that if one intends to stay here for long or have a family, then Finnish would be a much more useful language. Due to the limited usage of Swedish language in certain parts of Finland, there was also a suggestion that it can be reclassified as a regional language rather than as an official language. This would make much more sense in the areas where it is

spoken and appreciated.

“I feel that Swedish would be not as a 2nd language but as a regional language. Like a language spoken in western parts..... I think it has to be taken into account so that Swedish becomes a regional language that would make much more sense” (R.5).

Others felt that despite the fact that both Finnish and Swedish languages are recognised as official languages but that does not mean equality of access and usage. For instance, more immigrants go in for Finnish languages courses than Swedish. The reason is that they can get unemployment benefits. There are usually not enough Swedish language course hours to enable the employment office to grant unemployment benefits.

6.2 Confidence building

After being able to communicate in Swedish language, most of the respondents felt that they had more confidence when dealing with Swedish speakers. Being aware of what is being said around makes one feel confident and part of the group. The confidence has been strengthened because one feels being understood and more accepted. The respondents described that the possibility to express oneself and get along in a group leads to confidence building. This is because one is able to spot what is going on and feel relaxed. Those with Swedish speaking families expressed that they now had more confidence to engage in activities together with their Swedish speaking families. By doing these activities together they felt more involved, welcomed and part of the family.

“I think it is giving me more confidence when am out if I can’t explain something in Finnish I might be able to do it in Swedish particularly if I can’t use English. I feel confident and I will feel more confident if I will say something in Swedish” (R.2).

This means that the respondents now have the confidence to use Swedish language skills when they visit or need some things from the public offices. If they encounter someone or an official who cannot communicate in English, then there is the alternative to talk in Swedish.

Due to the confidence acquired by the respondents, some of them are now seeing or contemplating the possibilities of how Swedish language skills can be used as way of progressing in their work and study careers. The work or studies can either be done in or outside Finland. It was mentioned that there are careers where Swedish as a language can be an added advantage. For example, working in a Swedish-speaking municipality, for the Finnish government or

in Nordic sales, making it more international. It was envisaged that Swedish language skills give more and wider prospects. Furthermore respondents explained that the language skills could be advantageous when it comes to further studies because there are more books and research materials available in Swedish language as compared to Finnish. Swedish language therefore gives a wider and global approach as it is used not only in Finland but in other Nordic countries too. This has enabled the respondents to have the confidence to think about jobs or study possibilities in Swedish once their language skills have reached an advanced level.

“Swedish is more global than Finnish. There are more research materials available in Swedish than Finnish” (R.1).

As mentioned earlier on, there is the possibility to use Swedish language outside Finland simply because it is close to other languages such as Danish and Norwegian.

On the other hand, it was also recognized that despite the above-mentioned advantages, there were other things to be concerned about. The Swedish speaking communities usually hang out amongst themselves and have their own institutions. They are also extremely protective of their jobs and positions. Apart from being protective of their position, respondents also mentioned the negative attitudes which Finnish speaking people have towards the Swedish language. This came out when the respondents mentioned to their colleagues that they have studied Swedish and they are able to communicate in that language. The expression they got from the Finnish- speaking friends was not encouraging at all. It was more like a lack of interest. This somehow affected the motivation of the respondents at times. Nevertheless some respondents still had the confidence that they could still use their language skills within Finland or in Sweden for work or studies.

“Sometimes some people of course not all, some Finnish speaking people they don’t like it to be. They have a negative feeling towards Swedish language or Swedish culture so sometimes they really don’t say it but I can feel it that they don’t like it that I can speak some Swedish instead of Finnish” (R.8)

Others explained how they sometimes felt let down by some responses they received especially in public offices. A typical situation that was highlighted was when one visits an office and asks the officer if they can speak English. The officer says no and suggests Finnish. The respondent says that the Finnish language skills are not good enough and suggests that they speak in Swedish. The officer suddenly starts speaking English.

“I have actually felt it sometimes I go to an office then I ask do you speak English they say no and I say let’s talk in Swedish and they suddenly start talking in English” (R.8)

This has made some respondents to be weary about accessing services in Swedish when they go to public offices.

