Swimming upstream

-An exploration of the employment journey of immigrant women in Sweden-

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Abstract
This qualitative study explores the main factors influencing the employability of immigrant women in the Swedish labor market. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews of 12 employed and unemployed immigrant women in Växjö were conducted.

Prominent themes were identified in the empirical data and an inductive, bottom-up approach was applied to analyze and conceptualize the findings. Results of the study indicate the significance of human and social capital such as language, education, skills, motivation, social networks and contacts, in the employment journey of immigrant women in Sweden. Two vicious cycles, along with the strategies used to break out of them, were identified. Patterns such as differences and similarities in the perceptions of employed and unemployed women are also highlighted.

Key terms: Employability, Immigrant women, Sweden, Qualitative Research, Social Capital, Human Capital, Motivation.

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List of Abbreviations

EU the European Union
KOMVUX Municipal adult education
NGO Non-Governmental Organization
SCB Statistics Sweden (Statistiska Central Byrå)
SFI Swedish for immigrants (*Svenska för invandrare*)
UN the United Nations
UNHCR United Nations United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

List of Swedish authorities

The Employment agency Arbetsförmedlingen
The Migration Agency Migrationsverket
The Swedish equality ombudsman DiskrimineringsOmbudsmannen (DO)
The Swedish Integration Board Integrationsverket
1. Introduction

The introduction is divided into three sections: research problem, research aim and the research questions. A global overview of migration and the related issues is presented in the first section, which then narrows down to the situation in Sweden, providing a context for the research problem and its relevance in the field of peace and development. Aim of this study is laid out in the next section followed by the research questions.

1.1 Research Problem

Human populations have always found reasons to move. With the rapidly changing dynamics of the world, immigration continues to be one of the most challenging issues on the global policy agenda, with an impact on both global and local level. Today we live in a world that has over 232 million international migrants, according to the figures released by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA 2013).

Although often driven by a desire for new opportunities and livelihood, international migration is not always by choice. War and a fear of social, religious and civil prosecution have resulted in a persistent increase in forced migration globally. As a result, today we are living in an age of migration (Miller and Castles, 2009), a critical time frame in which “international migration has globalized, accelerated, feminized, broadened and heavily politicized” (Gayibor, 2012), posing many challenges, both on the societal and political front.

One of the biggest challenges is the inclusion of these immigrants into the economic, social and cultural lives of their host country. From a sociocultural point of view, the role of labor market integration of immigrants is pivotal for societies in this context, as it provides income for individual immigrants, making them more aware of cultural norms, systems, language, traditions and other socio-cultural aspects of the society. Arguing from an economic point of view, successful labor market integration is significant for aggregate labor supply, public finances and economic growth, as noted by Husted et al (2009), Georges Lemaître (2007) argues that in countries with rising dependency ratio1,

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1 A measure of the dependent portion of a population (people who are too young or too old to work). A rising dependency ratio is mostly a matter of concern countries with an ageing population, where it becomes difficult to provide for an older, non-working population.
Successful labor market integration of immigrants can play an important role in alleviating this rise, by satisfying the labor market needs through helping finance the pension systems.

With an influx of more than a million migrants and refugees crossing into Europe in 2015, EU countries are struggling to cope with the resettling mechanism of these immigrants.

According to statistics, Sweden’s population in 2013 was a 0.93% hike from 2012, the largest increase since 1946, marked by Statistics Sweden (Statistiska centralbyrån - SCB) as record high immigration (The Local, 2014). The current migration dynamics in Sweden are a consequence of a series of developments. Through the years, scale and dynamics of immigration in Sweden have shifted significantly, from mainly labor immigration to a migration inflow dominated by asylum seekers and tied-movers (Andersson and Osman, 2008). While during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s people mostly came to Sweden to work from Finland, southern Europe and Turkey, since the 1970s, Sweden has received refugees, first from Latin America and Asia, and subsequently more from the Middle East and Africa (Regeringskansliet, 2009). Therefore, the past two decades have seen more humanitarian migration than the past. Compared to other forms of migration, labor market integration is comparatively slower in humanitarian migration, resulting in an impact on the labor market dynamics of the country, provoking high unemployment rates², along with other issues.

While diversity can enrich societies, it can also result in a set of challenges including labor market segregation. The Swedish government has taken a number of steps to combat this challenge, implemented by institutions like Arbetfömedlingen (Swedish Employment Office) and the municipalities. A key step in this direction was to merge the migration policy with the integration policy. Furthermore, the Swedish government believes that better results in overall integration of immigrants can be achieved by putting emphasis on the policy areas of education and employment (Bijl & Verweij, 2012:316). The Swedish Parliament adopted the overall goal for Swedish integration policies in 2008 to be equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. Seven areas that are identified as important include “more in work, more entrepreneurs”, with an overall focus “to

² Unemployment rate is the number of unemployed people as a percentage of the labor force, as defined by Eurostat (2016).
increase the supply and demand of labor, and to create quality and equality in schools.” (Regeringskansliet, 2009).

However, it is noted that while employment and language acquisition take the mainstage of integration policies (Peromingo, 2014), persistently high unemployment rates suggest that “Sweden has not yet broken the back of this considerable challenge” (Emilsson, 2014).

A high number of unemployed immigrants in Sweden have made labor market integration a much discussed issue, both in public and in the parliament, indicating a clear need for continued research in this area. Unemployment among immigrants brings with it problems at many levels. It affects the individual negatively and according to Pierson (2007), it is viewed as a key factor in causing poverty. Immigrants face the risk of segregation and social exclusion due to prolonged unemployment lowering their self-esteem and sense of belonging.

Looking at the gender aspect of integration, women comprise almost half of all international migrants (UNFPA, 2015). Therefore, low labor market integration of immigrant women in Sweden hinders the development and smooth functioning of a multicultural society such as Sweden, making this a relevant and urgent problem to be explored.

1.2 Research Aim

The aim of this study is to better understand the factors and processes behind employment of immigrant women in Sweden, in order to shed light on their employability in the Swedish labor market, by hearing “straight from the horse's mouth” which in this case is the immigrant women themselves. The research is guided by the experiences, opinions and perceptions of the immigrant women. By shedding light on “views from within” this study aims to analyze personal experiences to highlight trends in the society, which can be helpful in understanding the processes and factors that influence labor market integration of immigrant women in Sweden. However, this cannot be done in isolation as the narratives in this study depict individual paths of immigrant women and are an assessment of how they perceive their situation. This research will therefore be complemented with the analysis of other factors to be found in policy documents and statistics, in order to present a more holistic picture of the situation.

These qualitative insights can also offer inspiration for future research aiming at understanding social and political measures taken in order to increase the employability rate amongst immigrant women in Sweden.
1.3 Research Question

1. What factors do immigrant women perceive to influence their employability in the Swedish labor market?

Subsidiary Question

1. What strategies do immigrant women use to increase their employability in the Swedish labor market?

1.4 Disposition

This study is divided into 6 sections. Every section starts with a brief outline of what the section entails. The first section gives an introduction, leading to the research problem and objectives of the study, identifying the relevance of the research topic and its contribution to the current scientific debate by briefly discussing the existing literature on the topic. Second section lays out the methodological framework, presenting the chosen methodology and its justification. The third section presents the contextual background. State-of-the art review of the existing literature on the topic is presented in a more in-depth manner in the fourth section. Fifth and sixth sections will ‘close the circle’ by discussing and analyzing the findings of the study respectively, connecting to the research questions posed in the first section. The last chapter presents a concluding discussion.

1.5 Key Definitions

This section briefly defines and presents the context in which some key terms will be used in this study.

1.5.1 Immigration

International organization for migration (IOM) defines immigration as a process by which non-nationals move into a country for the purpose of settlement. This study refers to Swedish immigrant women as women who are permanent residents of Sweden and have come to Sweden as a refugee, labor migrant or tied-mover. (IOM, 2011)
1.5.2 Integration

It is difficult to define the concept of integration with respect to immigration, in a single way, as it can take on different meanings in different contexts. To limit the scope of this study to a manageable proportion, this study will limit itself to labor market integration, which implies that in time immigrants will have the same range of labor market outcomes as the Sweden-born.

Although labor market integration does not guarantee socio-economic integration automatically, it does have a large impact on the immigrant's ability to be able to function as an autonomous citizen of the host country. Anyway, we chose to define labor market integration, it is arguably one of the most important factors for immigrant integration in any country.

EU has no formal definition of the term integration. However, a set of common basic principles on integration was adopted by the justice and home affairs council in 2004 and reaffirmed in 2014, defining integration as “a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of the member states” (European Commission, 2016). Knowledge of the host country’s league and culture, education, employment, equal access to goods and services, enhanced diversity and non-discrimination at workplace are identified as important elements of EU’s integration policy (European Commission, 2016).

1.5.3 Foreign-born: A person who was born abroad.

1.5.4 Refugee: The terms refugee and migrant are increasingly being used interchangeably in media and public discourse. However, in the context of this study, it is important to note that the difference. While migrants do not move due to a direct threat but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, refugees are people fleeing persecution or armed conflict and cross national borders to seek safety and are defined and protected in international law. (UNHCR, 2015)
1.5.5 Tied-mover: A person who has been granted residence permit due to close family ties.

1.6 Methodology and Methods

This is a qualitative study, using semi-structured, in-depth interviewing method to better understand the perceptions of immigrant women about their employability in the Swedish job market. Open ended and exploratory interviews were conducted. An interview guide was used to probe and guide the conversation. Findings of the study were analyzed using an inductive approach to generate meaning from the empirical data collected in the field. Patterns, resemblances and regularities in experiences were observed and analyzed in order to reach conclusions about the current job market situation of immigrant women in Sweden, as they themselves perceive it.

According to (Bryman, 2004), epistemological and ontological considerations as well as the perceived connection between theory and research, are influential in selecting a research strategy. The essence of this study is to hear the 'views from within' and make an attempt to construct social meaning guided by the experiences of immigrant women. Therefore, a lot of thought was given to the selection of a method that interprets and understands phenomena, through the meanings that people attach to them (Greenhalgh, 2001).

Qualitative research method is the most appropriate method for such a research that focuses on words and processes rather than numbers. Moreover, as we are dealing with employment issues of women in this study, Bryman (2012:411) notes a link between qualitative research and feminism, suggesting that qualitative research methods provide greater opportunity for a feminist sensitivity to come forth. Although this study does not explicitly focus on only the feminist aspect of employability, it does deal with issues faced by women in the labor market. As quoted by Bryman (2012:411), Skeggs (2001: 429-30) suggests that most issues related to women have been studied using qualitative research methods, focusing on women’s experiences with an aim to reformulate traditional research agendas.
Furthermore, the scale of this study justifies qualitative research methods as according to Denscombe (2009) qualitative method can be used to gather a detailed data in order to investigate a small scale research deeply.

