

# **Four Immigrants' Views on How to Succeed in Getting Access to the Swedish Labour Market A Qualitative Study**

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## Preface

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## Summary

The aim of this study is to try to find some factor that perhaps could contribute to the facilitation of immigrants' inclusion of society. My understanding of adult life, influenced by values of Swedish society, means having access to work and education on equal conditions. I am interested in finding out the immigrant's own opinions about his/her learning in Sweden improving the prerequisites to get a job and how he/she managed to get employment. This study is small, interviewing four employed immigrants living in Sweden, but I am intending trying to generate some contributory factor about the immigrant's possibility getting access to the Swedish labour market.

This is a qualitative investigation trying to get four interviewees to tell me about their experiences. Analysing the individuals' stories, I am using the socio cultural theory as a background of my interpretations. This perspective stresses the language and its impact on our lives. Language is seen as a mediating tool and a tool to express how we interpret the world.

My conclusions are that networks seem to be a decisive factor getting employment. Strengths of personality is another key factor comprising different elements like being goal-oriented, reliable, positive, industrious and imaginative. However, I also find chance as an unpredictable factor to be taken into account. Mastering Swedish, an often discussed employability factor, does not seem to be the main factor in my study getting employment, but to know Swedish in order to introduce oneself and one's capabilities is said to be important. The demands differ and to use language as a mean to discriminate cannot be excluded.

Increasing the number of work practices could improve the possibilities for immigrants getting a job, an offer concerning learning in practice both considering language and society and besides, an opportunity to networking. It could also be an opportunity to show one's capabilities besides language skills. In the long run, this could strengthen the individuals and their self-esteem without putting their ability in Swedish in the foreground.

The participants of my study have told me about their experiences getting employment and learning Swedish. Since then conditions are likely to have become different. Societies change in a speed faster than ever (Castles, 2000, 2003; Friedman, 2000; Giddens, 2000) and Sweden is not an exception (Broomé et al., 2001). Different kinds of initiatives have been tried out to integrate immigrants in Swedish society and institutions learning Swedish for immigrants cooperate with municipal employment offices (the Swedish National Agency for Education. Vuxenutbildning). These activities could possibly be improved by using some kind of incentive making employers attracted to make an effort enhancing the number of jobs and work practice. Welcoming newcomers to their company and contracting trainees involves extra work and responsibility.

Finally, my overall understanding of the development of Swedish society is that everyone has to contribute to the facilitation of immigrants' inclusion. One contribution could perhaps be to continue investigating the possibilities finding more examples of opportunities for immigrants to use their strengths and skills.

## 1. Introduction

Due to the fact that about 12% of Sweden's 9 million inhabitants (Statistics Sweden, 2003) were born abroad, Swedish society is today "characterized by cultural and ethnic diversity" and "new, complex and social issues have emerged" (the Swedish Ministry of Interior, 1999). Research on ethnic diversity and integration has become important areas. Nations are affected by global change in a speed that we have never experienced before (Castles, 2000, 2003; Friedman, 2000; Giddens, 2000) and there are relationships between social, economic and political change that affect the individual's life conditions (Castles, 2000, 2003; Friedman, 2000; Giddens, 2000; Selby & Pike, 2000).

Sweden like other Western communities is experiencing changes of demography (Broomé et al., 2001; Castles, 2003). There are concerns about the fact that in fifteen years many people will retire and it will be difficult to fill the employment gaps (the Swedish Institute for Futures Studies, 2000 - 2004; Broomé et al., 2001). Broomé et al.(2001) point out that during the period from 2005 until 2015 it is estimated that the number of retired people will increase with about 35,000 persons a year. The figures should be compared to the period from 1995 until 2000 with a decrease of 4,000 individuals above the age of 65 years. These changes and transitions of society are challenging our ideas of what we need to know and what we need to learn.

Issues concerning languages are a great interest of mine, teaching English at Komvux Lärcentrum, the municipal learning centre for adults, in Lilla Edet. My community has been centred around the pulp and paper industry since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1960s and the 1970s many people came from Finland and some years later from the former Yugoslavia. At the end of the 1980s Chileans arrived and today people are coming from all over the world with different educational and professional experiences. Broomé et al. (2001) state that people with foreign backgrounds have much more difficulties in getting employment compared to Swedes. Such conditions lead to exclusion from society which in turn leads to polarisation using concepts like "we" and "they" (Broomé et al. 2001). Instead of thinking along these lines we could appreciate everyone and everyone's abilities in working towards a common goal – to maintain welfare for all in Swedish society. *In my study I am trying to find some factor that perhaps could contribute to the facilitation of immigrants' inclusion in society or at least confirm conditions found by researchers in earlier studies.*

