

## **“First, you must speak good Finnish.” Adult immigrants’ descriptions of the actants supporting and hindering their inclusion in education and work in Finland.**

### **Abstract**

Adult immigrants are persistently striving for a place in the Finnish labor market and society although they have limited language skills and recognition of their earlier competencies is poor. This article reports on a need to broaden the understanding of competence and vocational qualification to ensure equal opportunities for adult immigrants to be part of Finnish vocational education and training, labor market and society. The study argues that a more nuanced recognition of adult immigrants’ prior learning and skills, special educational needs, and collaboration between stakeholders is needed to support immigrants’ inclusion in VET, work, and society. Education and work are becoming increasingly multicultural in many countries, indicating a need for better management of diversity in companies and a more solid but flexible education system.

**Keywords:** Inclusion, immigrants, adults, vocational education and training, competence, qualification

### **Introduction**

Inclusion is one of the main targets of the Finnish education system. This is manifested through Finland’s education policy whose goal is to leave no one behind by guaranteeing equal educational opportunities for everyone and by creating open pathways from basic education to higher education without dead ends (Finnish Government, 2021). The minimum aim is that everyone completes upper secondary qualification. In this study inclusion in education and work is understood broadly, according to which it concerns all persons and marginalized groups, not only those with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Thomas, 2013). Inclusion, safe and stable social bonds, and a sense of belonging are considered fundamental sources of human well-being and happiness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Sun et al., 2020). However, an inclusive education system cannot be discussed and developed in isolation from other policy areas (Guzi et al., 2021; Seitamaa & Hakoköngäs, 2022). Reducing inequalities in education must also be considered a comprehensive approach to providing and financing education from the social security system and labor market training perspective (Mattila, 2020).

Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark face similar problems when integrating large groups of immigrants into their education systems and labor markets (Calmfors & Sánchez Gassen, 2019). Learning a new vocation or relearning one that was previously mastered is one of the essential pathways for immigrant integration into the labor market (Kärkkäinen, 2017). When adult immigrants—in this article adults who (1) were born abroad and (2) speak a first language other than Finnish or Swedish—plan their occupational and educational careers in Finland, they are involved in several processes simultaneously. The group of people must operate in a foreign language and adapt to the ground rules of the labor market, the curriculums and learning styles of the education system, as well as new cultural and social norms (Aarnitaival, 2012; Kaukko et al., 2022). If adult immigrants have missed their formal education in their home countries, they need to catch up with their peers. Furthermore, environmental factors such as the forced evacuation of homes, separation from family members, interpersonal tensions, or loss of employment influence an individual's mental health. Consequently, adult immigrants' experiences of migration might have caused emotional issues such as loneliness, isolation, oppression, and depression, which might have significant effects on their mental and physical well-being (Morina et al., 2018). Being at the intersection of two or more cultures adult immigrants might feel comfort and alienation simultaneously and struggle with their individual and social identities (Kreuzer et al., 2018). Social interaction with locals inevitably demonstrates to adult migrants what it means, or does not mean, to be part of the host culture (Ahmed, 1999).

Social relations and a sense of belonging are the elements that form the basis for individual participation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Participation is part of an agency and a measure of agency in working life. It is emphasized as part of active membership of the community, but also as part of individual competitiveness based on knowledge and skills (Kettunen, 2021). Support from the work community can promote employee participation, but too much support can prevent participation. Excessive support can limit immigrants' space to act and thus prevent inclusion (Männistö & Laajalahti, 2020). However, according to earlier studies (e.g., Alba & Foner, 2015; Kärkkäinen, 2017), negative beliefs and misconceptions about immigrants, their backgrounds, and competencies are the main barriers to supporting their employment and participation in formal education. The obstacles to integration into society are not only socioeconomic or demographic differences but also the influence of political decisions and the operating methods of institutions (Guzi et al., 2021).