This will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology chapter 5.

1.7 Limitations and delimitations
This study is delimited to the women who are allowed to live and work in Sweden with a permanent resident status and are living in Växjö. Limitations of the study are discussed in detail in the Methodology section.

1.8 Ethical considerations
During this study, significance of ethical considerations became manifold due to the vulnerability of the target group and the sensitivity of the topic in the current political scenario. Measures were taken to ensure an ethical study by following the main areas laid out by Diener and Crandall (1978), quoted by Bryman (2012:125).

- Anonymity was ensured in order to protect the identity of the respondents. Names of the respondents are not mentioned in the study and they are referred to only by their home country.
- An informed consent to the interview was undertaken. All participants were made aware of the presence of a voice recording device and that the received information will be used for scientific purposes only.
- It was made sure that the privacy of the respondents is not invaded in any way. They were made aware that they can terminate the interview at any stage or refuse to answer any questions they are not comfortable with.
- Being an immigrant myself, I was cognizant of the possibility of a bias. I therefore tried my best to remain neutral in my data collection and analysis.

Respondents were shown the transcript of their interview for possible error elimination and to make sure that nothing was lost in translation.
2. Methodological Framework

This chapter outlines the methods used throughout the study, explaining and justifying the critical choices made in this research. The first part will lay out the overall methodology used to guide this research, followed by the methods used in the field to collect the empirical data. Ethical considerations taken into account will be stated and limitations will be addressed in the last part of this section.

2.1 Overarching methodology

As the research problem states, there is a high unemployment rate among immigrant women in Sweden. Despite the fact that the topic attracts a lot of attention of researcher due to the rapidly changing political and immigration dynamics, existing research shows a lack of immigrant women’s voice in this scenario.

The research problem of this study requires an understanding of women’s life experiences that can be best done through in-depth interview method. “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006:9). The descriptive details provide the mapping of context which helps the researcher to understand behavior. By exploring the participants’ worldview, this study provides a social scientific account of the world as seen by the participants.

By applying a bottom-up, inductive approach, this study focuses on studying individual behavior and using this observation to describe respondents’ perception of the factors and processes causing low employment rates in immigrant women in Sweden, which is the ultimate aim of this study.

Research findings were drawn from the frequent and dominant categories that emerged from the empirical data with an attempt to make sure that no key theme was obscured, reframed or left invisible due to preconceptions in the data collection and analysis process (Thomas,
Links of different categories with each other were also established (for example in the form of *vicious cycles*) and were sometimes compared with the findings from previous researches. A clear link was established between these research findings and the objectives of this study and these underlying structures of experiences were used to develop a framework that helps make sense of the current job market situation of immigrant women in Sweden.

### Table 1: The coding process in inductive analysis

<table>
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<th>Initial read through text data</th>
<th>Identify specific segments of information</th>
<th>Label the segments of information to create categories</th>
<th>Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories</th>
<th>Create a model incorporating most important categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many pages of text</td>
<td>Many segments of text</td>
<td>30-40 categories</td>
<td>15-20 categories</td>
<td>3-8 categories</td>
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*Note: Adapted from Creswell, 2002, Figure 9.4, p. 266*

### 4.2 Interview process

**Participants**

I conducted 12 interviews between April and May 2016. 9 interviews were conducted face-to-face, 1 via skype and 2 on telephone. All respondents are first generation migrant women, between the ages 20 and 55. 2 respondents are living in Högsby, 1 in Kalmar, 1 in Älmhult, 1 in Ruda and 7 in Växjö. 3 respondents are from Syria, 1 from Kosovo, 1 from Nigeria, 1 from Germany, 1 from Portugal, 1 from Saudi Arabia, 1 from Pakistan 1 from Iraq and 2 from Palestine. At the time of the interview, 5 of them were employed (3 were entrepreneurs) , 5 were unemployed and 2 were doing an internship. All respondents except 2 have had at least secondary school education from their home country. 4 respondents hold a Master’s degree and 1 is a pharmacist certified in her home country. 2 respondents have specialized vocational training as chef and hairdresser. 9 respondents entered Sweden as refugees, 2 as labor migrants and 1 as a student who stayed on to work.

**Sampling procedure**

I went into the field with a plan of theoretical sampling. However, the reality on ground sometimes made it difficult for me to connect with the participants with an ideal profile for the study. In order to interview immigrant women struggling to find work in Sweden, I
contacted Panncentralen, Araby Park arena, vocational teaching and Komvux learning center in Växjö. I selected these places as they offer services that largely attract immigrants trying to economically integrate in the Swedish society. Panncentralen, for example offers language training, women’s club and leisure activities specifically for women. In order to interview immigrant women who are economically well established in Sweden and are working in various capacities, I contacted an organization in Växjö called Step-Two that helps entrepreneurs of a foreign background to expand their businesses in Sweden. The reason for this choice was to capture the enriching experiences of immigrant women who have, despite all odds, managed to establish their businesses and are looking to expand in Sweden. Through snowballing, I established contact with not just entrepreneurs, but also women working as shop assistant and nurse etc.

My aim was to look for a diverse sample in terms of home country, language skills, length of time in Sweden and employment status. It was comparatively easier to find the unemployed group of respondents compared to the employed ones, as the former was more motivated and had the time to participate.

Although face-to-face was my preferred method for interviewing, 3 interviews had to be done via skype and telephone.
Many potential respondents had to be dropped due to their lack of Swedish or English language skills.
Meet the respondents
Hi. I was born in Nigeria and I am 48 years old. I am currently unemployed.

Hi. I was born in Kosovo and I am 36 years old. I am currently employed.

Hi. I am from Saudi Arabia and I am 30 years old. I am currently unemployed.

Hi. I was born in Germany and I am 55 years old. I am currently running my own company.

Hi. I was born in Pakistan and I am 27 years old. I am currently unemployed.
Hi. I was born in Syria and I am 29 years old. I am currently employed.

Hi. I was born in Syria and I am 37 years old. I am currently unemployed but I have been employed for many years.

Hi. I was born in Portugal and I am 48 years old. I am currently self-employed.

Hi. I was born in Syria and I am 55 years old. I am currently unemployed.

Hi. I was born in Palestine and I am 28 years old. I am currently employed.
Participant profile

The respondents were selected according to a certain criterion. All respondents are immigrant women who have the permission to permanently live and work in Sweden. The sample has two groups of respondents: employed and unemployed, giving the study room for an opportunity to make comparison between the perceptions of these two groups. The sample contains women who have been living in Sweden for a varying period of time, giving the study a perspective of the effect of length of time in Sweden on the employability of immigrant women. Language was also an important factor as I preferred respondents to communicate in a language they are comfortable with. Therefore, women with Swedish or English language skills were selected.

Interviews

A considerable amount of thought was given to the fact that setting of an interview can have an impact on the answers. 4 Interviews were conducted in the comfortable environment of the
employed women’s office and praktikplats during business hours. 3 interviews were conducted at the Komvux learning center in Växjö, 2 at the grounds of Panncentralen Växjö, 1 was conducted over skype and 2 over the telephone, as the respondents were at locations that were hard to reach at that time. Most interviews were recorded on my mobile device with the exceptions of those who declined to being recorded. To document the body language of the respondent, I took notes about facial expressions, hand movements and actions such as quotation marks winking of the eye etc. The interviews were guided by the research questions. Pilot interviews were done in order to test the dynamics of the interviewing technique and to practice my skills as an interviewer. Those test interviews are not a part of the study.

A guide was developed to provide support to the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviewing allowed the respondents to speak more freely and with more details as compared to structured interviews, making the procedure more flexible and respondent-led. The questions were used only as probes to steer the interviews. Respondents were free to bring up the topics they wanted to talk about, making the interviews rich and deep. Follow-up questions were asked to probe further when the respondent was not clear. Due to the in-depth and semi-structured nature of the interviewing technique, there was a variation in the length of interviews, depending on how expressive and reflective the respondent was. On an average, interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes each.

Notes were taken simultaneously, to record body language, facial expressions and gestures. The notes proved to be a useful supplement, especially for interviews that had poor audio recording quality due to background noise in public places. With the respondents’ permission, the language of some quotations was slightly adjusted to make them grammatically understandable.

4.3 The analysis Process

What we see in the field, as members of the society, is conditioned by many factors making the feasibility of theory-neutral observation doubtful. Therefore, my personal experiences and existing social scientific conceptualizations while using grounded theory methods in this study might be subject to criticism. However, many writers might take the view that the
researcher’s sensitivity towards an existing conceptualization can also help make the investigation more focused and can therefore build upon the work of others (Bryman 2012:580).

4.3.1 Transcription and Translation
The generation of a large amount of data such as interview transcripts and field note etc., can be a problem in qualitative study, as it is difficult to find meaningful analytical paths in data that is full of attractive but cumbersome richness. Miles (1979) describes qualitative data as “attractive nuisance” and Lofland names it as a condition called “analytical interruptus” (Bryman, 2012:570). This study attempts to carry out a true analysis, by remaining focused on producing knowledge that gives the data wider significance for the social sciences, without being distracted by the attractive richness of the empirical data acquired.

Empirical data was translated (when required), transcribed and organized in a single text file, making it ready for the coding process.

4.3.2 The coding process
The text was read closely and repeatedly and the multiple meanings inherent in text were considered. Relevant themes that occurred repeatedly, or were emphasized on, by the respondent were highlighted. These repeating themes were organized into categories. Due to the unstructured nature of the interviews, a lot of text was irrelevant to the objectives of this study and was therefore not categorized under any theme (for example how unemployment was interfering with the role of these women as a mother). Similarly, some conversation snippets came under more than one category (for example smaller municipality resulting in a lack of social activity as well as a lack of job opportunities for the immigrant women). Repetitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors (e.g. since or because) and missing data was carefully screened.

Links, associations and contradiction between categories were identified. For example, the role of Arbetsförmedlingen in employment integration of immigrant women was perceived in contradictory ways. Similarly, a similarity of perception in all respondents, about the role of gender in employability was also noted at this point.
After merging some smaller categories together, (for example discrimination, physical outlook, foreign name), a total of 6 categories were finalized. As stressed by Tomas (2003:7) a coder must make hard decisions about the importance of themes and categories and should not have more than eight themes in an inductive coding process.

According to Bryman (2012), coding can sometimes result in excessive fragmentation and de-contextualization of data. In order to avoid that risk, it was made sure while clustering the themes together, that narrative context of individual stories was not lost.