In the following part of my report before introducing literature reviewed on issues related to ethnic diversity I am highlighting some topics. These topics might be helpful to better understand the aspects discussed in the review about immigrants' opportunities to get access to the Swedish labour market and to be included in Swedish society. Firstly, I am introducing the theoretical framework of my study.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Theoretical framework**

As an epistemological foundation of my study I am using the socio cultural theory advocated by scholars like Leo Vygotsky (Vygotsky Archive). “Vygotsky (1978) asserted that skills have a social systematic nature and hence cannot be divorced from the context in which they are learned” (Brown et al., 2001:226).

The perspective focuses on the learner’s individual activities interacting with others when constructing his/her understanding of the world. Wenger (1998), a socio cultural theorist himself, claims that “for learning in practice to be possible, an experience of meaning must be in interaction with a regime of competence” (Wenger, 1998:138). Language is seen as a mediating tool and crucial to the individual’s understanding of life making it possible for interaction to take place. Wenger (1998) states that “Learning is caught in the middle. It is the vehicle for the evolution of practices and the inclusion of newcomers” (Wenger, 1998:13).

Hence, learning takes place in meaningful contexts when people interact in so-called learning communities such as institutions, at work and in social life (Engestrom et al. 1999; Wenger, 1998). The possibility of being acknowledged and included in a learning community is linked to recognition, “mirror images of each other” (Wenger, 1998:149). In other words, what we notice about each other are familiarities that we like or dislike. We accept or reject. “In our communities of practice we come together not only to engage in pursuing some enterprise but also to figure out how our engagement fits in the broader scheme of things. Identity in practice is therefore always an interplay between the local and the global” (Wenger, 1998:162). What characterizes “membership in a community” (Wenger, 1998:73) is “mutual engagement” (Wenger, 1998:73) which includes being immersed by everything connected to the enterprise. Other important concepts underlined by social theorists are collaboration and support. “... learning depends on our ability to contribute to the collective production of meaning because it is by this process that experience and competence pull each other” (Wenger, 1998:203). A sense of imagination is maintained to be a vital element both for our understanding of identity and for understanding learning.

### **2.2 The concept “being an immigrant“**

In their official report Eriksson et al. (2003) state that the concept of being an immigrant is diverse and used with different meanings by individuals, in the media and in policy documents. Three groups of persons are identified as being frequently referred to as immigrants:

1. everyone born abroad
2. everyone born abroad, but now having become native
3. everyone born in Sweden with at least one parent born abroad

The only thing these groups have in common is that they are not related in full to Swedish born individuals. There is a risk that using “immigrants” as a concept in research can lead to stereotypes and preservation of the concept, Eriksson et al. (2003) claim, since different persons interpret the concept in different ways. People from other countries can be characterized in a way they do not recognize themselves or take exception to. Essed (1996) points out that “prejudice concerns not only false generalizations about ethnic groups, but rigid generalizations as well” (Essed, 1996:12).

### **2.3 Racism and considered being “the Other”**

“Racism towards certain groups is to be found in virtually all immigration countries” (Castles & Miller, 2003:35). Essed (1996) claims that “professionals can learn by everyday racism by study, by reading about the subject, or by talking with , and in particular listening to the experiences of , neighbors, colleagues, or acquaintances of color” (Essed, 1996:32). Some reasons for racism and discrimination are ignorance and the lack of contact between native-born and immigrants (Eriksson et al. 2003). The roots of the interpretations of “race” can be traced to the nineteenth century, when biologists and anthropologists defined different “race categories” (Essed, 1996:7) and Europeans were considered being the “super race” (Essed, 1996:7) in contrast to “the stock of lesser quality, the ‘others’ ”(Essed, 1996:7).

Today racism is an often discussed topic but people tend to reject this condition thinking of clear and open actions. Essed (1996) maintains that this circumstance makes it easier for racism to prevail, since hidden forms of racism are neglected. “People can explain very well that racism is ‘wrong’, but when you ask what racism *is*, they will be inclined to associate racism primarily with the extremes, which are easy to pinpoint, such as the ideas of white supremacies. They are far less informed about the more complex and hidden forms of everyday exclusion” (Essed, 1996:12).

### **2.4 Measures to promote equality and combat discrimination**

Knocke (2000) claims that “indications of ethnic discrimination at work in the process of labour recruitment are manifold, while empirical proof of discrimination meets with difficulties” (Knocke, 2000:372). The Swedish Government is supporting communities as well as non-governmental organizations in their work to promote equality and combat discrimination.