6.3 Social networking

To some respondents, learning Swedish language enabled them to widen their social networks. This has happened in different ways. The acquired language skills motivated them to make Swedish - speaking friends with whom they can practice the language with. This was based on the desire to make friends with the possibility of communicating in Swedish. According to respondents, the positive aspect of this is to retain their acquired language skills to avoid it fading away. In fact to one of the respondents, having new friends was one of the most important benefits from the course. This person even pointed that integration into the Swedish speaking society may be easy.

“I think it has added a very good value because, I mean, I could effectively, I haven’t really learnt it very fluently but I can have a very good conversation with my friends, it may be very easy for me to kind of integrate you know or to associate myself with people who speak Swedish and I mean I found it very easy to bridge the gap. I think it is very useful” (R.6).

Prior to the course some respondents were virtually without Swedish speaking friends, which to them was very vital. None of our respondents, at the time of the interviews got a job as a result of the language course but most of them are very optimistic about the future and happy to have made a few friends. For instance, there was one of them who was already working and thinks that the Swedish skills might one day be needed at the work place. This, according to the respondent could be when their work place opens a branch in Sweden or in one of the mainly Swedish speaking areas of Finland.

To some of them, since social networking cannot take place in a vacuum, having a wider network of friends might help in a lot of other issues including getting jobs or even knowing where to buy certain things. Despite the fact that the internet has a lot of social networking possibilities, it cannot or in other words should not replace real human interaction. Human

interaction will nevertheless still remain important although usually restricted, due to lack of friends especially when one moves into a new country and does not know many people.

One respondent down played what the Swedish language course has provided but agreed to the increased social networking aspect of it. For this particular respondent, the language skills have been a vehicle for the pursuance of a dream.

“The only thing that I get. Now that am more active with the Swedish part of the population I get to meet a fully different type of people....., I have been talking to a lot more people in the Swedish side. I have been blogging as well in some Swedish think tanks. Participated and talked at events where the Swedish community ponders how it gonna integrate the immigrants so that sort of things. But is mostly because am involved in a lot of issues related to improving the immigrant’s kind of getting the chance to learn Swedish but other than that it wouldn’t change anything” (R.3).

The language skills empowered this respondent to get into things that would not have been possible without Swedish language. It was further emphasized that unless you start speaking the language of the people, they would not be convinced that you are ready to be part of them. And you cannot be part of the people if you do not become friends or be able to speak to them.

On the other hand, respondents were surprised or probably disappointed to realize that not all foreigners have an open mind to learning Swedish language. One respondent explained how uninterested the friends were when told about the Swedish language. That means they were not a source of motivation for this particular respondent. It was a bit weird to realise that there exist some immigrants who are pessimistic about the choice of other immigrants to study Swedish language. It was further narrated by the respondent that, those friends aligned themselves to the notion that Finnish is the majority language and should be the choice for immigrants.

“I felt a little bit sad that I also take a Finnish course and then when I say to my friends now I take a Swedish course they were more like hmmm. Nobody was interested or anything to do about it and that makes me sad” (R.4).

Others were saddened not only by the lack of fellow immigrants that would motivate them to study or practice Swedish language but also by the unwillingness of authorities to speak Swedish. Another respondent who earlier on lived and studied in a Swedish- speaking town pointed out that the language skills were being used during the time stayed there. However,

it was disappointing to realize that no one seems to be ready to speak Swedish in the metropolitan area.

“I think that as long as I lived in, it played a very big role you know. I could almost like communicate with everyone in Swedish. But since January 2009, when I moved to Helsinki, I think it hasn’t almost played any role in my daily life. And everyone I speak to, like hi can you speak Swedish? If they cannot speak English they almost always say sorry I just speak Finnish. So it means that it hasn’t given me any added benefits in Helsinki. But in, it was very different. I communicated with officials like at the health centre in” (R.6).

Some respondents were of the opinion that the authorities can set an example by themselves to speak Swedish language at least to those who want to speak it. In that way, members of the general public may follow suit.