**Limitations**

- As established earlier, municipalities have a lot of direct responsibility in the management of newly arrived immigrants and their integration. As municipalities in Sweden are different in size and resources, they have a different impact on the employability of the immigrant women living in their area. It is therefore difficult to draw any general conclusions by conducting the study in Växjö only. However, participants of this research who have had the opportunity to live and work in several municipalities of Sweden enriched the study by sharing their experiences and comparing the situation in different parts of Sweden.

- Native language of several participants was Arabic. Although they participated in Swedish and English, from an in-depth research technique, it can be viewed as a disadvantage. “The emphasis on depth, nuance and the interviewee’s own language as a way of understanding meaning implies that interview data needs to be captured in its natural form” (Ritche & Lewis, 2003:142).

- I faced difficulty in getting hold of working women as this is a busy time of the year for working women in Sweden as school terms are preparing to wrap up and businesses are preparing to file their taxes.
Time was a constraint as grounded theory analysis is a constant interplay of data collection and conceptualization (Bryman 2012:580). Conducting in-depth interviews and transcribing the recorded interviews was time consuming.

This study is built on the perceptions and experiences of the participant immigrant women living in a small city of Sweden and hence cannot be generalized. This study can however become a part of a bigger research done on a larger scale.

3. Contextual background

This section provides an overview of the Swedish migration describing two main periods of immigration in Sweden, namely labor immigration and humanitarian immigration period. A broad view of the economic integration policies will also be provided in this section. This historical background aims to provide a better understanding of the developments leading to the current situation and its impact on the lives of immigrant women in the contemporary Sweden.

Most of the facts presented in this section have been taken from the official website of Migrationsverket (unless specified otherwise).

Since this study makes use of the perceptions and opinions of the immigrant women and how they assess their situation, it becomes essential to have a broader overview of situation from other perspectives, in order to create a more holistic picture of the employment situation of immigrant women in Sweden.

3.1 An overview of Swedish migration

Rauhut D., (2010:103) quotes (Björklund et al. 1998; Socialdepartementet 2001; Lundh et al. 2002; Lundh 2005; Åslund et al. 2006) saying that today, the general opinion is that immigrants are economically less integrated in the Swedish society compared to the former times, regardless if immigrants are seen as non-Swedish citizens or foreign-born persons. The relative employment rate for immigrant women has dropped from 102% of the native women in 1975 to 75% in 2003. Rauhut D., (2010:105) quotes Svanberg and Tydén (1992, 333–35)
arguing that until the early 1960’s, the problems related to labor immigrants and refugees were considered as more of a language issue by the Swedish authorities, rather than an issue related to employment and the labor market in Sweden. In order to understand the current unemployment rate in immigrants in Sweden, it is important to understand the factors and developments through the years, which led to the current situation.

*Migrationsverket* (Swedish migration agency) presents on its official website (www.migrationsverket.se), the history of different groups of people who have immigrated to Sweden over the centuries, starting from Germans from the Hanseatic League in the middle ages, to French artists, philosophers and intellectuals in the 1700s, skilled Italians in the 1800s and Scottish people, who among other things started breweries.

**The labor immigration period 1945-1975**

In the traditionally emigration country Sweden, immigration began with the second world war with Sweden receiving refugees from the Baltic, Nordic and other European countries. Due to political neutrality of Sweden during the Second World War, its infrastructure and production capital was intact, in a world that was full of war and destruction at that time. This strategic advantage resulted in low production cost and high consumption demand and a significant demand for labor in manufacturing and particularly the textile sector. Georges Lemaître (2007:12) states that there was an average of 4% economic growth per annum in Sweden between 1950 and 1973 with a period of growth of over 7% between 1959 and 1965.

In the early 1950s, owing to the growing need of foreign labor, immigration to Sweden was very cheap, costing very little money. Generally dominated by Nordic citizens, bilateral agreements were signed with Hungary and Italy along with some other European countries in 1947, in an attempt to facilitate recruitment of non-Nordic citizens. 1950’s saw workers coming from countries like Germany, Italy and Austria and soon expanding to Turkey, Yugoslavia and Greece by the 1960s, with almost 60% of this immigrant population working in industry with immigrant women working mainly in the textile industry. (Georges Lemaître (2007).
Refugee immigration period (1970-2016)
A military takeover in Greece resulted in many Greeks seeking asylum in Sweden and by the end of 1960s, refugee immigration became an increasing part of the total immigration of Sweden per annum and regulated immigration was introduced. (migrationsverket, 2016). With the declining importance of Labor immigration, refugee immigration dominated the Swedish immigration dynamics. In the 1970s, immigrants were coming mainly from Latin America, and during the 1980s, from the Middle East. In the beginning of the 1990s, people from the former Yugoslavia were the largest group of refugee migrants and towards the end of the 1990s, people from Iraq had become the most dominant group. The number of immigrants gradually increased over time since then. Between 1968 and 1977 there were 2400 asylum seekers per annum which raised to 3000 within the next five years which became 20,000-30,000 by the end of the 1980s.

2.2 Swedish economic integration policy
While studying the issues of immigrant women in entering the labor market in Sweden, it is important to have a broad overview of the situation and the process through which this situation evolved over time.

Trade union saw the so-called “tourist immigration” as a threat to the workers’ rights and the in the mid-1960s, foreign labor started to receive focused policy attention. Swedish immigration board was established in 1969 to take over the immigration responsibility from the Swedish Labor Market Board. 240 hours of language training for the immigrants was tied to a salary by the government in 1972. Immigrants were given the right to own property and start a company in Sweden. By 1974, immigrant workers had the same access to public jobs as the Sweden born.

In 1979, an amendment was made in the Swedish constitution, through which measures were taken towards integration of immigrants in the Swedish labor market. A system was established to convert foreign educational qualifications to their Swedish equivalent. Owing to this employment oriented immigration system, it was the Swedish labor market board that was mainly responsible for immigrant integration in Sweden, until 1985, when the
responsibility of integration was handed over to the Swedish Immigration Board. (OECD:225).

Through an active placement policy in 1985, newly arrived immigrants were assigned to municipalities all around the country, instead of just the metropolitan cities of Stockholm, Goteborg and Malmö. This meant that immigrants were placed not according to job availability but according to housing availability, limiting the chances of immigrants to enter the job market in Sweden. In 1998, the Swedish Integration Board was established and the responsibility of integration of immigrants was transferred to them. Today, the municipalities have the direct responsibility of the newly arrived immigrants, while the Swedish Integration Board is responsible for distribution of introduction allowance to the municipalities.

**Introduction programs and incentives by Arbetsförmedlingen**

*(All information about this program has been taken from the official website of Arbetsförmedlingen, unless specified otherwise).*

In an attempt to increase the employability of immigrants, government institutions like arbetsförmedlingen and the municipalities have developed programs and incentives for both the employees and the potential employers. Under the program called *Special Recruitment Incentive in the shape of Entry Recruitment Incentive*, in some cases, the employer can receive financial compensation for hiring an immigrant. This applies to all temporary, permanent and part-time employment. *(Arbetsförmedlingen, 2016).*

The government has developed a two-year *introduction plan* for newly arrived immigrants in Sweden which helps prepare and transit the immigrants to the Swedish labor market. Before starting, arbetsförmedlingen and the municipality carry out some tests to see if the immigrant is ready to enter the labor market in terms of education, training and experience. A strategy is developed with the immigrant to enhance his portfolio with the requirements of the Swedish labor market, including activities such as Swedish language training, social studies and vocational studies if required. This program is not compulsory. However, once started, the payment of social benefits becomes bound to it. The length of the introductory plan is adjustable for participants who do not manage to learn the language in two years, or if the participant interrupts the program in pursuit of a job.
Directly affecting the employability of immigrants is the language learning aspect of this plan called SFI (svenska för invandrare) which is combined with språkpraktik (work experience to practice language at a work environment). While introduction plan is offered to refugees only, language learning program is offered to all immigrants in Sweden. After the completion of the program, the immigrant is considered the same as a Swedish citizen, so far as the job market is concerned. Aimed at increasing the labor market integration of immigrants, some programs at the national level have been introduced, targeted at regions with a high number of immigrant job seekers.

Targeted at strengthening labor market integration, a program called ‘Work Place introduction’ was launched in 2005, where both employer and the employee were supported for a period of 6 months. Immigrant women are a particular target of this program, as they are cited particularly as they often have problems entering the labor force. (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2016).

4. State of the Art Review

This section presents an overview of some prominent literature available on this issue. The existing literature on the topic can be categorized in two different categories. One category presents the theoretical aspects of immigrant integration and the second one focuses on the role of government policy and institutions in economic integration of immigrants.

3.1 Literature focusing on theoretical aspect of economic integration

Studying the challenges in economic integration of immigrants in their host country, a study by Piracha et. al. (2013) uses the principle component analysis (PCA) to build an index of social networks and confirms the positive effect of social capital on immigrants’ employment outcomes and wages, especially for women. The study quotes (Chiswick, 1978), highlighting the employers’ fear of a gap between the immigrants’ transferable skillset and the required skillset of the host country, leaving the migrant in a disadvantaged position compared to the native born. Social capital is offered as a solution that leads to the potential employer and
employee interacting with each other in less formal situations, creating mutual trust and understanding. This facilitating of the socio-economic assimilation of migrants in the host country may lead to progress in finding employment in the host country’s job market. The findings of this study give us an insight into the perception of the employers’ fears and apprehension when hiring an immigrant.


Carlson (2010), use the method called correspondence testing to confirm the patterns suggesting that in general men have a more negative attitude towards immigrants than women. The study recommends an increased involvement of women in recruitment process, to lower the degree of ethnic discrimination in the employment process in Sweden. It is interesting to note here that Sweden enjoys the reputation of being one of the most gender-equal countries of the world, with an active participation of women in the country’s economy. Yet, studies indicate differences in employment rate in the Swedish labor market with women being paid less than men.

Stenmark (2010) traces the roots of gender discrimination in the Swedish labor market back into the days of early industrialization and suggests that the conservatory character of institutions reproduce those gender perceptions even today. As established earlier, dynamics of immigration in Sweden have changed since the 70’s, yet gender discrimination in the Swedish market still exists. This curious fact suggests reasons for discrimination to be more than an increase in the number of immigrants in Sweden.