Earlier studies have indicated that in the integration of immigrants, the recognition of their prior learning—which can be from formal education or informal learning from a different labor market—is a key factor (e.g., Andersson, 2020). Several policy and practice initiatives have been carried out to promote the inclusion of immigrants in Finland (Shemeikka et al., 2021). However, there are also challenges in these processes (e.g., Kaukko et al., 2022; Kärkkäinen, 2017; Seitamaa & Hakoköngäs, 2022). The aim of this study was an attempt to understand the experiences of adult immigrants (N=10) who were not in education or employed in Finland and to trace the practices and actors helping them and preventing them from achieving their value objects. It strived for a deeper understanding of their needs and prospects.

We ask:

(RQ1) Of adult immigrants, which actants are supporting and helping their integration into Finnish VET and work?

(RQ2) Of adult immigrants, which actants are slowing down or preventing their education journeys or employment in Finland?

### **The immigrant population in Finland**

The foreign-born population of Finland is increasing. In 2021, the growth was the largest in the last forty years (Statistic Finland, n.d.). Adult immigrants are not a homogeneous group of people—their backgrounds, prior learning, and special educational needs differ from individual to individual (Nieminen et al., 2015; Pöyhönen et al., 2019; Seppälä, 2022). Some immigrants are highly educated, whereas others cannot read or write. However, most plan to stay permanently in Finland (Nieminen et al., 2015). Therefore, providing opportunities for them to participate in Finnish society's functions is essential. Civilization is thought to be visible through internationalism, understanding diversity, well-being, and promoting sustainable development in Finland. The education system supports immigrants and international experts to find their place in Finnish working life and society (Seitamaa & Hakoköngäs, 2022). In Finland, a total of 265,587 students studied vocational education in 2020, 33,591 (12,6%) of whom were non-native speakers of Finnish or Swedish. Nearly 10% of students received special support, of whom 3,729 (8.5%) were foreign language students (Vipunen – Education Statistics, n.d.). A person's socioeconomic or ethnic background seems to affect their education level: The children of poorly educated parents are still on average less well educated than children of highly educated parents, and children of immigrants

are less well educated than the children in the general population (Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist et al., 2020).

On average, the employment rate of the foreign-born population in Finland is a lot lower compared to native Finns (Nieminen et al., 2015). A deeper analysis of the data suggests that while some groups of migrants manage to integrate quickly, other groups face significantly lower employment rates for many years. Immigrants with a refugee background and especially women are struggling to integrate, and many remain locked in inactivity for many years (OECD, 2018). Shemeikka et al. (2021) have identified the following five social phenomena or malfunctions of a service system that significantly slow down or prevent immigrants' education paths or employment. These are (1) a lack of identification and recognition of skills; (2) a lack of customer orientation in services; (3) livelihood challenges; (4) negative attitudes toward immigrants; and (5) an inadequate provision of education and employment services. Identification of one's own competence can be difficult for anyone, but a language barrier can make it more challenging. In addition, things like trauma, challenges with mental illness, or cognitive obstacles can affect competence identification processes (Morina et al., 2018). With female migrants, it is important not to also overlook cultural factors such as religious factors or preferences between work and family obligations (Blekesaune, 2021).

Building trust is essential as it reflects on how much a person is willing and able to talk about themselves and their competence (Uslaner, 2012). It is also important to consider a person's state of health and ability to work and function (Rask et al., 2016). Employers are seen as important partners in the identification of competence as they can assess it in relation to concrete work tasks (Arola, 2015; Shemeikka et al, 2021). Better knowledge of Finnish work life and competence requirements would also enable immigrants themselves to evaluate their competence for a profession (Hievanen et al., 2020; Shemeikka et al., 2021). Livelihood challenges refer to phenomena also recognized by the OECD (2018) as one of the malfunctions in the Finnish context, where immigrant women, from refugee-sending countries, struggle to integrate and many remain locked in inactivity for years. However, over a longer period of time immigrant women are able to narrow the gap in comparison to immigrant men and find employment (OECD, 2018; Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2014). Negative attitudes toward immigrants are seen as a significant obstacle in education and employment paths. It is perceived that an immigrant's competence, learning readiness, and way of managing at work are often looked at only from the

point of view of Finnish language skills rather than from the perspective of professional competence (Shemeikka et al., 2021).