6.4 Acquiring citizenship

To some respondents, acquiring citizenship was one of the concrete results of the Swedish language course. In Finland, foreigners can apply for citizenship after living in the country for six years and passing an examination in either Finnish or Swedish. These are the two official languages in Finland (Language Act 423/2003). To these respondents, one of their initial motivations in addition to communication and career progress was to apply for citizenship. As a result of that, the respondents opted to study Swedish language in preparation for the citizenship examination. Another motivating factor for the respondents was the opinion that Swedish is simpler than Finnish.

At the time of the interviews, two respondents had already taken the citizenship examination in Swedish. One of them passed it while the other one was unable to get the pass mark. The good news is that failure in the exam has motivated the said respondent to study more Swedish before undertaking the next attempt. The one who got the citizenship possessed the feeling of belonging and the possibility to legally identify oneself as a citizen.

Having the feeling of belonging and legal possibility to identify oneself is helpful in one’s societal interaction.

“Then they gave my citizenship exam in Swedish and I passed it. Apart from that I can read Swedish newspapers (Hufvudstadsbladet), know what is going on in Finland, so I feel a bit integrated than before” (R.8).

Being a citizen to them goes beyond the mere fact of getting voting rights but it is also about understanding the society, their culture and being able to communicate. Since culture is embedded in the language, then it has been a positive experience for them to study the language. By studying Swedish language it also meant that, they have an understanding of the Swedish culture, society and how it functions.

7 Discussion

This section comprises of an elaborate interpretation of the main findings and comparing it to existing knowledge related to language as a tool for social integration. There might be different approaches to prove this, but we thought it wise to conduct a qualitative research based on the language courses organized at Bridge. Interviews were conducted with the help of semi-structured questionnaires to collect the data and an inductive content analysis method was used for the analysis. The main research question for the study was: “What are the effects of Swedish language courses at Bridge in the social integration of immigrants into Finland’s Swedish speaking society?”

The findings indicated a general positive feeling among all the respondents even though there were a few instances where some expressed negative experiences. However, the positive feelings outweighed the negative ones. The language course gave them an environment, to not only learn a language, but also an opportunity to share experiences with fellow immigrants and also opened up linkages to the Swedish speaking society. The learning process becomes very beneficial when it is meaningful to both sides. Viberg (1996) as quoted in Korkman (2004, 6) emphasized that, “the use of language is the motor in the development of language”. Apart from learning the language, immigrants also learnt about the social norms and values of the society through interaction with the mainstream society. The findings indicated that the respondents were able to communicate in Swedish, have increased confidence in society, wider social networks and some of them acquired citizenship.

There were different motivations for studying but the most important overall effect from the findings was the ability to communicate in Swedish language. This draws one to Jandt (2004) who defined language as a set of symbols shared by a community to communicate meaning and experience. The set of symbols in this case was Swedish language and has been used by the respondents in various instances as indicated in the findings. Communication on the other

hand could be easily characterized, rather than defined, as there are different definitions for it. According to King (1974) the most important characteristics of communication is the assignment of meaning to behavior. King (2004) considered communication to have occurred whenever one person perceives another's behavior and attaches significance or interpretation to his/her perception. He also pointed out that communication has occurred when you see another person direct an obscene gesture your way or when someone laughs at a joke you told. This is supported in our findings when respondents made use of it at work places and even having joint hobbies with their families. It will be hard for any meaningful interaction to take place without some form of communication. Gore (2007) agrees that communities are formed when people are connected together through communication. He further described communication as the social glue that binds people together, consequently creating a culture.

The possibility to communicate is an important aspect of being part of the society and its culture. Jandt (2004) points out that when people learn their native language, they also unconsciously learn their culture. He further indicated when a person grows up knowing more than one language, then there is a possibility that the person will be aware of the different ways to perceive and describe reality in both languages. In describing the relationship between language and culture, Jandt likened them to two mirrors. Each one reflects and is reflected by the other. Our findings are in line with Jandt's point of view when some of the respondents expressed feelings of being more accepted, understood and hence comfortable within the Swedish speakers. There was a general feeling of being accepted and understood better. However, those that came from a bilingual family emphasized this feeling more. A possible explanation for this might be due to the regular interaction with the family members.