Alden and Hammarstedt (2014 p.16) observe the recent trends and position of foreign-born in the Swedish labor market. Their study indicates that foreign-born Africans and Asians are over represented in jobs requiring low competencies and have a higher unemployment rate compared to the other groups in the Swedish labor market. This study suggests the

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3 According to Rooth D. (2014), correspondence testing provides a credible way to reveal discrimination in hiring on the basis of age, gender, sexual orientation etc. Matched pairs of job applications are sent out with a characteristic that hints one application to the membership of a group.
exploration of these findings to be a lack of human capital of immigrants and the existence of discrimination on the basis of country of origin in the Swedish labor market. Discussing employment rate of immigrant women with relation to education, they observe disproportionately high unemployment rate even among well-educated women. A high percentage of women with post-secondary education are found outside the labor force. Considering the length of time in Sweden, they found that fewer than 10% of women with refugee background managed to find employment one year after arrival and even after five years; fewer than half of them are employed. They argue that a greater access to social networks might be beneficial in entering the labor market.

Looking at the gender aspect of labor market integration, Gayibor (2015) quotes a study by Coral del Río and Alonso-Villar (2012), Tastsoglou and Preston (2012), Heilbrunn et al (2010) indicating the presence of a double segregation in the labor market for immigrant women, as their activities tend to be more feminized compared to those of the Sweden-born women, and are more segregated than those of the immigrant men.

3.2 The role of government policies and institutions in economic integration
Research regarding the role of government policies and institutions presents many different dimensions. There is an extensive research available on the role of EU, arbetsförmedlingen, migrationsverket, SFI, the local governments and universities. Scholars are generally in agreement about the pivotal role these institutions can play in the economic integration of immigrants, also indicating the weaknesses or limitations that hinder their effectiveness and consequently resulting in low employment rates among immigrants.

Bevelander (1999:445) studies the effect of a change in the immigration policy, on integration. He compares the labor market integration of immigrants in the 50s and 60’s, when immigrants were mostly labor-immigrants (see definition) were generally successful in entering the labor market, to the ones entering Sweden since the 70’s. He affirms the proposition of many cross-sectional studies (Bevelander 1995; Bevelander and Scott 1996; Ekberg 1991a, Ohlsson
1975 and 1978; Scott 1995), that those immigrants who entered Sweden since the 70’s have had a much more difficult time penetrating the labor market.

Explaining the difference in the levels of employment rate between the Sweden-born and the foreign-born, Bevelander (1999) observes traditional discrimination and structural changes in the economy to be the two main reasons for an increased demand for language skills and culture-specific social competence.

In an interview at Harvard Kennedy School, published online, Robert Putnam (2008) stresses the significance of the role of public policy in making both the old folks and the new folks comfortable with the diversity in the environment creating a sense of ‘we’ rather than ‘them’ and ‘us’. He predicts about modern societies being more ethnically diverse in the next 30 years from then. Elaborating on the advantages of an integrated immigrant population in terms of economy, culture, creativity etc. he offers an explanation as to why increased immigration and diversity in the current times is reducing trust, social solidarity as well as social capital. He argues that uncertainty makes people ‘hunker down’ or ‘pull in’ like a turtle in the presence of some feared threat. Local government can play an important part as a lot of civic integration takes place in churches, schools, workplace, bowling leagues etc. The challenge for a successful immigrant society is to create a new sense of shared identity.

Studying the relationship between SFI and employability, McEvoy (2016) stresses the importance of language education and states that education is the tool to create cultural capital that can be converted to economic capital. She studies students’ experiences of the one-size-fits-all course structure of Swedish language education, through his anthropological research and notes the lack of pedagogic transmission largely due to asymmetrically distributed forms of capital within the classroom. The researcher highlights students’ frustration over the ineffective structure of the course, which negatively affects their employability in the job market.

McHugh and Challinor (2011) evaluate the range of policies of the EU and the North America, available to improve the immigrant’s economic integration through the acquisition of the host country’s language. The study suggests that immigrants’ employability depends
not only on their level of education and technical skills but also on their ability to communicate in the language of the host country. Therefore, any strategy for immigrant integration in the host country’s job market, must address the main challenge of language acquisition. While examining the relationship between employability and language proficiency among the immigrants, the study states that immigrants with more language proficiency earn more and work in more skilled occupations compared to those with low language skills. The study further establishes that the highly-skilled immigrants benefit from learning the host country language and manage to find work in their relevant field rather than being downgraded to a less-skilled work level. Similarly, those immigrants who are less skilled can reach higher levels of work by learning the language of the host country. Language can be a key to their upward mobility in the new job market. Elaborating on the aspect of establishing effective employment-oriented language policies which are tailored to immigrants’ job market requirements, the study indicates the existence of multiple challenges in designing such accessible and cost-effective programs. They recommend ‘survival language’ skills, along with the contextualization of language for workplace use, highlighting a difference in the language of *everyday interactions* and the language of *office interactions* and the businesses that rely on their labor. The study indicates a need for a language system that has contextualized and differentiated instructions.

Analyzing the perceptions of immigrants that suggest that unemployment causes immigrants to feel excluded from the Swedish social networks, the study identifies cultural differences, discrimination and segregation from the Swedish society as well as lack of country-specific skills like Swedish language and education, to be the main reasons for low employment integration in this group. Magnusson (2013) furthers this argument by observing only partial sociocultural integration of highly educated migrants in Sweden. This study highlights the role of international workplaces where respondents present low levels of Swedish language knowledge due to English being the main language used at the workplace, thus lowering their human capital in Sweden. Economic integration, according to this study, should not be the core focus of Swedish integration policy as it does not automatically ensure socio-economic integration.

A number of arguments can be identified from the existing literature.
• Immigration policy has a direct effect on the integration policy of Sweden.
• Social and human capital like networks, contacts, language, education and skills etc. increase employability.
• Discrimination and segregation in the Swedish housing and labor market hinders the ability of immigrants to penetrate the Swedish labor market.
• Government policy and institutions play a pivotal role in the economic integration of immigrants and there is a clear need for them to improve their effectiveness in this regard.

It can be seen here that the voice of immigrant women is underrepresented in the existing literature on this issue. This study aims to fill this gap by adding this important stakeholder's perspective to the overall assessment of the situation of low employment rates among immigrant women in Sweden.

5. Findings

This chapter lays out the findings of this study, coded according to the themes that emerged during the research process. The chapter presents findings about the perceptions of immigrant women, about factors influencing their employability and identifies the differences and similarities between the perceptions of the two groups.

What goes on in the mind of a woman when she immigrates to a new country? How does she deal with her new surroundings and adapt to the new environment? What processes does she go through in her everyday life that helps her survive the change? How does she rebuild her social circle? How does she learn the new language? And most importantly, how does she penetrate the job market? This study attempts to explore some inner thought processes and perspectives of women who have undergone this experience, in order to make sense of the employment situation of immigrant women in Sweden. The findings of this study offer an
insight into the most important stakeholders of the integration process i.e. the immigrant women themselves.

5.1 Factors affecting employability

Figure A: This is a representation of the findings that will be explained in the text later in this section.
Figure B-The figure represents a mind map of the findings of this study that are explained in detail in following text.

5.1.1 Language
Almost all the respondents brought up the subject of language. However, the mixed perceptions of women on the role of education were interesting to note. While both employed and unemployed groups of respondents agreed on the importance of language as an influencing factor for employability, difference of opinion was observed on the subject of difficulty in acquiring this vital skill. This will be discussed in more detail in the analysis chapter.

Most respondents expressed frustration over the language barrier and the trap it creates for immigrant integration in the Swedish job market. A respondent from Syria, age 29 expressed her feelings in these words.
“Learning the Swedish language and finding a decent job in Sweden has been harder than crossing the sea on the death boat (referring to escaping her home country on a boat, through human smugglers).”

Respondents deliberated on the struggles of learning the technical level of language required at the workplace. They believe that it is critical to be able to read, write and understand Swedish in a job situation, which is why, firewalls of language proficiency requirement, have been built around job openings by the employers.

“I can easily introduce myself in Swedish and communicate my needs too. I can even tell my story in Swedish. But when I go outside the school, to the red cross or ICA (local grocery store), I don’t understand a single word in Swedish. Then how can I understand my boss? How can I understand my work friends? My contract papers? I will make a fool of myself.”

Some respondents expressed that a lack of experienced and certified language teachers working in SFI programs contributes to an ineffective language learning system for the immigrants.

*My German teacher has a very bad accent. Her Swedish words sound different from the Swedish words of my daughter’s fritids teacher or the voices I hear on the radio or in the park outside my window. I am always confused and lost.*

Some respondents expressed that the terms and expressions used in real life employment situation are absent in a classroom setting. A lot of bookish knowledge is imparted in the language class, but not simple things like popular slang words, figurative speech, shortening of words, small cultural jokes or expressions or the register of speech. This gap in language teaching keeps the immigrants alien to the undercurrents of conversations taking place not only throughout the working day, but also during *fika* breaks or at official social gatherings. Respondents also mentioned that books that are being used for teaching formal language used in Swedish job market are so official that it goes against the very nature of the Swedish workplaces, which are rather open, casual and on a first name basis. While recalling her short job experience as a substitute teacher, a respondent stated how her language skills were so out
of sync with the language spoken in the real world job scenario. One respondent from Poland recalled an experience when she used the Swedish word *ni* instead of *du* (*you*) in an application to her boss, because she wanted to give respect to her boss.

“I wrote an application to my boss in Swedish and she came and hugged me saying that this application sounds like it has been written to the king. Her hug was sweet, but I felt embarrassed and couldn’t face her for days.”

Similarly, some respondents expressed frustration over the lack of technical language required for relevant jobs. For example, potential candidate for job that requires public dealing needs to be able to understand different dialects, accents and pronunciations of Swedish. Similarly, potential candidate for a job that requires a lot of report-writing must be aware of the official language of report writing. One respondent expressed her frustration on this issue in these words.

“They have cookie-cutter solutions to every immigrant. They think we can all be washed with the same washing powder. They see me as an immigrant who must pass SFI and leave the seat for the next immigrant who is waiting in line. I left school with SFI level D, but not enough Swedish to even read and understand a child’s storybook with more pictures than words.”

Another issue that came up quite often was the presence of mixed levels of students in SFI classes. A person with very little to no educational background is put in the same level as a person who is highly qualified in his home country, making the situation problematic for both the teacher and the students.

*I am dying to find a job while my teacher is teaching my classmate how to say hello in Swedish. This class crawls like a snail.”*

The phenomenon of language internship also came up several times. While 3 respondents have a positive experience, several others perceived it as a waste of time. Those who spoke in favor of *språkpraktik* expressed their satisfaction over finding the confidence to use the language in real-life practical scenario while the others thought that it’s a bad idea to throw an
under-prepared swimmer into the deep waters. Many respondents agreed that internships seldom develop into meaningful and relevant work experience that can help them secure a job later. Some respondents recalled their language practice and expressed facing embarrassment due to a lack of vocabulary. One woman who was working at ICA failed to understand when a child asked for ice-cream (called glass in Swedish), and she bought him a disposable glass instead.