A special action plan is developed outlining measurements taken and the future ideas. Implementing a better understanding of how to prevent racism, xenophobia and discrimination the Swedish Government is aiming at including everyone at all levels and in all places of society. Everyone should be respected regardless of colour, ethnic or national backgrounds, beliefs or sexual disposition (the Swedish Integration Board, Sverige mot rasism).

On June 1, in 1998, the Swedish Integration Board was founded. The goal was to create “one Sweden for all” (the Swedish Integration Board, 2002) and to offer equal opportunities for all citizens including equal rights to education and working life regardless of background. However, to get access to the introductory course “Swedish for Immigrants” (SFI) immigrants need to have a residence permit, which can take a long time from having got one already before the arrival in Sweden until as much as four years and more. People claiming asylum and waiting for their residence permit are allowed to work, if their case is estimated to take more than four months and is on the waiting list (the Swedish Migration Board).

There are laws against ethnic discrimination, the latest one becoming law on the first of July, 2003. An Ombudsman is appointed by the government to supervise that these laws are followed. The meaning of discrimination is explained as “unequal treatment of comparable cases” (the Ombudsman Against Ethnic Discrimination). Indirect discrimination is also taken into account. This is explained as higher demands on more skills than necessary “to perform a job in proper manner” (the Ombudsman Against Ethnic Discrimination) without giving any motivation for such a decision. Language skills are especially highlighted in this regard. In their report Eriksson et al. (2003) analysing official Swedish integration documents state that the integration procedure is supposed by the government to be mutual in order to benefit from multicultural diversity. They also point out that the integration policy of Swedish society presupposes that everyone irrespective of background are aiming at equality, everyone’s equal value and equal possibilities and that racism should be counteracted. Referring to the latest record from the Integration Board, Eriksson et al. (2003) stress the fact that in spite of regulation of discrimination, people from other countries are treated unfairly.

In Lilla Edet, where I work, the municipal learning centre for adults organizes education for immigrants as well as for Swedish people who want to further their schooling. The municipal employment office and the adult learning centre co-operate. This means that immigrants and refugees can register at any of these municipal departments depending on their aims. Some are aiming at work in the first place. They register at the employment office. Those, who are aiming at learning Swedish register at the adult learning centre. There are continuous contacts and meetings between these departments to find solutions for integrating

immigrants in Lilla Edet. People without a residence permit can attend different kinds of locally supported projects or start working, if there is a vacant place, but the municipality does not organize Swedish studies. The Swedish Migration Board is responsible for such activities. Refugees in the community have possibilities to go to a nearby town, but like attending the introductory course “Swedish for Immigrants” this is a choice made by the individual himself/herself. People with a residence permit can study Swedish for Immigrants, mix studies and work, attend work projects or work.

## **2.5 Swedish for immigrants (SFI) and Swedish as a second language**

Everyone who does not know Swedish sufficiently, has a residence permit and is more than 16 years old has the right to learn Swedish and to learn about Swedish society for an average of 525 hours. They can attend the introductory course “Swedish for immigrants” (SFI). The municipality is responsible for the education and should offer such education no later than three months after that an individual has applied to attend such a course. From July 1, 2003, there is a new curriculum set by the Swedish Government. This curriculum makes it possible for immigrants to combine early studies in Swedish with other municipal courses for adults and also with practice at work places and ordinary work. The goal is to improve the possibilities to get a job and as soon as possible be integrated in Swedish society. Having organized the introduction course at three levels the new curriculum recognises the immigrant’s previous educational background, abilities and goals of the studies (the Swedish National Agency for Education).

Those, who have a residence permit, are twenty years old and lack basic education compared to what children and teenagers learn at the primary and secondary levels have the right to attend such education. Considering studying Swedish, immigrants can choose from attending Swedish as a second language or Swedish for native speakers (the Swedish National Agency for Education).

## **2.6 The perspective of teaching in Swedish curricula**

The prime goals of Swedish adult education are “to enable the individual to expand his or her knowledge and skills in order to promote personal development, participation in the democratic process, economic growth and employment.....adult education and training must take as its starting-point the needs and requirements of the individual and must therefore be highly flexible” (the Ministry of Education and Science). Publicly employed teachers are supposed to do their very best to meet the individual’s needs, a goal set by the Swedish National