Being accepted and understood by others will undoubtedly give confidence to many people. From the findings, the respondents expressed feelings of being confident in society especially in the midst of Swedish speakers. As a result, they have built more confidence because there is little or no fear of being misunderstood or making everyone speak English due to their presence. One of the ways of building confidence is by recognizing one's insecurities. Respondents' inability to communicate in Swedish was considered as insecurity for them. This is in line with Jaakkola (1983) who pointed out that most Finnish immigrants in Sweden who had more knowledge of the Swedish language were more confident in themselves and more outgoing as compared to those with less language skills in Swedish. Similarly, our respondents prior to their Swedish language course had less interaction in their daily lives as compared to after the language course. This, according to the interviews was as a result of not been able to interact with others which was mainly due to lack of language skills. The feeling of insecurity was reduced as they developed Swedish language skills. Therefore, by learning the language, the respondents were able to express their views and understand the views of oth-

ers. This facilitated interaction and confidence building.

Having new social networks could be considered as a step towards social integration. However, social integration as a process is a big challenge especially for immigrants. It entails that they have to maintain contacts with the majority population as well as adjust to the new environment and culture. One of the ways of maintaining contacts with the majority population could be through social networks. As the network develops, the communication and interaction within it also increases. This enabled the immigrants to practice their acquired language skills and also interact with the larger society. Language use is one prerequisite for language development as well as helping the development of social networks of immigrants. The circle of networks developed assists the individuals to express themselves, understand and explore the society in which they have settled in. Language is a link between a person and the society. With the acquired language skills, respondents can now confidently start a conversation within their new social networks, attend events or listen to programmes conducted in Swedish and use it at work or with their families.

Meetings in informal settings like cinemas, bars or pubs may also raise social networking possibilities. Networks are however hard to maintain without having the possibility to communicate which mostly involves the use of a language. The individual's social network according to Adams (1967) consists of those persons with whom one maintains contact and has some form of social bonds. In this case, Swedish language was the main foundation of the social bonds that bonded our respondents to their networks. As mentioned earlier, learning the language gave confidence to the respondents which in turn gave them the motivation to approach and talk to others more easily than before. Effective social networking requires a means of communication. The medium of communication in this situation was the ability to speak a common language.

As in Gore (2007), the first experience with group communication takes place in a group that has formed naturally, such as a family or a group of friends. He called this type of group as emergent while the other type of group intentionally formed for a specific purpose as contrived. A specific example of a contrived group is a team at school or work. Gore further stated that whether the group is emergent or contrived, linkages are formed among the members and a network soon becomes apparent. From the above, the groups or teams formed by our respondents could be categorized under contrived in accordance with Gore's definition. This is because the initial contacts started in the language course (school). The specific purpose of coming together was the interest in wanting to learn Swedish language. In so doing their course mates became part of their widened social networks. The findings showed that most the respondents have had maintained contacts or networks after the course. One of them was blogging, one is doing ballet dance in Swedish while others have

started using Swedish at work or with new friends that speak Swedish. This enabled them to develop and maintain social networks beyond the language course. Gore (2007) concludes that the contrived network groups with the passage of time tend to link all members of the group, at least at a minimal.