Respondents stated that 2 years is a long time to sit in a language class as an adult. They reported a loss of interest and motivation with passing time.

While most respondents expressed language as a roadblock, some perceive it the magic key to the Swedish job market.

“For me, Swedish language was a short-cut to the job market, especially when I sounded exactly like the Swedes on the phone. Sometimes my good Swedish accent covered up for my lack of vocabulary. So I listened to the radio and tried to copy their accent, even when I didn’t understand the words. I did it day and night for many weeks and enjoyed it.”

Another respondent, who has been living in Sweden for a decade now, stated how doors to the job market started opening for her after she stopped counting on SFI only and started practicing with everyone she saw. She perceived language as the powerful axe which she used to tear down the walls around her.

It was noted that while a majority of women relied largely on SFI for learning Swedish, a small group of respondents stated having a more hands-on approach towards language learning. They identified the use of effective strategies like training the ear by listening to different dialects on the radio, starting early; even before entering Sweden, labelling everything in the house, reading road signs, reading their children’s storybooks, writing a daily dairy, reading food labels etc.
5.1.2 Driver’s licence

Many respondents brought up the requirement of a driver’s licence as a roadblock in the way to job market, speaking at length about how hard it is to go around this hurdle. In their opinion, requirement of a driver’s license significantly cuts down their chances of finding a job. The process of getting a driver’s license is a long, difficult and expensive path, which most of these women have a hard time walking through.

*I am trapped (...) and need money to get a licence to get a job to get money. This has been going on for so long that I have stopped thinking about jobs that ask for a licence.*

Some respondents from Asian countries expressed how the difference between left hand drive and right-hand drive system is hard for them to get used to. They also expressed a fear of hefty penalties in case of a mistake on the road, which they cannot afford to pay, being unemployed.

5.1.3 Work experience

The topic of a requirement of relevant work experience in the Swedish job market came up frequently. Respondents expressed difficulty in making the first cut as there’s a need to prove one’s self through Swedish work experience.

Internship came up as the most common route immigrant women take in order to penetrate the job market. However, many respondents expressed relevant internship to be as hard to find as a job itself.

Educated and skilled women, who have had good careers in their home countries, find it depressing to do irrelevant internships for example as a kitchen helper or a babysitter. A qualified pharmacist from Syria recalled her experience as an intern in an *asylboende* in these words.

*“Angry asylum seekers sometimes peed on the stairs and I had to clean it all. I don’t understand what can I possibly learn from this experience that my potential employer at a pharmacy would find valuable.”*
Most employed women, with a few exceptions, had a slightly different experience regarding this issue. They experienced irrelevant internships and job experiences as a way to gather transferable skills and an authentication stamp that can prove to be helpful in finding an entry point in the Swedish job market.

“You see, Swedes easily trust other Swedes. Employers feel safe hiring you if you as an employee have been tried and tested by some other Swede. Even if it is a job in the kitchen.”

Another aspect that came up during the interviews was the value of networking in increasing the employability of immigrant women. Many women even from the unemployed group agreed to the fact that the more people you know the more chances you have to get employed and the best way to meet new and relevant people is through the workplace, even if you are an intern.

A young immigrant from Palestine shared her story of her first real job in these words.

“I was working part-time in a cafe where regular Rotary Club meetings used to take place. I met many people from the club and I used to talk to them before and after their weekly meeting. This is how I got my first interview for a job in the kommun. (....) wasn’t easy but I’m a very patient woman.”

5.1.4 Self-employment

This issue represented perhaps the highest level of difference of opinion amongst the immigrant women in Sweden.

Respondents discussed self-employment as a potential path towards economic integration in the Swedish job market. While most women expressed this as a tough yet exhilarating and intellectually rewarding experience, some women identified self-employment as an act of acceptance of defeat with an access to mainly intellectually low level fields like running a
pizzeria or hair dressing. The respondents who had established careers in their home countries, in fields such as nursing or teaching, had a particularly negative opinion about the idea of self-employment. An unemployed respondent from Pakistan said the following.

*I can’t live wondering what the next month will bring to the bank. What if it brings only 100 kronor and then I have to look for extra job?*

As this is the time of the year when businesses file their taxes for the year, the tedious work of accounting and audit came up quite frequently during the interviews and a considerable majority of immigrant women indicated the difficulty they face in following the Swedish system. A fear of heavy fine in case of any mistake in filing also made self-employment an unpopular option; particularly the unemployed women expressed a fear of the unknown.

Women also expressed that the clientele of immigrant business owners is mostly limited to their own ethnic community and is discriminated against, leading them to segregation rather than integration. However, employed women generally perceived self-employment as a solid step towards gaining confidence and self-sufficiency in the Swedish job market.

One woman from Portugal stated the example of many successfully running businesses owned by immigrant women entrepreneurs in Växjö, ranging from eateries to health services and many more.

One respondent from Germany, who has lived in Sweden for over 20 years, provides legal advisory services related to audit and taxation issues, to businesses in Växjö. She expressed that her hair has turned white doing such hard work all these years but if she has a choice, she will choose to do the same over and over again.

5.1.5 Relevant Education

Respondents expressed that Sweden has high standards when it comes to education and the job market. Most fields require a specific skill-set and a relevant education. Respondents expressed their disappointment on the low acceptance of foreign qualification in Sweden,
especially non-EU countries. Women who had spent a considerably long period of time to educate themselves in their home country found the current situation in the Swedish job market frustrating.

Professionals such as doctors, engineers, pharmacists, lawyers and psychologists, who spend many years studying, can find it frustrating to have to top up their education again, according to the Swedish educational standards, in the Swedish language.

One woman from Syria expressed herself saying

“I have seen (that) everyone in Sweden is so good in English but they always ask for excellent Swedish for every job. Books in pharmacy and medicine colleges are in English but they teach them in Swedish, so now I have to study the same course again in Swedish if I want to work as a pharmacist here.”

Women expressed their concern by saying that even after acquiring education in the relevant field, there are no guarantees of a job. The Swedish job market is very competitive and hard to penetrate. A respondent opined that spending time in getting the relevant education in Sweden might increase the chances of penetration in the job market, but is still a very risky investment of both time and energy.

Some respondents who had invested in education in Sweden stated their positive experiences and strategies they used to manage the hardships of this investment. One respondent from Iraq stated

“We had a plan and took turns (to study). My husband did jobs and paid the bills when I was studying and I did small jobs and paid the bills when he was studying. It was crazy and with difficulties (but) we found work that we both like. And now we also have a Swedish education.”
Another respondent from Poland recalled her long and difficult employment journey and expressed how things turned around for her after she decided to acquire education and try to find her dream job.

“I was working as a nanny when my boyfriend told me that I am not being paid well. It was a long tussle after which I decided to open my own company. I cleaned other people’s houses to make ‘dark money’ while I completed my education. I now know how to manage my economic life and no one can cheat me into an unfair salary, so yes, I can say that education was my game changer.”

Some respondents also associated education with a way of meeting new people with similar interests. They expressed feeling closer to the Swedish society by closely experiencing the value they give to certain things in life like being on time, not missing deadlines and commitments and taking frequent coffee breaks.

It was noted that respondents stressed on the importance of ‘friends’ in their employment journey. They expressed how they get stuck every now and then, especially in the early years of settlement. They stated finding the help of friends, neighbors, people they knew at the church, SFI, university or workplace. They mentioned frequently making acquaintances at their child’s school, library, and the park or sometimes at the local pizzeria. These acquaintances often prove to be a good source of information, moral or physical help and sometimes even simple encouragement and guidance was enough.

A respondent from Saudi Arabia stated her experience in these words

“My husband always discusses small things with his friends. If we need to buy halal meat, buy something or need help to move, we call everyone like a party. We have some friends in Malmö, who know a lot because they travel to Germany and Copenhagen many times.”
5.1.6 Time

Time came up as a significant factor influencing employability. Women expressed that they are aware that re-settling in a new country does not happen overnight, but in Sweden, it takes way too long. By the time they learn Swedish, manage to get a license, get their documents validated, reeducate themselves in the relevant field, make meaningful social connections, time quietly slips out of their hands and they realize that too many years have passed by.

“New things happen every day and immigrants are sitting inside the classrooms for years and years learning Swedish, math and samhälle (social studies). When I finally went out to apply for a job, I just felt strange and outdated. My children maybe fit in this world, not me.”

Respondents expressed how they lose touch with their relevant fields. This gap has a very negative effect on their employability as they no more remain up-to-date with the relevant knowledge of their field.

Respondents also reflected on how their motivation level went down with the passing time.

“I started with much energy. After so many years of struggling, I lost my energy.”

Women complained of “not being the same person” after too many years of non-stop struggle. Most of them agreed that the Swedish system is slow. Starting from the validation of foreign qualifications to finding housing in the right city and learning the language, everything takes valuable time out of their lives, and eventually takes a toll on their employability once they are ready to penetrate the job market.

Women agreed that time spent in learning the language is understandable but much time is wasted in non-issues like housing and validation of foreign qualifications. All the skills that they already have are ignored and wasted in this process.

A respondent from Nigeria who was a trader in her home country, stated that
“It is so funny that the phones that I had in my shop in Nigeria a few years back don’t even exist anymore. Obviously, the world was not going to wait for me.”

Some respondents, however, shared a more positive experience. A woman from Kosovo owned a hair salon in her home country. She was very cognizant of the time resettling takes so she started learning Swedish even before she entered Sweden. She subscribed to Swedish news and use YouTube to train her ear.

“I found a permanent job at a hair salon within 7 months of my arrival. It wasn’t easy and I failed countless times in the process but I didn’t give up on my dreams. I worked all day and practiced my Swedish with the customers who were always so nice and understanding. What can I say, maybe I am lucky?”

Mentioning time as an influencing factor on employability, another respondent from Germany expressed that time made things clearer for her. Even though it took her many years, she felt more and more employable with every passing year. She feels that time enriched her employability, through valuable experiences and processes.

“Everyone at SFI and Arbetsförmedlingen used to say, “be patient! ”and I did be patient. I still don’t have a very good job but I think of it like this that yesterday I had no job and today I have one. I know tomorrow I will have a better one and so on.”

5.1.7 Size of the city

Due to a lack of housing in Sweden, immigrants are resettled in small towns along the countryside. Respondents expressed their concern on the negative effect this situation on their chances to integrate in the Swedish economy. They feel that when all immigrants are grouped together, there is no chance to integrate and mingle with the Swedes. Very little to no interaction or exchange of culture takes place causing isolation and loneliness. A respondent from Syria stated that
“We live in our own world and watch things happening but we never become a part of anything. I don’t have many friends because maybe I’m very shy.”