Agency as well as local politicians. Improving personal growth is an explicit goal. In order to do so teachers should try to point out students' strengths extending their possibilities to improvements. The student is in focus and considered being able to take responsibility for his/her learning, since he/she is the only one who knows about the whole learning situation, where private life is included. Teachers should contribute to facts and advice and like a guide point at paths and short cuts that might facilitate learning. The goals of generic subjects set in the curricula are supposed to be followed and the educational activities should be influenced by the fundamental values of Swedish society such as equality and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable (the National Agency for Education, Sweden). All adults who have received a residence permit have the right to attain the secondary level. This means that immigrants can go on studying courses at the secondary level after having passed the introduction course "Swedish for Immigrants" being publicly supported.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **3.1 The purpose of studying the literature reviewed**

In my study I am trying to find some factor that possibly could contribute to the understanding of how to make it easier for immigrants to find a job in order to avoid being excluded in society. This seems more important than ever thinking of the change of demography. We know that fewer people will have a chance of maintaining Swedish welfare in the future (Broomé et al., 2001). Everyone of working age will be needed at the labour market for everyone's own good.

To get insights into these matters I have from contemporary literature reviewed national and international studies, where factors related to ethnic diversity for getting employment and necessary for successful learning have been researched. Some of these studies the researchers have summarized in articles available on the Internet or in journals. The studies I have reviewed in full are Osman (1999), Rooth (1999), Löfgren & Fägerlind (2000) and Ryding Zink (2002). Four of the studies reviewed are American. There are big differences between conditions in the US and Sweden, but the concept of diversity has been highly discussed and we can learn from their experiences (Broomé et al. 2001).

#### **3.2 Factors related to work and employment**

##### ***3.2.1 The importance of educational and professional backgrounds***

The focus of the study conducted by Rooth (1999) was “the integration processes of immigrants” (Rooth, 1999:19) in Sweden until 1995 and immigrants who received residence permit during the period of 1987 - 1991. Researching employment rates, duration of employment and educational investments obtained in Sweden, Rooth (1999) used a database with data compiled from Swedish Statistics, the National Labour Market Board and the Swedish Integration Board. With three variables Rooth (1999) studied factors that are considered contributing to Swedish employment: the length of education in the native country, the length of education in Sweden and experiences of Swedish employment. Using data from the same database this study was followed up by another one, also carried out by Rooth and published in an article in 2000 (Rooth, 2000).

One result of the studies was that immigrants had a high rate of employment based on statistics concerning any employment during the year. On the other hand measures of employment during a period of the year showed a low rate of employment. Rooth (2000) concludes that this indicates that immigrants change work often. The results also indicate that the

number of Swedish employment and time being unemployed affect the possibilities to get a job.

Interviewing some immigrants and personnel at two employment agencies Ryding Zink (2002) studied factors in the process of job searching and the meeting between these people analysing their descriptions of their experiences. Like Rooth (1999) she found that neither the length of education in the native country nor in Sweden is a key factor to immigrants' employment.

One of the reasons for not getting a job could be the fact that employers do not know how to evaluate immigrants' educational and professional background or that they do not think that the quality of the capabilities are the same as compared to Swedish circumstances. (Löfgren&Fägerlind, 2000; Ryding Zink, 2002). "Immigrants are regarded as uncertain investments with unknown pay-off" (Ryding Zink, 2002:132). Samir, one of the interviewed engineers of Löfgren & Fägerlind's study (2000) claims that an immigrant has to be even better than a Swedish job seeker to get a job.

Ryding Zink (2002) argue that at what age immigrants arrive and how quickly they get a Swedish residence permit are important aspects concerning getting access to the labour market too. These findings are confirmed by Knocke (2000), a Swedish scientist, who argues that "research is unanimous in stating that negative experience in the first years of labour market contacts have a great impact on the later success or failure in the labour market" (Knocke, 2000:370).

### ***3.2.2 The importance of nationality***

The native country as a key factor to unemployment was found in the studies by Rooth (1999) and Ryding Zink (2002). Rooth (1999) found that immigrants from Rumania, Poland and Chile had a high rate of work while immigrants coming from Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Somalia had bigger difficulties in being employed. The main conclusion of the study performed by Ryding Zink was that "the closer the country of origin is to Sweden, the easier it is for the immigrant to find employment" (Ryding Zink, 2002:122). However, Ekberg & Ohlson (2000) point at regional differences considering immigrants' work. They concentrated on the difference of employment rate concerning nationality and chose Bosnians, since they were the biggest ethnic group that immigrated to Sweden during the 1990s. These researchers claim that there are available data considering a general view of the rate of immigrants' employment and unemployment, but considering regional differences the knowledge is poor. For example, in Vänersborg, Ljungby and Småland Bosnians had a higher rate of jobs compared to Nor-

rköping and communities in Blekinge. There were big differences between cities like Stockholm and Malmö, where Malmö had a low rate of employed Bosnians. In communities where Bosnians have had difficulties in getting a job, Ekberg & Ohlson (2000) argue that newer statistics still show the same tendency, but there are regional differences considering immigrants' work.