### **Building a sense of citizenship through studying and work**

In Finland, the reintegration policy for immigrants has shifted from the previous emphasis on social policy to an emphasis on education and employment policy (Saukkonen, 2013). Integration training for adult immigrants is becoming increasingly important in working life. Most of the learning takes place at work, and vocational integration training is provided for sectors experiencing large labor shortages (Pöyhönen et al., 2019.) The guidelines emphasize the agency of immigrants, their employment, and meeting the needs of labour market. In Finland, integration training is seen as an intermediate route leading to further education, so the skills of learning to learn are emphasized (Pöyhönen et al., 2019).

From the perspective of integration and employment, it is important to reach out to immigrants and motivate them to participate in education and work and strive for full membership of the society. This was demonstrated in the systematic review of active labor market policies' effects on immigrants' employment (Kiviholma & Karhunen, 2022). It emphasizes that well-executed integration measures can improve immigrants' labor market attachment, speed up the process of entering employment, and improve the quality of attained jobs. Municipalities must be able to reach immigrants with information, advice, and counseling services. Services are also needed in the immigrants' own languages. Some of them need comprehensive support for life management, society, increasing gender awareness, and supporting identity work in a new culture. Considering the family situation of immigrants is an important part of integration so that for example education is possible (Kiviholma & Karhunen, 2022; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2021).

### **Immigrant adults in the Finnish VET**

The aim of the Finnish VET is to provide students with the knowledge and skills required for post-secondary studies and employment (Act on VET 531/2017). VET supports students' development as human beings and members of society, but also their continuous learning. It gives students the flexibility to take advantage of qualifications and smaller elements of training that meet their own or the labour market's needs. The purpose of VET is to increase and develop the professional

competence of the population, to develop trade and industry, and to meet the skills and competence needs (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019).

The organizers of VET assess the skills of applicants at the application stage. The focus of competence and skills assessment is on the language skills of the applicant, while other estimations, such as the ability to study, are secondary. VET providers must ensure that those selected as students have adequate language and study skills and thus have a realistic chance of progressing to their study goals. However, VET providers do not receive a comprehensive picture of applicants' skills and competencies in the selection process, and for this reason, students sometimes end up studying for an occupation that is wrong for their skills and needs (Hievanen et al., 2020).

The current VET system in Finland is built on personalization and flexible learning pathways (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). During VET studies, a personal competence development plan (PCDP) is drawn up for each student by a vocational teacher or a guidance counselor together with the student. The student's prior learning is recognized in the PCDP process, and they acquire only the missing skills. Students may influence how and from where they acquire the missing competence, such as from work, hobbies, international studies, internships, or through different media platforms. The plan also includes information on the support measures the student needs. The support received by the student may include special teaching and study arrangements due to learning difficulties, disability or illness, or studies that support the ability to study (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019).

Students with immigrant backgrounds often need a lot of support in their vocational studies, specifically in the common units of the vocational qualification that include studies in communication and interaction skills; mathematics and science; social studies, and work-life skills. The purpose of the common units is to strengthen basic skills and provide students with eligibility for further studies and life-long learning. Completing only parts of a vocational qualification would be easier and more suitable for some VET students. However, most aim to complete the entire qualification when the common units of the degree are mandatory. It seems that education providers do not use all the means made possible by law to support their students in attaining the qualification requirements (Goman et al., 2021), such as studies supporting readiness to study, remedial teaching,

or deviations from skills requirements or competence objectives, which would enable them to support the learning and progress of students with immigrant backgrounds (Hievanen et al., 2020). The most common forms of support are clear instructions and learning materials, teaching and learning support, studying in various workshops and small groups, and extra time to perform tasks (Goman et al., 2021).