Since the networks established by the respondents were mainly from the larger society, one can say that it may help to reduce prejudices. The contact hypothesis also called intergroup contact theory by Allport (1954) and Chrysochoou (2004) indicated equal status between the groups, social and institutional support, cooperative interdependence and acquaintance potential as preconditions in order to produce best condition for intergroup contact. From the above preconditions, the situation of the respondents could be mirrored in social and institutional support, cooperative interdependence and acquaintance potential. For instance, the contacts were made through Arbis, a learning institution, which cooperates with the Bridge project. The involvement of Bridge as an integration project facilitated interaction between the students and the larger population. Chrysochoou (2004) referred to Pettigrew and Tropp (2000) who in their meta-analysis involving face-to-face interaction emphasized that contact is beneficial for the reduction of prejudice when it is supported by institutions and authorities in ways that allow people to have sustained interactions and develop friendships. From the language course description it was stated that the respondents had a number of organized visits to Swedish speaking institutions. During the said visits, they interacted within themselves and with those at the hosting institutions. Thus, they were possibilities of sustained interactions through the language course and also maintain contacts with those they met at the visited institutions. The findings indicated that the respondents had some form of interaction with the people they met and also with their new networks. One of them for instance mentioned that he has some friends that he gets in touch with once in a while. Chrysochoou (2004) further pointed out that the contact hypothesis is not about living closely with members of the out-group (respondents in this case), but about establishing contact through interpersonal and close interaction. The out-group needs to interact with the in-group (larger community) for their mutual benefit. Respondents may hardly have access to social resources without interacting and networking with the members of the in-group.

Social resources as defined by Lin (1999) are resources accessible through one's direct or indirect contacts. "The access and use of these resources are temporal and borrowed. For example, a friend's occupational or authority position, or such positions of his friend's friends, may be ego's social resource". (Lin 1999, 468). This all goes to show how important social networks are, especially to immigrants. One respondent for instance made mention of being more active with the Swedish speaking population as a result of learning the language and became a blogger in a Swedish think tank. The respondent was able to get information

about the blogging possibility through an information flow within the respondent's newly found network. Granovetter (1973) as cited by Lin (1999) proposed a network theory for information flow. In the hypothesis, Granovetter highlighted that ties tend to form bridges that link individuals to other social circles for information not likely to be available in their own circles. Such information according to Granovetter is of importance to the individual.

In addition to communication, confidence building and social networking, acquiring citizenship was another effect of the Swedish language course for the respondents. Modern writing about citizenship in Western democracies was deeply influenced by TH Marshall (1950) historical analysis in *Citizenship and Social Class* as indicated by Wagner (2004) who expanded the concept of citizenship in three phases. Civil citizenship according to Marshall appeared in the 18th century when the emerging capitalist economies developed institutions that protected private property, guaranteed the freedom of contract and gave citizens access to unlimited bargaining in the marketplace. Wagner (2004) added that, in the 19th century, political rights augmented civil rights, enfranchising, i.e. granting the power to vote to male (later to female) citizenry. According to Wagner, it was only after World War two that a third kind of citizenship emerged in the form of social rights, granting to working people a modicum of economic welfare, social security and the right to participate in full in the heritage and economic wealth of society.

The New Finnish Nationality Act (359/2003) defines citizenship as a legal relationship between the state and an individual person, with rights and obligations for both parties (Ministry of Interior, Finland). The Act highlights that Finnish citizenship can be acquired through any of the following conditions: citizenship of a parent or adoptive parent, birth in Finland, parents' marriage, application and declaration. From the above our respondents fall under the application category of acquiring citizenship. Under this category, foreigners can apply for citizenship after living in Finland for six years and passing a language examination in either Finnish or Swedish (Language Act 423/2003). Upon acquiring citizenship, one has certain rights and obligations such as voting right, obtaining legal assistance from embassies abroad, access to government posts limited only to citizens like police officers, judges and certain positions in the foreign affairs administration. Becoming a citizen in Finland therefore encompasses all the rights and privileges accorded to natives in accordance with the constitution.

The findings showed that two of the respondents had already fulfilled the six year criterion of living in Finland. Both attempted the language test in Swedish but the other one did not pass. The one who got the citizenship pointed out having the feeling of belonging and the possibility to legally identify himself as a citizen. This also means that the person will not have a language barrier when interacting with the mainstream society because one only acquires the

citizenship after passing the language course. Many countries nowadays including the United States, United Kingdom and Australia conduct citizenship test for foreigners before granting citizenship. Critiques of the system in those countries argue that the test is difficult for the average citizen to pass. It is even much harder for the foreigners. There are debates about Finland replacing the current language test with a similar one. For the respondents, being a citizen goes beyond the mere fact of getting voting rights. The process of getting the citizenship includes having a broader understanding of the country, its culture and being able to communicate. The aspect of culture was one issue that was included during the language course. This was emphasized by one of the respondents who pointed out that once they learn the language, they also learn about the culture. Bellamy (2008) implies that citizenship is the capacity to participate, in both the political and socio-economic life of the community. An immigrant's participation in a particular community would be limited if not impossible without language skills. Bellamy further indicated that citizens must be willing to consider themselves in some sense belonging to a particular state in which they live. From the interviews, we were able to deduce that the respondents had the motivation to participate in the language course because they had a sense of belonging/attachment (having a family, work or studying) in Finland.