Educated British Caribbean women participated in the study conducted by Alfred (2001). She wanted to find reasons why this particular ethnic group succeeded better in getting jobs than others and found that their earlier experiences of struggles in their native country contributed to success in getting employment.

### ***3.2.3 The importance of language skills, especially Swedish***

Ryding Zink (2002) states that "knowing a language does not only imply mastering grammar and vocabulary but also understanding the social situations where the language is used" (Ryding Zink, 2002:87). Getting a higher position at work and to be able to make a career mastering Swedish has been experienced being a key factor in the studies by Löfgren & Fägerlind (2000) and Ryding Zink (2002). The overall view is that professions working with people, the ability to use Swedish correctly is more clearly expressed compared to work with individual tasks without having to co-operate with others. The pronunciation is especially stressed, since there are people that pay much attention to immigrants' abilities in speaking with a Swedish accent. In work places linked to the market, differences in language skills were found to be more tolerated "they accept people regardless of their background and social skills as long as they possess the desired competence" (Ryding Zink, 2002:88). The engineers in the study carried out by Ryding Zink (2000) stressed the fact that the knowledge of English was as important as Swedish concerning making a career.

### ***3.2.4 Ethnic aspects***

Language is a frequent issue in the debates on immigrants and integration. In the research projects conducted by Löfgren & Fägerlind (2000) and Ryding Zink (2002) language skills are concluded being decisive for immigrants' possibilities getting employment in Sweden. Are the demands too high? Could the reason be referred to discrimination? "Is it a convenient way of sorting out applicants with a non - Swedish background?" (Knocke, 2000:369). There are examples when language seems to have not been decisive at all. Ryding Zink (2002) argues that "within certain areas, for example the medical business, the competition for competent labor is so intense that language skills carry less importance" (Ryding Zink, 2002:88).

In 2000, Ekberg & Rooth (2001) investigated unemployed job seekers registered at the employment offices, both newly arrived without a residence permit and immigrants with residence permit. The aim of the study was selections and employment policy priorities that were made at Swedish employment offices during the years of 1995 and 1998. It was found that the employment rate among people at the age of 16 – 64 years living in Sweden with foreign citizenship was 54 % to be compared to native born whose employment rate was 75 %. In these figures different publicly supported projects generating employment were included. The so-called “overtly unemployment rate”, where people neither have employment nor participate in publicly supported projects, was 13 % for foreign citizens compared to 4.5 % for native born Swedes. Ekberg & Rooth (2001) point at the fact that in spite of the boom around the turn of the century, 30 – 35 % of several ethnic groups were overtly unemployed. Recently arrived immigrants were found to be included in publicly supported labour market incentives, especially those coming from Bosnia, while immigrants from Southern Europe and the Middle East having arrived in Sweden before 1993 were to a small extent included in such projects.

Ryding Zink (2002) claims that “ethnic discrimination is still occurring in Swedish work life despite the fact that the law demands that companies strive for diversity in the work place” (Ryding Zink, 2002:51). On the other hand, a more open – minded attitude has been recognised, especially among younger employers. (Ryding Zink, 2002)

### ***3.2.5 The importance of networks and the conditions of communities***

Why did immigrants with the same native country have different possibilities getting employment? In their article, having studied Bosnians and their conditions considering employment Ekberg & Ohlson (2000) point at two conceivable reasons. One is differences in informal networks between companies, which in turn means a shorter way to make decisions. The other one is the conditions of municipalities concerning economic growth and the amount of vacant jobs. However, the conclusions are diverging, since areas with increasing growth rate showed differences too concerning the possibility to work for this ethnic group.

### **3.3 Factors related to learning**

To be able to understand skills necessary to get employment, and being able to improve these skills, we also need to understand the aspects of learning (Brown et al., 2001; Wenger, 1998). Compared to other countries immigrants in Sweden have generous opportunities in the educational system to improve their communication skills in order to getting access to Swedish society and the labour market (Cabau-Lampa 1999). Criticism of these initiatives has been

raised during the last decade from immigrants themselves but also from an economic point-of-view concluding that language education for newcomers has not been efficient enough (Cabau-Lampa, 1999; Osman, 1999; Löfgren & Fägerlind, 2000; Ryding Zink, 2002). From my own working experiences I know that learning takes place anywhere, if the conditions are good and the learner is motivated. People learn in different ways and always, everyday life included (Fenwick, 2000). This is important to be aware of for policy makers but also for civil servants, since they will be the ones to implement the ideas.