Finnish VET is intensively connected with the labour market, and workplace learning is a key part of education. It supports language learning, the creation of work contacts, and employment for students with immigrant backgrounds. Finding a suitable job for workplace learning is a prerequisite for successful learning in work life, but not all students with immigrant backgrounds have access to suitable jobs (Hievanen et al., 2020). For some immigrant students who have good basic skills to complete vocational training, fast vocational training paths are appropriate to flexibly enter the labor market. Conversely, if a student has insufficient basic skills, faster graduation and entering working life can be a risk from the perspective of social and economic equality. If students do not achieve strong basic expertise during their vocational studying, they are vulnerable to changes in working life (Ukkola & Väättäinen, 2021).

The suspension of studies in VET for students with an immigrant background is more common than among the indigenous population (Nieminen et al., 2015). Adequate teaching, guidance, and support are important to any student but particularly to those with an immigrant background who are constructing their vocational careers in Finland (Kaukko et al, 2022; Nieminen et al., 2015). As a result, personalization is being further developed in Finnish VET, and a model of positive special treatment is introduced. For students with an immigrant background, a VET system that provides positive experiences of cohesion, community, and inclusion is a vital resource. Providers of education should have adequate facilities to meet the needs of students. The implementation of vocational training will be strengthened through additional teaching and guidance resources and other support needs (Finnish Government, 2021). A student's previously acquired competence must be viewed through previous studies, previous employment relationships, and competencies acquired during leisure time. More time and longer-term monitoring of student activities may be needed to assess students' competencies because it is difficult to make know-how visible. Due to a lack of language skills, skills assessment challenges, lack of study capacity, and knowledge of labour

market, additional resources and guidance are often needed for students with immigrant backgrounds, as well as longer periods of education than the indigenous population (Arola, 2015).

## **Material and method**

The research material consists of semi-structured interviews with adult immigrants (N=10). The youngest participant was 31 and the oldest was 50. The participants had lived in Finland for between five and twenty years and all were without education or employment. Five of the participants were men and five were women. Participants were clients of a Finnish skills center for immigrants which offers services that increase their professional skills and promote their employment.

At the beginning of the research process, we contacted the development director of the vocational institution to apply for research permission in a center that organizes services for immigrants. After that, we contacted the director of the skills center for immigrants, who provided us with the contact information of the staff at the center. They asked the immigrant clients to participate. Participation was voluntary, and we provided participants with an information letter. At the beginning of the interviews, the researcher repeated the intentions of the study.

One researcher in the research team carried out the interviews online in the Spring of 2021 because of the COVID-19 situation. The interviews were carried out in Finnish, which was not the first language of the participants. This might have limited their opportunities to express themselves extensively. Another limitation might have been that they participated in the interviews independently with no interpretation help. Interviews consisted of thirteen questions which were discussed with the participants. We asked the participants about their earlier studies, careers, and hobbies. We wanted to hear about their capabilities, potential and prospects. We were also interested in their opportunities to receive support to implement their capabilities and preferences. Furthermore, we asked them to talk about the things supporting them or hindering them from attaining their value objects.

The material collected was ambiguous. Some of the participants expressed themselves freely and relaxed whereas others were more reserved, and some asked for clarification of the interview questions. Some of the interviews were short and fragmented but some were rich in content. However, we did not force the continuation of the discussion and in case a participant answered only shortly we accepted the answer. Therefore, the length of the interviews varied from four minutes to fourteen minutes. The data considered here totaled 52 pages of transcribed text and was anonymized by making only generic references to participants. The transcription was carried out by a company that is also used as a contract supplier in other contexts.