Although Växjö is a vibrant, medium sized city, it has areas where the majority of residents are immigrants. A respondent from Palestine, who lives in Araby expressed how horrible she feels when police cars patrol around the Araby Park Arena at night.

“It makes us feel like a bunch of criminals that need to be watched. If there were more Swedes involved in this area, maybe it would look safer to both us and them.”

Another issue picked up by several respondents concerned a lack of work opportunities in small towns. With a limited number of businesses running in small towns, residents are left with mostly shops, eateries or in some case a small school and clinic that is hiring at a regular basis. A respondent from Högsby recollected her struggles in these words.

“I lived in Ruda for two years. The closest town with any (possibility of) a job was Högsby but there was no bus service on the weekends. I had no money to pay for driving lessons or buying a car. Then one day I found out that they need someone for the job of ironing nurses’ uniforms in Högsby vårdcentralen (health clinic). I looked so much to find a room in Högsby but nothing happened.”

Women expressed feeling depressed and lonely in the quiet countryside, especially in the winters when it gets dark. This lowered their morale and motivation for finding a good future in Sweden.

“I went to Högsby every day for SFI and wasted a lot of time because when I came back from school, there was no one to talk to in Swedish. I also had to pay 600 Kr a month for the bus card.”

A few respondents expressed their preference of a small town over bigger city. They expressed that small towns usually have retired Swedish people who are old and like to speak Swedish rather than English. They have a lot of time to spare and are an excellent resource to
practice Swedish and understand the Swedish culture from within. They feel that small towns can work as a perfect springboard that can prepare immigrants until they are ready for the challenges of bigger cities.

5.1.8 The Role of Arbetsförmedlingen

The role of the government employment agency was brought up with mixed experiences. There were respondents who appreciated the much need guidance of the agency in their early days in Sweden, when they couldn’t even read the forms and brochures written in Swedish. Some respondents stated it be not perfect, but still better than nothing. A respondent recalled her first working experience in Sweden many years back.

“My handläggare (adviser) at arbetförmedlingen emailed me some links about the position of a substitute teacher in a school that did not require licensing. It was only for one week and a half but I got money for that. And also the children like me very much, and I liked them.”

Several respondents stated bad experiences with the agency, saying that it has failed them. According to them, they didn’t find any real help that could take them in the direction of a real job. They were offered internships through arbetsförmedlingen programs that were either irrelevant in the long run or they never developed into anything significant.

“Empty promises! They only want to save their own jobs. They have nothing for us but just wasting our time in stupid things so that they can write in their monthly report that they have helped us.”

Respondents further expressed that they had to wait in long queues to meet the handläggare on the two days a week when she was available.

“I can’t express my problems when there is a line of 40 people outside the door waiting for you to finish your business and get out.”
5.1.9 Attitude

One aspect that stood out very strongly in all the interviews was the significance of immigrant women’s attitude towards their economic autonomy and their understanding of economic independence. They all agreed to the fact that the mindset of immigrant women is a significant factor which leads them through their journey towards economic integration in Sweden. A respondent from Poland said, elaborating on this issue,

“Those immigrant women who believe that employment is their ticket to choice make sure that they find this ticket.”

Expanding on their understanding of the concept of economic independence, most respondents linked employment with freedom rather than money. They were generally in agreement that an economically independent woman is someone who makes informed choices about important decisions like which products to consume, which places to visit, who to live with, where to live and for how long. Economic independence, as they perceive it, is to be able to use money as a means to freedom to make these choices. The amount of money doesn’t matter, so long as it gives access to choices in life. A woman from Kosovo expressed the attitude of free riding to be a limiting factor in the employability of immigrant women in Sweden.

“I have learnt that the only thing that Swedes hate in the society is free-riding. Free riding is not a preferred option in Sweden, in a relationship, at work, in schools or in politics. In Sweden every person, man or woman earns and is taxed as an individual, gets benefits as an individual. When he falls sick, the government helps him as an individual. It’s an individualistic society where every individual funds himself. It’s the price we pay for emancipation.”

A respondent from Germany experienced immigrant women to be so touchy and sensitive about discrimination that they sometimes mix it with other phenomenon.
“Swedish women are very independent and there’s a stigma attached to being unemployed. This is sometimes mistaken by immigrants as discrimination and exclusion in the Swedish society. This is not (discrimination or exclusion).

Reflecting on the shift of immigration dynamics in Sweden, an immigrant from Germany, compared today’s Sweden with the time when she was looking for employment 20 years ago.

Today the street life in Sweden is very different (compared to 20 years ago). You see a lot of immigrants around you today, at work places, at schools and universities and at the train stations. These are the people who are pulling their own weight proving that immigrants can be a part of the host country’s economy, if they are committed to pulling their own weight.

While most respondents agreed on the role of attitude of immigrant women towards economic independence, some had a different perspective focusing on the role of luck along with the other factors. They stressed on the fact that only opportunities and systematic planning does not guarantee employment. A woman from Kosovo recounted her experience of getting her first real job.

“I was at the right place at the right time. The hair salon needed someone badly and I was knocking at their door every day. They decided to give me a try and I worked on 7-8 clients in a single day because I have worked like this for 20 years in Kosovo. Then I received a job offer from another salon and had to choose. I have been lucky, I must say.”

Most respondents struggling with permanent employment in Sweden had a slightly different understanding of economic independence compared to the employed group. The former group perceived employment as a means to contribute to the family and play a part in bringing money home. They perceived money as a means to pay the bills and enjoy life with dignity. One respondent from Syria talked about her husband who is handicapped and cannot work.

“Finding a job for me is important because I show my husband that I can take care of him and the family. The happiest day of the month for me is when I show him my little paycheck and we have tea with sweets in our kitchen as a little celebration.”
Responses of the employed group of women had more emphasis on the aspect of freedom and independence that is linked with earning money. They consider employment as a means to penetrate the Swedish society by experiencing the laws, unspoken rules, norms and culture that govern the work environment in Sweden. They expressed how being employed made them more confident in every aspect of their life in Sweden. A woman from Nigeria expressed how much the Swedish corporate culture helped her understand Sweden as a society.

_During the first week at work, I was a bit curious about the big boss and why he never mingles with us (junior staff). It was in the second week that I discovered that the man working with us all the time is the boss himself. No suit, no tie, no stiff neck, no king’s attitude. My neighbor told me that evening that bosses don’t brag their bossiness at work places in Sweden. Another respondent from Syria expressed that_.

“When I came from Syria, I felt trapped in a cage, eating crumbs that the Swedish government was feeding me. I hated myself every day and even thought about going back to my Syria, instead of living on Swedish crumbs. Then, my job in Sweden made me feel my wings. Every time I pay the tax, I feel my wings.”

**Discrimination**

No evidence of discrimination on the basis of gender was expressed by the respondents. On the subject, one respondent from Iraq expressed satisfaction on the fact that she doesn’t have to worry about being a woman in the Swedish labor market.

“I see on the streets of Sweden that women are driving buses. I saw two smart girls with golden hair doing the job of keeping discipline in the train in Stockholm, and this means women can get tough jobs too. So good.”

One respondent from Nigeria shared that opinion regarding discrimination on the basis of country of origin. In her opinion, her thick accent and a foreign-sounding name on the CV substantially lowers her chances to find a job.
“We discuss this a lot because many of us have this problem. No Andersson or Petersson or Johansson (Swedish Surnames) on the CV. They (employers) say that they don’t care about the nationality but I don’t think that is true. They say this just to keep their jobs safe, otherwise we can call them racist.”

The main findings of the study can be summarized as follows.

- Social and human capital play a significant role in the employability of immigrant women in Sweden.

- Women find themselves trapped in two vicious cycles that negatively influence their employability. These cycles are
  
  No Job → no money → no driver’s licence → job
  
  No Job → no money → small city → job.

- Government institutions such as arbetsförmedlingen and SFI are significant in the employment journey of the immigrant women.

- Gender does not play a significant role in the employability of immigrant women in the Swedish job market. Immigrant women find Sweden’s gender equal workplaces encouraging.

- Some similar experiences are perceived differently by employed and unemployed women, indicating that a positive “attitude” or “frame of mind” can contribute positively to the employability of immigrant women.
6. Analysis

A detailed Analysis of the findings is presented in this section, conceptualizing the knowledge about employment integration from the perspective of immigrant women in Sweden. Findings are connected back to the research questions and the literature reviewed in chapter 4, establishing the contribution this study has made to the existing literature on the topic.

An Overview of the Analysis

Human Capital
- Language
- Education and Skills

Social capital
- Networks and groups
- Social and Professional contacts

Two vicious cycles
- No job-no money-no licence-no job
- No job-small town with no opportunities-no money to move to bigger town

Fig C: This figure is the graphical representation of the overview of analysis section

The empirical data obtained during this study suggest that employment integration of immigrant women in Sweden needs to be improved. In order to improve the current system for immigrant women, it is important to establish a clear understanding of the needs and
interests of immigrant women in the Swedish job market, by documenting and analyzing their own point of view regarding the influencing factors and processes in their employment journey.

6.1 Human capital

6.1.1 Language

Women from different countries immigrate to Sweden for a variety of reasons but they all have similar goals in mind, one of them being able to earn in their new country. Be it a job or entrepreneurship, immigrant women experience difficulty in penetrating the job market in Sweden, owing to numerous formal, cultural and social obstacles. The findings of this study reveal that employability of immigrant women can be increased by investing in their social and human capital.

Human and social capital is linked to each other in a complex way such that one benefits from the other. (OECD, Human capital, 2007). For example, Thomas Clark (2006) connects language to social capital by stating that social capital is the productive values of relationships between people hence all communication systems, including language is a form of social capital.

The important relationship between linguistics and political economy was established many decades ago, according to Thomas Clark (2006) who states that “Language is power (Malinowski 1934) and grammar is ideology (Voloshinov 1973).” This study finds that women express that the SFI classes are not effective due to a heterogeneous student body within levels. Although scholars agree that students learn from each other in a mixed-ability language class and it can be a tool to practice tolerance and respect for others, it is important to note the difference between mixed-ability and heterogeneous classrooms. Every class that has more than one student is a mixed-ability class in the sense that every person is at a different language level in a real life context. Heterogeneous, on the other hand is a class where students vary in background, interests, age, gender, personality, motivation, cognitive ability and learning styles. New knowledge should connect to prior knowledge, in order for the student to make sense of it. It is therefore challenging for the teacher of a heterogeneous
class to cater to the varying levels of ability of the students, causing frustration for not only the teacher but also the students at the both upper and lower level.