“In more than one sense, immigrants, refugees and their children are all involved in a process of learning.....of how to cope and manage in an alien environment” (Knocke, 2000:376). The aspect of social constructivism considers learning taking place when people interact and actively take part. Wenger (1998) states that “our identity is formed through participation” (Wenger, 1998:152) and newcomers often have to face “conflicting forms of individuality and competence as defined in different communities” (Wenger, 1998:160). Observations, imitation and modelling, supporting learning activities of the perspective, are supposed being used in formal contexts like learning at schools and work places but also in informal contexts like learning in everyday life. Work and learning are intertwined (Wenger, 1998).

### **3.3.1 The importance of the learning environment and interactions**

Learning strategies are probably different in different countries. These differences can lead to difficulties in being acknowledged and affect learning in the new country (King, 1999; Osman, 1999; Alfred, 2001). Concerning the effect of changing learning perspectives King (1999) examined the implementation of the transformational perspective, which in short is about changing attitudes. The participants of the study, college-based adult students learning English as a second language, expressed that they experienced new attitudes towards learning and the new culture. They improved confidence and sensed a feeling of empowerment. Osman (1999) came across the phenomenon of “two contradictory understandings of the role definition of teacher” (Osman,1999:156).

The teachers participating in his study based their teaching technology on the ideas of self-directed learning where the learner should be active and take responsibility for his/her learning instead of “being taught”, something understood by immigrant learners as being the core of learning. As a consequence one of the observed students dropped out from school. In the study carried out by Alfred (2001) the Caribbean women were not used to classroom dia-

logue and found it very hard for them in the US to express their ideas. They became silent, which led to “invisibility and marginalization” (Alfred, 2001).

Investigating the opinions of female multiethnic welfare recipients and their teachers, Ziegler & Durant (2001) focused on learning and the learning environment. and to what extent psychological factors had impacted on the participants’ learning. The interviewees claimed that they considered the learning environment, i.e. the relationship with teachers and fellow students, being even more important to them than the subject matter or the learning content. Furthermore, shedding more lights on work places as learning environments the Norwegian study by Rismark & Sitter (2003) was carried out with three participants, a trained doctor at a hospital, a fully trained seamstress in a handicraft shop and an unskilled car mechanic at a garage. The interaction and “extended access to interaction” (Rismark & Sitter, 2003:508) during breaks were found to be crucial for these immigrants to improve the understanding of their work activities.

Ziegler & Durant (2001) found engagement being vital for the participants of their study to decide about taking part in adult basic education. This engagement was analysed as believes in making a change of their lives and the importance of achieving goals. “Some goals are short term, such as getting a driver's license. Other goals are intermediate, like passing the GED (General Education Development) test. Some goals are more long term, like getting a good job with benefits. Most participants linked their participation in class to obtaining their goals” (Ziegler & Durant, 2001).

There is much Swedish and international literature on adult learning as a general issue as well as literature on immigrants, integration policy and the effects viewed from economic aspects. However, my conclusions after having searched for recent research related to my topic about immigrants’ possibilities getting access to the Swedish labour market is that the amount of studies is limited concerning immigrants’ point-of - view about their learning in Sweden and their opinions of Swedish integration policy. My study is small, interviewing four employed immigrants living in Sweden, but I am intending trying to generate some contributory factor.

### **3.3.2 Language skills**

The lack of knowledge of Swedish is one factor maintained being contributing to failure in the Swedish labour market and in Swedish education (Löfgren & Fägerlind, 2000; Osman, 1999; Ryding Zink 2002). “Hence, the political and expert knowledge or discourse in this context calls for more language. Language in this discourse is portrayed as the magic wand

which can solve the problem of the marginalisation of the “other” .....if all immigrants can learn to speak Swedish perfectly, preferably without an ethnic accent, then their employability would be high and their marginalisation would be considerably less” (Osman, 1999:216).

Osman (1999), studying the concept of being the “other” compared to what is considered being the “norm”, states that there are consequences in Swedish education for immigrants of stressing the importance of mastering Swedish. His sample was comprised by immigrants and native students at two adult institutions, a folk high school and at Komvux, the municipal adult educational institution. Some teachers and heads of the schools were also included. For those immigrants, who go on with further education, the usage of Swedish as an educational language enhances difficulties in at least two respects, in their studies and in attributing “ the marginalisation of the ‘other’ to their ability in Swedish” (Osman, 1999:216).