### *Data analysis*

The theories initially chosen for the study provided a framework for describing the data. According to the criteria of the abductive research approach, the theoretical frame of the study was completed along with the analytical process to inductively examine the findings and refine the themes (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). The analytical process started with a close reading, which aimed to construct an overview of the data (Hinchman & Moore, 2013). We discussed the data and our preliminary findings with our research team. After the close reading, we carried out the analytical round using Greimas' actantial model (1983) as lenses to scrutinize and categorize the interview data. The actantial model includes actors and actions known as actants. These include subject, object, sender, receiver, helper and villain (see Figure 1). Actants may be divided between several characters in a narrative or merged into the same character. The subject (an adult immigrant) is the central actor of the narrative who strives for a value object of (paid employment or education according to the close reading). The sender is one who motivates the subject to obtain the value object. Receivers are the elements that assess the success of the subject's action and reward or punish the actants at the end of the narrative. The helper supports the subject in achieving the value object, and the villain prevents the realization of the subject's aims. We added an auxiliary object (Finnish qualification) to Greimas' actantial model, through which the subject may obtain the object (paid employment) (Tarasti, 2000).

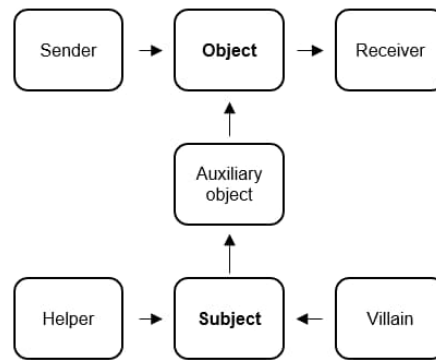


Figure 1. Actants in Greimas' actantial model (Greimas, 1983; Tarasti, 2000)

Our actantial analysis was concerned with looking for participants' descriptions of features supporting and hindering the attainment of objects. We identified three subject categories whose descriptions contained similar elements. Furthermore, we used the categories to structure the findings into a coherent form: (1) Educated but not experienced; (2) Experienced but not educated; (3) Not educated or experienced.

## Findings

The purpose of the study was to find out (RQ1) of adult immigrants, which actants are supporting and helping their integration into Finnish VET and work, and (RQ2) of adult immigrants, which actants are slowing down or preventing their education journeys or employment in Finland. In the analytical process, we developed three subject categories to answer the research questions. Next, we introduce our main findings and then we will take a close look at subject categories.

An explicit value object of the subjects was to be employed in Finland. The participants of the study found VET as a tool (an auxiliary object) to gain a foothold in the Finnish labor market. Some participants had no earlier formal education or work experience from their home country, whereas others had a wealth of experience and some even had university qualifications. Some participants had arrived alone in Finland, whereas others had their families supporting them. First, a common denominator as a villain of their career plans was a lack of Finnish language skills. One participant mentioned that it would help with everything if you could speak Finnish: "First, you must speak good Finnish. It will help you in everything." (Subject 1) Secondly, another villain that emerged either explicitly or implicitly in the interviews was feeling like an outsider. Some of the participants talked about their experiences of loneliness and depression, which may have been deepened because

of the COVID-19 isolation, and some depicted their everyday lives with family members and friends, but none described the collaboration with proto-Finns. Thirdly, mental health issues were also apparent in the subjects' descriptions. Subject 1 stated "I think about my child. It is very hard for me. I have a two-year-old child... but I can't be with them. I am alone in Finland, I have no one, nothing." Fourthly, we found that both the adult immigrants and Finnish society could be positioned in an explicit actant role of a sender and a receiver when (re)constructing the inclusion of adult immigrants in Finland.

#### *Educated but not experienced*

Three of the study subjects had a university-level degree or other prior qualification from their home country, which could be positioned into an actantial role of a helper when these subjects were obtaining their objects, employment, or further education. Prior education could also be assessed as a sender that urges subjects to find employment in Finland. One of the subjects with a university-level degree had only brief prior work experience in his/her home country. However, his/her object was to be employed in the same field in Finland: "I would like to work in the same field that I have studied [in my home country]". (Subject 5). The subject's great interest in his/her field could be positioned to the actant position of a sender. Whereas Subject 4 had worked for many years in his/her field in his/her home country, but now his/her aim was to be re-educated in another field. This implies that the university degree did not work as a direct sender, but it might have provided Subject 4 with the self-confidence to study and pursue a completely different degree without any prior work experience in that field: "I want to apply for pharmacy education. I want to work in a pharmacy too and travel with my family." Subject 8 had participated in a vocational course in his/her home country but strived for a new profession because of his/her well-being: "I worked as a cook but not anymore because of my health issues. I want to change my occupation." Each subject pointed out the significance of their families and that their social competence and self-confidence were helping and supporting their career ambitions. A common denominator that emerged as a villain of their career plans was the lack of Finnish language skills. "It is only my language skills that is the problem." (Subject 4).