In conclusion, there were overwhelming expressions of feelings of being better accepted and interacting with the society. However, the findings and conclusions drawn from this thesis do not necessarily represent the broader effects of Swedish language courses in Finland. This is because we had only a sample size of eight respondents who are all living within the capital region (Helsinki, Vantaa and Espoo). In addition, all the respondents we interviewed studied at Arbis and had attended integration programmes organized by Bridge project. This means there might be a possibility that other immigrant students that attended courses at Arbis or other institutions without attending activities organized by Bridge would have a different experience.

Therefore it is worthwhile to conduct a comparative study on immigrants that have attended Swedish language courses without the integration programme. Such a study would be able to highlight the levels of integration of immigrant students that attended classroom teaching plus integration programme versus classroom teaching. The result of such a result will assist relevant stakeholders to adopt effective and appropriate methods of integrating immigrants in the Finnish Swedish society. Some of the respondents studied Swedish language with the intention of using it in their daily lives (hospitals, supermarkets, KELA, employment office, kindergarten), it would therefore be important to find out how many of the public officers are able to speak Swedish. From the interviews, it was realized that some of the respondents have tried to use Swedish in public offices but were disappointed because the officers in question were not able to communicate in Swedish. In accordance with the Finnish constitu-

tion, Finnish and Swedish are the two official languages. Therefore it is a requirement that public officers must be able to serve clients in both languages.

In a nutshell, the aim of the thesis was to find out the effects of Swedish language on the social integration of immigrants into the Finnish Swedish society. There were four major effects of Swedish language course in the social integration of immigrants into Finnish Swedish society. These include communication, confidence building, social networking and acquiring citizenship. Of all the four effects of the language course, communication was cited as the most important. We believe that this is as a result of the fact that elements of communication were found in the other remaining three effects. For instance respondents made mention

of building confidence, networking and acquiring citizenship only after been able to communicate in Swedish. This means that communication was the backbone of the other three effects of the course. Nevertheless all the effects contributed towards their social integration.

The findings of the thesis can be used in the evaluation of the Bridge project's integration programme. This can also be a valuable addition to their annual report. In so doing, Bridge will be able to justify its existence to its benefactors/collaborating partners, solicit for more support and be used as a source of reference for future planning. This thesis can also be a useful material for any other person who might want to look into this or other related topics.

In doing this thesis, we have obtained a wider understanding of multicultural work and an understanding of language as an integration tool. We were able to deepen our knowledge and understanding of integration in general with specific focus on social integration of immigrants. We also acquainted ourselves with theories relating to social integration. The Qualitative research design, which was used to conduct this thesis, became a familiar method to us. Doing this thesis in pairs was an opportunity for us to improve our teamwork skills. In addition, it enriched the study by having two perspectives during all stages of the thesis. It was difficult working in pairs sometimes, but we had to compromise with each other in order to move forward. However, we considered it as part of our learning process because our education is such that we could be working with different people in different parts of the world. These are important skills for us to possess as social work students. Knowledge in multiculturalism and integration enables a social worker to better understand clients of diverse culture and language. Knowledge of multicultural work is a necessity in social work considering the diverse nature of our societies or communities. The importance of language as a medium of communication in social work, as in all other professions, cannot be over emphasized. Therefore, it was worth knowing the role it plays in the integration process. For social work to be effective one needs to consider the impact of the language that is used on the clients and the

interpretations attached to it by clients.