The non-native participants of his study say that “the language of instruction disadvantages them” (Osman, 1999:190). Ryding Zink (2002) highlights the education in the Swedish language for immigrants and the evaluation of being good at using and speaking Swedish. Referring to Annick Sjögren, a Swedish ethnologist, she states that “there is a low tolerance for unsatisfactory pronunciation” (Ryding Zink, 2002:59) Besides, heavy demands of language skills are maintained in this study to decrease immigrants’ possibilities to get access to the Swedish labour market.

### **3.3.3 Prejudice and stereotyped ideas**

Most of the non-native students in the study conducted by Osman (1999) thought that they were disadvantaged by “the lack of recognition of their past educational and professional competency” (Osman, 1999:190). Interpreting the concept of “being an immigrant” without taking the diverse complexity of the concept into account is a hindrance to learning of the Swedish language for immigrants (Osman, 1999; Löfgren & Fägerlind, 2000). Osman states that “despite their educational background they are placed in the basic education programme in both schools studied” (Osman, 1999:214). This is also confirmed by Löfgren & Fägerlind’s study (2000) interviewing immigrated engineers to get their images of Swedish work places and working life. One of the engineers interviewed says that the courses in Swedish for immigrants are for everyone. It does not matter if you have an academic background or not.

Excluding factors were found by Aiken (2000) in her study researching reasons for drop-outs and absence of Black women in nursing programs in the USA. The Black women of this study reported that they were not treated in the same way in the classroom like their White fellow students. These unequal conditions increased the awareness of being “the other”

and like racism, injustice, psychological distress and the denial of racism these elements were decisive for participating or not in higher education.

After having studied the concept of “otherness” in a Swedish context Osman (1999) found that all the non-native participants of his study had experienced being “treated differently because they are immigrants” (Osman, 1999:206) and one of the participants stressed that the native students will not accept the immigrant students “because they are not ‘white’” (Osman, 1999:206). Osman (1999) underpins the lack of research or data on adult education about prejudice and the notion of being “the other” versus “the norm, Swedish” and its effects for immigrants’ learning and transition to Swedish labour market.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Research questions**

I am interested in getting to know about the immigrant's thoughts about how he/she managed to get a job. What does he/she consider having been the contribution or the hindrance to get access to employment? My study is limited, but by interviewing four employed immigrant men and women living in my community who speak languages other than Swedish, I am aiming at trying to extend some understanding of the immigrant's possibilities to get employment. What factors do these four individuals think have contributed to or have been obstacles for them to get employment? What about the knowledge of Swedish? Has this been an issue of great importance getting a job for them?

I am studying trying to find some factor that perhaps could contribute to the facilitation of immigrants' inclusion in society or at least confirm conditions found by researchers in earlier studies.

### **4.2 Research design**

This is a qualitative investigation trying to get the interviewees to tell me about their experiences in order to widen the understanding of immigrants' integration. I am interested in finding out the interviewees' own opinions about their learning in Sweden improving the prerequisites to get a job and how they managed to get employment. Considering learning I am especially interested in the aspects of the educational environment and language learning. Being a language teacher these areas are familiar to me and language skills are stressed being one of the most important factors getting employment (Osman, 1999; Löfgren & Fägerlind, 2000; Ryding Zink, 2002). Firstly, I have studied literature related to my topic. I want to know what others had found that could support my findings but also about indicated further research that could be included in my study.

Qualitative methods are carried out by using recorded in-depth interviews and I followed the ideas described by Kvale (1997) in his book "Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun". Kvale recommends outlining the interview, how to analyse the data and how to report the results. This means to think about interview questions in advance, and also the analysis of data, reliability and validity of findings and the report of the study.

By analysing the aims of my studies I have found two main research themes:

Contribution / Hindrance to learning Swedish  
Contribution / Hindrance to get employment

From these two themes I have formed a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions such as:

How did you get your job?

Why, do you think, did you get this job?

Why, do you think, were you selected?

What is your advice to immigrants who want to succeed in getting a job?

What are your experiences with regards to learning Swedish?

Can you tell me about your best learning strategies when learning Swedish?

What kind of contact did you have with Swedish students at Komvux in Lilla Edet?

What is your advice to immigrants who want to succeed in learning Swedish?

During the interviews I have tried paying attention to leading questions to the participants, an issue highlighted by Kvale (1997). Concerning reliability and validity of the results I have also tried during the interviews and the analyses as much as possible to be critical and pay attention to my and my participants' bias. I am Swedish and the participants are immigrants. I was born in Sweden and am influenced by Swedish culture and society embracing "the equal value of all – irrespective of gender, race, religion or social background" (the National Agency for Education, Sweden).