Looking at this situation through the lens of frustration-gap theory, we see that this system makes immigrants feel the gap between their highest achievement and their goals, causing frustration. The findings of this study strengthen the anthropological research of McEvoy (2016) that was reviewed in chapter 2, recording a negative impact of one-size-fits-all strategy of language education for immigrants in Sweden.

Another issue with language acquisition identified by the respondents was the gap between classroom and real-life language skills. Kevin Butler (2009) urges the need for language lessons to be more communicative, participatory and connected to the real world rather than just learning vocabulary from the whiteboard, in isolation from the reality of street language used in everyday life in Sweden.

These findings of this study not only identify this problem, but also shed some light on the solutions as perceived by the immigrant women. Those respondents who managed to successfully cross this barrier stated the proactive use of modern technology to supplement their classroom learning to be an effective strategy. Respondents reported that they learned Swedish faster and more effectively once they stopped relying on SFI lessons alone. Analyzing this empirical finding in the light of cognitive evaluation theory, we see that immigrants who are entitled to the government introduction plan are paid a salary for the amount of hours they spend in the language school every day. This salary acts as an extrinsic motivator for the immigrants. This points out the fact that women who study over and beyond those ‘paid hours’ are intrinsically motivated. The finding that the immigrant women who have successfully penetrated the Swedish job market were intrinsically motivated implies that they engaged in the activity of language learning to obtain outcomes that were more than just learning the language. Intrinsically motivated immigrants go in the classroom with a higher goal in their minds, i.e. to increase their employability. This higher goal makes them proactively learn beyond the requirements of the language class.
In the light of the empirical evidence of this study, the extrinsic motivation or the ‘reward’ for studying SFI is perceived by the respondents to be controlled by the kommun, which significantly reduced their intrinsic motivation. As mentioned in the findings section respondents perceived this ‘reward’ as Swedish crumbs constantly reminding them that they cannot pull their own weight in the Swedish economy.

6.1.2 Education and skill
The job market experiences of immigrant women in Sweden indicate education as being one of the biggest factors influencing their employability. The literature reviewed in section 2 states statistics indicating higher success rates for immigrants with higher education. One of the strategies expressed by successfully integrated immigrants was to equip themselves with the relevant education in order to pave the path towards their professional career in Sweden.

These findings strengthen the significance of human capital for effective job market penetration. Women expressed gaining relevant education as a time consuming and expensive path to economic integration. However, studies suggest that it is an investment worth making.

This investment of time and money in a person’s human capital makes him/her more productive, resulting in future benefits in terms of more productivity, employment, higher wages as well as non-monetary benefits, both to the individual and the society. (Mulongo 2012).

In theory, this has been explained by the work of many classical as well as contemporary authors. “A man educated at the expense of much labor and time may be compared to one of those expensive machines… and the work he learns to perform should replace to him the whole expense of his education” Adam Smith (1776). Alfred Marshall (1890) confirmed this argument by equating industrial training to a national investment. Mincer (1958), Schultz (1961) and Backer (1975) argued that spending time and money on gaining education is every penny worth it as it builds human capital and the RoR (rate of return) of such an investment can be calculated in the same way as it is calculated on any physical investment.
At a micro level of economic growth and development, we can find significant research on the fact that individuals bare the cost of education, expecting future benefits from this investment. For example, a study “Human capital and rates of return” by Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004) states that educational quality has a strong impact on individual earnings as well as economic growth. Psacharopoulos (2004) suggests that more schooling is associated with higher individual earnings.

In the context of immigrant women in Sweden, the findings of this study therefore strengthen the statement that the better educated the group, the better the chances of employment.

Apart from direct employment, education benefits immigrants in other ways too. It empowers them to save themselves from being exploited and to advance their interests in their daily lives as well as professional lives. Educated people are more aware and hence more likely to take informed decisions about their salaries, terms, job responsibilities and other details of employment. When immigrants move to their new country, they need education to be aware of the culture, history and most importantly, the legal as well as social laws that govern the country. Education is the tool that equips them with the valuable knowledge of their responsibilities and rights in that state. The choices they make about their health, lifestyle, family and employment are all positively affected by the level of education they acquire. As presented in the findings section, respondents have expressed the significance of *freedom of choice* in their lives.

Looking at the bigger picture, immigrants who decide to invest in their education contribute not only to their personal growth and penetration in the job market but also to the society at large. Mulongo (2012) quotes Vila (2000) stating that social groups, communities or countries with a higher average education, offer better living conditions compared to those with a less educated population.

Respondents also associated language skills and education with self-confidence. They felt more secure, better informed and better equipped with the tools of their trade. This finding is significant as it indicated that education effects the way immigrant women value their worth in the Swedish society, by giving them a positive orientation towards themselves, or in other
words, increasing their *self-esteem*. The concept of self-esteem can be defined and measured in many different ways but in the context of this study, Rosenberg’s simple definition can be considered which describes it as “a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the self (Rosenberg 1965:15). This brings us back to the questions posed at the beginning of the findings section, about the need of better understanding of the processes going on in the minds of immigrant women as they go through their employment journey in the Swedish labor market.

Role of Human capital in a nutshell

Aim of this research was to better understand the underlying processes and factors influencing immigrant women’s employability in Sweden. Findings of this research regarding the language, education and skills of the immigrants, strengthen the argument presented in the literature reviewed in section 3, stating that human capital positively influences the employability of immigrant women in the contemporary Swedish labor market.

This study also indicates an insight into a number of effective strategies that the successfully integrated women perceived to be effective for gaining human capital in Sweden.
6.2 Social capital

6.2.1 Networks and contacts

This research is aimed at better understanding the underlying processes and factors that are causing low employment rates in immigrant women in Sweden. The study finds that social capital, among other factors, is essential for increasing employability. This indicates that immigrant women in Sweden can benefit from indulging in activities that can increase their social capital, by being an active member of the society, joining social and professional groups, meeting people and getting involved in social activities with an aim to increase their employability through social contacts and networks.

Respondents have expressed feelings of loneliness and depression owing to a lack of people to socialize with, in small towns and the countryside (refer to finding section 5.1.7), leading to isolation. This study reveals that immigrants who do not get a chance to experience a vibrant exchange of culture in the form of language, food, and traditions, folklore etc. experience low employability as compared to those who manage to accumulate a high level of social capital over time.

The concept of social capital has evolved over time and literature defines it in several different ways (Radhika, 2012, Ayios et al 2014 & Bankston, 2014). However, scholars largely agree that social capital and the resources located within can prove to be useful for its members (Stanley et al 2012, Enfield, 2008). Social capital can be located on horizontal or vertical axes, depending on the closeness in the relationships. This concept can be further explained by looking at the three prominent forms of social capital; bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital refers to the relationship between close friends and family. In the context of this study, this refers to the findings section 5.1.3 and 5.1.5 where respondents expressed finding new paths through developing social connections and networking.

Bridging, almost horizontal to bonding, is the contact between people who are not exactly close friends or family, but are roughly equal in economic and social status for example colleagues or casual friendships developed at SFI or through internship/workplace. This form of social connectivity has been identified in the literature as positively contributing to the
development of trust among economic agents (Sabatini, 2009). The respondents of this study expressed the isolation they experienced in the absence of these bonds and links, indicating that the trust created through social bridges can be of paramount significance in the employment journey of Swedish immigrant women.

*Linking*, on the other hand is the social capital that exists between individuals, groups of people, networks or communities that are not equal in social and economic status. It links people from different social niches for example local governments (kommun) and immigrant women.

Many activities that immigrants indulge in can help them gain social capital in Sweden. Sweden has numerous associations where volunteer work is welcomed, for instance the Red Cross, United Nations Association and Human Bridge, just to name a few. Leisure time clubs are available round the year for example knitting club, language club, football club, cooking club etc. ‘Palladium’ in Växjö offers culture nights and language café as an effective mingling activity, giving an opportunity for mingling, sharing culture, language, food and in other words, acquiring social capital. Similarly, organizations like Panncentralen and Araby Park Arena in Växjö have activities for immigrants that range from language classes to leisure clubs, sports, travel and cultural exchange. This study finds that active involvement in such community based activities is an effective way of increasing social capital which results in an increase in employability.

Self-employment was also found to be a prominent theme in the data and the study suggests that social capital can play a part in the setting up of a new business or taking an entrepreneurial initiative. Literature points out that social capital may allow people to leverage on resources such as information and/or influence over the host country’s labor market (Aguilera & Massey, 2003). Referring to the findings section 5.1.4, respondents expressed their frustration on the difficult Swedish taxation and auditing system which made them fearful of opening their own business, and paying heavy fines in case of even a minor mistake in the complicated calculation system. Using their social capital, immigrant women can have access to information, knowledge, and guidance from their contacts that have the influence or experience of setting up their own business in Sweden.
Social contacts contribute to the immigrants’ social capital in the new country. Being a part of a network can open up new possibilities for immigrant women, as the networks are embedded with valuable resources such as money, power or influence in the society or community women in Sweden. Looking back at the findings of this study, a clear indication of the importance of horizontal bonding can be seen through the experiences of the immigrant women.

As discussed in literature review section 3, social capital is linked to economic success, establishing that cooperation through personal networks is a profitable activity that enables individuals to share valuable and otherwise restricted information and services (Herreros, 2004). Therefore, like all forms of capital that generate benefit with time, social capital can be considered as an asset that immigrants develop and increase over time.

Those women in particular, who have managed to penetrate the Swedish labor market have expressed that being socially active with a purpose of making beneficial contacts has helped them find their way through their employment journey.

Role of Social capital in a nutshell

Research question of this study aims at finding the factors that influence employability of immigrant women in Sweden and strategies to increase their employability. This study indicates the positive significance of social capital in the form of contacts, friends, online networks and groups made through platforms such as SFI, fritids (hobby) groups, internship/workplace etc., in increasing employability.

The findings of this study strengthen the argument that building social and professional contacts and networks in the host country gives immigrant women an access to resources that can prove to be helpful in her employment journey in Sweden. The indirect effect of social capital on employability is socio-cultural assimilation that leads to an increased employability.
6.2 Identification of two vicious cycles

Looking at the empirical data, two situations can be identified, in which the women feel trapped in a sequence of reciprocal cause and effect. These vicious cycles seem to significantly reduce their employability, by preventing them from achieving the social and human capital required to penetrate the Swedish job market.

Vicious cycle 1:

![Diagram of vicious cycle 1]

Figure C1- This figure represents the vicious cycle that immigrant women perceive to be trapped in, on their employment journey in Sweden

This refers to a situation where women require a job to make money, but to get that job they need a driver’s licence and to get that driver’s licence, they require money which brings them back to square one and the vicious cycle continues.
Respondents have expressed that most jobs that they come across require a B-Körkort (licence to drive a car in Sweden). Not only is the process to learn driving and getting licensed expensive and time-consuming, but also requires patience and courage. This low comfortability level can be explained considering the fact that sometimes women come from countries where driving is not encouraged for women, and in case of Saudi Arabia, not allowed at all. Difference in left and right hand rule of the traffic system can also be a limiting factor in some cases.