8 Ethical consideration and trustworthiness

8.1 Ethical Consideration

In carrying out research, it is vital that one takes into consideration the ethical issues involved. Research participants, also called informants or respondents are the providers of the information in social research. Therefore, it is important that their rights to partake or discontinue in a research and informed consent are at the forefront of every research. This means there must be the informed consent of the individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or

manipulation Berg (1998) as cited by David & Sutton (2004). Informed consent must be given before conducting any research.

Denscombe (2003) pointed out that social researchers should be expected to respect the rights and dignity of the participants, avoid harm to them as a result of their participation and operate with honesty and integrity. We have no doubt that our respondents' rights were and will continue to be respected concerning their participation in our research. Protecting the interest of the participants, giving them informed consent and the avoidance of deception and misinterpretation by researchers were the three main principles identified by Denscombe (2003) as guides to the activities of researchers. The first principle is basically about the prevention of all forms of harm to the participants ranging from physical, psychological plus any other harm that may arise as a result of disclosing the collected information. We collected our data by interviewing our respondents in safe and secured venues mostly chosen by them. Undoubtedly, our questions and the information collected will not cause them any harm in future. The personal information was written on paper while the actual interviews were tape recorded and transcribed later. This means that the respondents were not anonymous to us. Anonymity according to David & Sutton (2004) refers to a situation where the researcher does not know or does not record the personal details while confidentiality means knowing and recording the information without revealing it. We kept the personal details separately from the audiotapes and coded the transcribed data. No one can identify our respondents by reading any part of the report or listening to the audiotapes. Better still, the transcribed data and audiotapes will only be kept by us and be destroyed later on.

Despite sending a consent letter (see appendix 1) to them in advance, we also went through it with each of them prior to the actual interview. This was because we wanted to make sure

that they knew what they were getting into. We identified ourselves as students from Laurea with our full names, nationalities, e-mails and phone numbers. By so doing, they knew with whom they were dealing with. The consent letter clearly indicated why we were doing the research, who authorised it and possible benefits of the findings.

8.2 Trustworthiness

In the process of doing the research, we made sure that scientific methods were followed at all stages. The issues of objectivity, reliability and validity are as important to qualitative research as to any other approach (Kirk and Miller 1986; Silverman 1993; Miles and Huberman 1994) as cited by Denscombe (2003). The personality of a researcher counts a lot in terms of the objectivity of the results. In view of this, Descombe (2003, 273) pointed out an increasing approval among qualitative data analyst, when “some biographical details about the researcher warrant inclusion as part of the data analysis”. In that way, the writer can explore the ways in which s/he feels personal experiences and values might influence the research while at the same time enabling the reader to judge “how reasonable the writer’s claims are with regards to detachment or involvement of self-identity, values and beliefs”. (Descombe 2003, 273).

Kvale (1996, 117) stressed that “the personality of the researcher is critical for the quality of the scientific knowledge and soundness of the ethical decisions in any research project”. As immigrant students conducting a research on the experiences of other immigrants may seem to indicate some similarities between us and them. However, we took into consideration that our personal biases and assumptions did not influence the direction of the research process or the interpretations of the data. Kvale (1996) also points out that during the interviewing process; the role of the researcher is intensified because the interviewer is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge. In view of the above, one may be tempted to think that the respondents may consider us to be immigrants like them and hence talk too much or too little about certain things. It was difficult to know for sure if that did or did not happen. The results however were true experiences of the language course.

“Consistency in methods is referred to as reliability or the extent to which a measure, procedure, instrument provides the same results on repeated trials”. (O’Leary 2010, 37). The fact that we used the same set of questions for all our respondents with the two of us present in all of them can be considered as a basis for reliability. The questions asked were not leading questions allowing the respondents much time and possibility to respond. During the transcribing and analysis stages, each of us listened to the tapes and later listened to it together in order to make sure that there was a common understanding and interpretation of it. In answering the question: “If someone else did the research, would he or she have got the

same results and arrived at the same conclusions?” (Descombe 2003, 273). It is our opinion that the results might not be exactly the same. This is because the experiences are not constant and therefore are bound to change with time. We are assuming that the respondents will continue to use the acquired Swedish language skills with their new social networks and interact with the Swedish speakers thereby gaining more experiences.