#### *Experienced but not educated*

Half of the subjects belonged to the category where subjects had work experience from their home country but no education. They have received posts as trainees but not paid work in Finland, which seems to hinder their integration and inclusion into Finnish society. Subject (1) stated:

“I worked in my home country as a car mechanic. I worked with my brother. For 25 years in my home country. But here in Finland, nothing yet. I have participated in many internships in car repair shops, and in supermarkets but I have not received paid work.”

Subject (2) voiced similar experiences: “In Finland, I have not received any work, only internships and studying in a vocational college. In my home country, I was a full-time construction worker and farmer.” Two of the subjects did not talk about help or support from their spouses or families. It seemed that they were struggling alone in Finland. When Subject 1 was asked about the helpers in his/her career plans, he/she answered: “I am alone in Finland, I have no one, nothing.” Subject (2) hinted at traumatic experiences that are explicit villains of the subject and are shadowing his/her life: “My history and my old life, it is hard for me. My whole life. It is the reason why I am depressed. I want to sleep, but my old history follows me.” These subjects felt that their poor Finnish language skills and missing vocational qualifications were the most important villains hindering their inclusion and employment in Finland. But it seems that their own ambition to work and to be employed worked as a sender in their narratives.

### *Not educated or experienced*

Two of the subjects have no education or work experience. Subject 7 described: “I don’t work, I don’t have any occupation, not here or in my home country.” Both subjects highlighted their cooking skills. One subject wanted to be a cook or a baker in the future and the other one dreamed about working as a special needs assistant. Both noted that their experience in housework and with children might advance their career trajectories. Surprisingly, these subjects did not emphasize their lack of Finnish language skills in their interviews. One subject was worried about his/her family if he/she starts a job, whereas the other one took a firm stand on their education and employment: “I would like to study for an occupation. When this course is over then I will go straight to study. If I obtain good points [from language test] then I will start directly.” (Subject 9)

## **Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to analyze (RQ1) of adult immigrants, which actants are supporting and helping their integration into Finnish VET and work; (RQ2) of adult immigrants, which actants are slowing down or preventing their education journeys or employment in Finland. Though the number of participants in the study was relatively small, it complied with the results of the Finnish Government's education policy report (2021) and Pöyhönen et al. (2019), which describe people with immigrant backgrounds in Finland as being heterogeneous. We identified three subject categories in our analytical process. The interview subjects were either educated but not experienced, experienced but not educated, or not educated or experienced in relation to their value objects. By analyzing actors supporting and hindering the subjects' integration into Finnish VET and work, we were able to portray the ambiguous situations of the subjects planning their occupational and educational careers in Finland.

In response to the first research question, it seemed that the subjects of the study were involved in several similar processes, which is in line with the work of Aarnitaival (2012), Kaukko et al. (2022), and Kärkkäinen (2017). The main actor who could be assessed both as a sender and a helper seems to be the subjects' strong ambition to be included, to find their place in the Finnish labor market, in education, and in Finnish society. However, in line with Kärkkäinen (2017), Alba & Foner (2015), and Seitamaa & Hakoköngäs (2022), the results of the study pointed out challenges in identifying and recognizing adult immigrants' competencies in the labor market or in the education system. Despite one particular subject having substantial work experience, they had received no paid work in Finland – only internships. Several different groups, including illiterate immigrants who faced challenges to describe their skills, as well as highly skilled immigrants with the need to connect with work life requirements, would benefit from opportunities to demonstrate their skills (Andersson, 2020; Shemeikka et al., 2021). In addition, although Finland's education policy is to guarantee equal educational opportunities, it seemed that the subjects had challenges in terms of admission to education (Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist et al., 2020).