Respondents have expressed frustration which comes as a result of this situation where valuable time and energy is lost. They argue that when they don’t have a job, how can they possibly come up with money to buy a car or acquire a licence? The situation becomes even more complicated for women living in areas that are far away from their potential work places and sometimes long commuting is not affordable for them in terms of time and money involved.

**Vicious cycle 2:**

![Figure C2- This figure represents the vicious cycle that immigrant women perceive to be trapped in, on their employment journey in Sweden](image)
Similarly, another cycle that limits the employment chances of immigrant women is the size of the city. In order to find more opportunities to work and more people to mingle with, immigrants expressed the need to live in a bigger and busier city. In order to live in a bigger city, they require housing and money. In order to find housing and money, they require a job, bringing them back to square one.

**Breaking the vicious cycles:**

Those respondents who managed to break these vicious cycles and penetrate the job market successfully reported taking big risks and approaching this situation with a proactive attitude. ‘Big risks’ were described by the respondents as moving to a bigger city despite financial constraints or job offer. As mentioned in the comment of the respondent from Kosovo, in findings section, knocking doors and meeting potential employers personally, turned out to be an effective strategy in the employment journey. This strategy helped her increase the chances of finding a job by making relevant social contacts and also by presenting herself to the potential employers as a motivated candidate in the job market.

Respondents agreed that learning the language and acquiring relevant education and skills were important steps they took to reach their goal. However, taking these steps becomes easy when you socialize with people. It is very difficult to penetrate the job market in isolation. Respondents have expressed that sending online applications by the dozen has not been a successful strategy. Instead, they rated the strategy of making personal phone calls and presenting themselves as available candidates in the market through relevant contacts and networks has proved to be fruitful in increasing employability.

Applying the concepts of motivation and frustration, it can be seen here that women often struggle to gain the social and human capital in their new country. In this struggle, they often find themselves stuck in a helpless situation without an exit door. This prevention of progress and success can sometimes cause frustration. Frustration and motivation in a work structure are linked. Motivation cycle can be defined as a process beginning with a need, followed by a response which is directed towards a goal. Sometimes in life, there are barriers around the
goal blocking it, causing frustration. The strength of this frustration depends largely on the magnitude of the need. The person may respond by adapting to an acceptable substitute goal, or may continue trying to cross barriers, ending in frustration. (Nitisha, 2015)

In the context of this study, we can see that the ‘need’ of an immigrant woman is Economic independence. The ‘goal’ to meet this need is employment. And the ‘barriers’ that block this goal may be among others, housing, licence, money, language and so on. This can be explained in the form of the following diagram.

![Diagram of need, barriers and goal of immigrant women in employment journey](image)

**Figure D:** This figure is a representation of the need, barriers and goal of immigrant women in their employment journey
Vicious cycles in a nutshell

Keeping in view the aim of this research, it can be seen that certain situations trap immigrant women causing frustration and hence, seriously hampering their employability in the Swedish labor market.

Strategies to break out of these situations include taking big risks, leaving the comfort zone, adopting a proactive attitude, acquiring social capital like contacts and networks and human capital such as language, education and license.

6.3 Comparison of varying patterns in perceptions

It is interesting to note that some similar experiences are perceived differently by the employed and unemployed groups of women, pointing out that certain factors that are perceived as barriers by some women might be perceived as stepping stones by the others, depending on their experiences, attitude, beliefs, identity and the perception of reality.

As presented in the findings section, size of the city was perceived as a major issue for those who were struggling to find work. A majority of the respondents had had the experience of living in smaller towns or the outskirts of the city. An underlying pattern was noted in the responses of the unemployed women, who with some exceptions, considered handicapped by living in a small town with a slow pace of life and limited opportunities to work.

On the other hand, several respondents, who were employed at the time of the interview, recalled their experience in a small town as a preparatory ground, which gave them the
much-needed time to immerse in the Swedish culture at their own pace, without feeling the pressures of fitting-in. They reported that being in a small town gave them the chance to speak with the elderly, retired Swedes in the äldreboende (homes for elderly people), where it is quite easy to find temporary work. This gave them the confidence to face the challenges of the fast-paced and expensive life style of bigger cities.

Similarly, a difference of opinion on the experiences of the two groups regarding language learning process was also noted. The employed group of women considered language as a short-cut to the Swedish job market and approached this challenge in a pro-active way. They were intrinsically motivated by the prospects of finding a good job by acquiring good language skills. They used various strategies, as mentioned in the findings section 5., to learn the language speedily and effectively instead of depending only on SFI. One of the respondents from Kosovo who managed to learn the basics of language within 7 months of coming to Sweden, reported that she managed to convince her employer that she although she is not yet perfect in her language skills at the moment but she is committed to the profession and is confident that she will learn it fast. Another respondent equated her language learning journey to a fulfilling experience that gave her self-confidence and a sense of achievement.

On the other hand, a pattern of disappointment and frustration was identified in the experiences of most of the respondents who were unemployed at the time of the interview. They considered learning Swedish an unnecessary roadblock for immigrants especially in a country where so many people speak English. They reported their language learning journey as tiresome and at times frustrating.
Comparison of varying patterns in a nutshell

The research question that this study wants to answers is to identify factors that influence the employability of the immigrant women in Sweden. Identification of differences in the perceptions of employed and unemployed groups of women give us an insight into the thought process of these women and helps us better understand the context of their behavior in the job market.

Some factors like small towns and language acquisition were perceived as limiting factors for employability by some respondents. The same factors were perceived as opportunities and stepping stones by the others. This difference in the perceptions indicates that experiences can affect immigrant women differently, depending on how they perceive them.

7. Conclusion

As human beings, we behave in ways that cannot be explained by a set of laws and rules. We all come with a unique set of perceptions, experiences and observations and this makes studying humans a complex yet fascinating subject. Studying vulnerable groups like women and immigrants, is challenging as well as rewarding as it brings forth new knowledge that attempts to bring us closer to a better understand of the processes that influence their lives.

With this understanding at its core, this study was conducted to fill a gap in the existing literature by bringing to life, the voices of immigrant women and better understand the processes and factors that influence their employability in the Swedish labor market.

Integration is a complex process; economic integration, even more so. This study has identified the factors and processes influencing the employability of immigrant women. This
knowledge can contribute to the existing literature on this topic, by offering an insight to the immigrant women’s perception of the situation. This angle is important for the research in this area because immigrant women are the biggest stakeholders in this situation and any analysis without the inclusion of their own voice is incomplete.

Keeping in view the empirical evidence collected in the field as well as the historical context of the situation of the Swedish job market, the study has the following conclusions.

1. Immigrant women face multiple challenges in their employment journey in Sweden. Some of the challenges identified were language barrier, previous education, driver’s license, relevant skill set, housing, size of the city and isolation. A variation in the perceptions of employed and unemployed women was also noted, pointing at the role of attitude in penetrating the labor market.

2. Language learning was experienced as a difficult process by most respondents. Those who managed to cross this barrier shared the successful strategies they used. Some successful strategies included using technology such as smart phones, apps, iPad etc. to learn the language through online courses available for free, labeling household items such as table, chairs, coffee machine, curtains etc., training their ear by listening to Swedish radio with different dialects, reading small storybooks with pictures, reading road signs and posters on the bus station and immersing themselves in the language by trying to mingle with the natives in natural, real life situations.

3. Immigrant women often get stuck in vicious cycles which can cause frustration and hence a negative influence in their employability. These vicious cycles can be broken with the help of gaining social capital and with time, human capital. More employment-centric role of government organizations such as the local government, employment agency, migration agency and housing agency can be beneficial in helping the immigrant women through their employment journey in Sweden.
4. Different forms of capital such as social and human capital were identified as important factors influencing the employability of immigrant women. Women who managed to successfully penetrate the Swedish job market reported strategically building social and human capital in Sweden by applying various strategies like learning the language, gaining relevant education and building social contacts and networks through an active participation in social and professional activities.

Therefore, the answer to the research question can be presented as follows.

There are many factors that directly or indirectly influence the employability of immigrant women in Sweden. These factors include human capital such as language, education, skills, license etc. and social capital such as groups, networks and contacts. Government institutions and policy play an important role in the economic integration of immigrants. A more effective role of institutions like arbetsförmedlingen, migrationsverket and adult education programs like SFI can be helpful in solving the low employability problem of immigrant women in the Swedish labor market. Moreover, immigrants who approach the situation with a proactive attitude and stay motivated perceive many barriers are stepping stones and hence make themselves more employable in the Swedish labor market.
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Annex

Interview Guide

Checklist

- Explain the purpose of interview.
- Explain why she has been selected.
- Inform about the duration of the interview.
- Information about confidentiality.
- Information about the recording device.
- Get informed consent form signed.
- Conduct the interview
- Summarize key data after the interview and verify for accuracy.

Background and Personal Information

Name: ____________________________________________________
Age: ______________________________________________________
Country of origin: __________________________________________
Marital Status: _____________________________________________
Education: _________________________________________________
Swedish language ability: _____________________
Preferred language for the interview: _________________________
Years in Sweden: __________________________________________
Employment Status: _________________________________________
Years being employed: _______________________________________

Theme 1: Factors affecting employability

1- Let’s talk about your career expectations, apprehensions and plans when you decided to move to Sweden. To what extent do you think those expectations were met?
2- What would you consider to be the most challenging aspect(s) of finding work in Sweden? Please explain
3- What plans, tools or strategies did you apply in order to increase your chances of employment?
4- Would you say that you have a lot of friends in Sweden? In what ways does that help you in your employment journey?
5- How did you make friends and contacts in Sweden?
6- What worked well? What didn’t work so well? Please elaborate.
7- What would you do differently, if you could go back in time?
8- In what ways did the government institutions like SFI or arbetsförmedlingen helped you in your employment journey?
9- What motivates you to keep struggling for your dream job? What frustrates you in your employment journey? In what way?
10- What advice would you give to those who are struggling to find employment in Sweden?

**Theme 2: increasing the employability**

11- How would you describe an economically well-integrated immigrant woman in Sweden?
12- Do you consider yourself to be well-integrated in the Swedish society? Elaborate?
13- What strategies did you use to find a job? What worked and what did not?
14- Do you feel being a woman is a problem in the Swedish labor market? Please elaborate
15- How do you evaluate the option of self-employment in Sweden?

- Is there anything you’d like to add to this conversation?