In everyday language, validity may be a term used to refer to the correctness of something. However, there are more detailed definitions of validity in research. Kvale stated that: “In a broader concept, validity pertains to the degree that a method investigates what it is intended to investigate, to the extent in which our observations indeed reflect the phenomena or variables of interest to us”. (Pervin 1984) as cited by Kvale (1996, 238). Punch (2009) considers it as the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to and if it represents the concept it purports to measure. The validation process has been present at all levels from the planning, implementation, analysis and reporting. For instance when we wanted to validate the findings from our first data analysis, it was realised that it was not answering what we initially wanted know. As a result, the tutors suggested we should re-analyse the data again and see what themes emerge from it. The findings from the second analysis were easily validated, in other words answering our research question. This reflects Punch’s statement above that validity is an instrument which measures what it is intended to measure. This implies that the considered methods and theories used were related to what we were researching.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Consent letter

CONSENT LETTER

We are students studying Social Services at Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Otaniemi. We are currently doing our thesis entitled: **SWEDISH LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION BASED ON IMMIGRANT STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AT BRIDGE**. This thesis is being undertaken under the supervision of Bridge, a project geared towards the integration of immigrants in the capital area. Bridge is a working life partner of Laurea University of Applied Sciences which has also approved the thesis.

Our intention is to conduct an interview in which we are looking into the use of Swedish language as social integration tool in Finland. Our target is to interview immigrants that have studied Swedish language at Bridge. **The anticipated benefits of your participation in this study may result into better ways of developing services for immigrants in the capital area.**

While participating in this study, you will be asked to share some time for an interview which will be tape recorded with your consent so as to enable the interviewers to get accurate information. We will ensure the confidentiality of the information gathered. Any information obtained that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be given out to anyone without your prior consent.

If you would like to get additional information, you can get in touch with:

Bully Camara (Mr) Tel: 0xx xxxx xxxxx Email:@laurea.fi
Slade Syakango (Mr) Tel: 0xx xxxx xxxx Email:@laurea.fi

I have read and understood the information written in this consent letter.

Name & Signature of participant

Date and place

Signature student researchers

Bully M. Camara

Date and place

Slade Syakango

Date and place

Thanking you in advance.

Appendix 2 Research questions

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONS

SWEDISH LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION BASED ON IMMIGRANT STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AT BRIDGE

Research question: What are the effects of Swedish language courses at Bridge on the social integration of immigrants into Finland's Swedish speaking community?

A. Background information

1. Name?
2. Age?
3. Nationality?
4. Duration of stay in Finland?
5. Marital status?
6. Educational level?

B. Swedish Language and social integration

1. a) How long have you been studying Swedish Language?
 - b) Have you studied Swedish language before or after Bridge?
 - c) How did you get information about the course?
2. Describe your motivation as to why you chose to study Swedish Language?
3. Can you describe how a typical day at the Swedish language course is conducted in:
 - a) Classroom situation
 - b) Other activities (visits, theatre, art, cooking etc)
4. Describe if the following parts of the course have helped you in understanding the

Swedish language and your daily social interaction into Finland's Swedish speaking community?

a) Classroom situation

b) Other activities (visits, theatre, art, cooking etc)

5. a) What role does Swedish language play in your daily social life with family, friends, community, work and public offices?

b) In what way(s) has the Swedish language course affected your daily social interaction with your family, friends, community, work and public offices? Give positive and negative experiences.

6. Could you describe how your daily social life was before the Swedish language course with your family, relatives, family, public offices and work?

7. How do you feel about your daily social interaction with your family, friends, community, work and public offices after the Swedish Language course?

8. What were your expectations when you started studying Swedish language?

9. Describe if these expectations have been met. If not why?

10. How do you want to use your Swedish language skills in future?

11. How important is it in your opinion for an immigrant to speak the language of the mainstream society? Give examples from your own experience

12. Could you recommend the Swedish language course to other immigrants? Give reasons

13. Do you have any other comments you would like to share concerning your experiences with the Swedish language course and your daily social interaction into the Swedish Finnish community?