In response to the second research question, the study identified a common villain for all participants, which was a lack of Finnish language skills. This was emphasized in the descriptions of the subjects who had lengthy work experience from their home country but no education. Furthermore, these subjects did not describe receiving help from their families, whereas loneliness, isolation, oppression, and depression were perceivable in their interviews (Morina et al., 2018). The

findings of the study did not imply friendships or close connections with proto-Finns, which might have hindered their integration and sense of belonging to Finnish communities, thus causing mental health issues (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Sun et al., 2020). It is important to support immigrants in networking with proto-Finns but similarly, diversity management and equal employment in companies are crucial to tackling structural and attitudinal barriers at work.

The results of the study emphasized a lack of identification and recognition of adult immigrants' skills as a villain, which was slowing down or preventing the participants' education paths or employment (Shemeikka et al., 2021). Language barriers, trauma, and mental disorders might also have affected participants' competence identification processes (Arola, 2015; Morina, 2018). The cultural readjustment to being a student, a trainee, or a paid worker necessitates a fundamental change, specifically in those immigrants' lives who were neither educated nor had experience and have stayed at home their whole lives. The support, encouragement, and examples provided by their spouses, families, peers, and workmates would help these immigrants to adapt to their new identity.

The results did not reveal the subjects' special educational needs in terms of learning or how education providers have responded to these, though students with immigrant backgrounds often need a lot of support in their studies and employment (FINEEC, 2020; Goman et al., 2021). However, since some of the participants had lived in Finland for twenty years without gaining adequate language proficiency or competence for education or work, it could be postulated that there might be a complex combination of malfunctions hindering their inclusion where learning difficulties, livelihood challenges, negative attitudes, and inadequate provision of services play significant roles (Shemeikka et al., 2021).

The study is not without its limitations. If the interviews had been carried out in the subjects' first languages, they might have described their experiences in a more verbose and abundant manner. Furthermore, because of COVID-19, the interviews were conducted online, which might have affected the participants' understanding and the atmosphere of the interviews. The research was designed and implemented by a team consisting of experts in education and research. The study followed the guidelines of the Finnish National Advisory Board on Research Ethics (2019). This

ethical commitment of the study encompasses not only the research practice but also the kind of understanding the study promotes and produces of the subjects and their condition in Finland.

### *Conclusions*

The analysis of actants which was concerned with looking for participants' descriptions of features supporting and hindering the attainment of their desired objects indicated that although the subjects lack language skills and recognition of their earlier competencies, they were persistently striving for a place in the Finnish labor market and society. Education worked as an auxiliary object for the subjects to obtain the value object, but it was not an object in itself. The participants in the study wanted to find paid employment, which would secure their residence permit and livelihood. This study strengthens previous observations (e.g., Guzi et al., 2021; Kärkkäinen, 2017; Morina, 2018; Seitamaa & Hakoköngäs, 2022; Shemeikka et al., 2021) that the inclusion of adult immigrants is not only a socioeconomic or demographic issue but also, depending on political decisions and the operating methods of society, an issue for the VET system and employers. The recognition of adult immigrants' skills and competencies necessitates enough time to enable the development of trusting relationships between stakeholders (Uslaner, 2012; Rask et al., 2016). It calls for a careful reading of documents, curriculums, and qualification requirements. In addition, it is important to extend the use of the display of competence as part of the integration process, a PCDP, and as a bridge between education and employment.

To conclude, the findings of this study challenge the Finnish system, which has not adopted a uniform procedure but where individually tailored solutions should create a continuum and not a treadmill from one service to another. The fact that education and work are becoming increasingly multicultural in many countries indicates that there is a need for better diversity management in companies, and a more solid but flexible education system. This also calls for comparative international research on the subject.

### **Acknowledgments**

This research is part of the G.I.V.E. - Governance for Inclusive Vocational Excellence Project (621199-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA3-VET-COVE) and co-financed by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission.

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