The interviewees are influenced by their experiences from their native countries and from living in Sweden. I am a female teacher, having been an educator of children, youth and adults for thirty years, now mainly teaching English as a foreign language at the secondary and the upper secondary level. I am genuinely interested in trying enhancing people's ability using language as means of interacting with others. Three of the participants have been my students studying basic English, but they have all attended courses in Swedish and been taught by colleagues of mine at Komvux, where I work. In that respect I am not a foreigner to them. On the other hand, this circumstance that we have a kind of relationship to each other might have affected the data and my analysis of the data.

Having been their teacher and familiar with the community, I share knowledge with the participants about Komvux in Lilla Edet and about the local public services of our community, but in contrast to the interviewees, I have lived in the municipality for forty years. The interviewees have lived in Sweden and in the community about ten years or less. The transitions of languages could also be taken into account. Swedish is my native language but the interviewees' second language. Information could have been misunderstood or misinterpreted. Using English, which is a foreign language to me, is still another transition of lan-

guage recording and presenting analyses of data for this paper. The exact nuances describing different situations and experiences are for the most of us only possible using our native languages.

The 2 - hour - interviews were carried out individually with the invited participants of the study. The interviews were in Swedish and tape - recorded. After each interview I have transcribed the interviews verbatim, analyzed them and rewritten the data in a narrative form. Since the interviews were held in Swedish, I have also translated parts of the rewritten data into English to be included in the report.

### **4.3 The sample**

I decided to find four interviewees, two men and two women

1. who have lived in Sweden about ten years
2. who did not know Swedish before coming here
3. who have employment
4. who have attended courses at my school and know me in one way or another that is having been taught either by me or by my colleagues at Komvux; the institution is rather small and teachers and students recognise each other, even if they do not meet in the same classroom

I used my personal network i.e. colleagues, the administration office at my school and my previous students to find interviewees that could be possible. Kvale (1997) argues that interviewees are seldom chosen randomly, instead other kinds of criteria are chosen. I decided to send a letter with a brief summary of my research to four of the selected persons and the aim of my letter. I also informed them that I was going to make a contact by phoning them some days later to find out about their interest in participating and to set a date for a meeting at my work or at my home.

To get my sample I needed to send seven letters, since one of the selected interviewees, a refugee, was afraid of publishing the results because of previous experiences and two set interviews were cancelled because of illness and too much to do at work for the interviewee.

Arzin, Sefika, Muratka and I met some years ago when they were my students in English at the municipal adult education. Arzin has also been one of my students in mathematics. Nihad I have only seen at work, when he attended the class learning Swedish for immigrants.

### **4.4 The interview**

Three of the interviews were held at my school and one at my house. I suggested the interview at my house, since it was held in the evening after work and because of that more com-

fortable to do so compared to a work place. Possible influences of the different environment on data of the interviews should be included concerning validity of findings of this study.

I started the interviews with providing the interviewees with more details about the purpose of the study and explained that I needed to record the interviews to get valid data. I asked about their permission to use their names, but I also offered them to use a pseudonym. None of the four participants thought it was necessary to use another name and they did not want to read the thesis before publishing. However, they wanted a copy of the thesis to add to their collection of experiences of their life stories. I did not consider it being necessary for them to sign a treaty, a procedure suggested by Kvale (1997), since their stories would not touch on such controversial issues or affect anyone that in turn could affect them.

## **5. Description of the data**

### **5.1 Presentation of interviewees**

#### ***Arzin***

Arzin is a 37 - year - old - man from Bosnia. He finalized a vocational programme there at the upper secondary level to start working at a factory in the paper industry. After school he worked for about one year before arriving in Sweden in 1994. In 1998, Arzin got a job at one of the factories in the community seeking the job by contacting the employer directly without the involvement of the employment office. Today, six years later, he is a foreman there and is responsible for five persons. From his arrival in Sweden Arzin was more or less obsessed by the thought of getting a job.

#### ***Sefika***

Sefika is a 40 - year - old - woman from Bosnia. She is an educated physiotherapist in her native country. This education was a vocational programme at the upper secondary level, and she worked ten years at a hospital before arriving in Sweden in 1993. Before finalizing her education as an assistant nurse in December 2000, she was offered a temporary post at one of the old people's homes in the community. Today she is permanently employed at this work place.

#### ***Muratka***

Muratka is a 47 - year - old - woman from Bosnia. In her native country she was an educated dressmaker and worked at a factory. Like Arzin and Sefika, Muratka's education was accomplished at a vocational programme at the upper secondary level. She arrived in Sweden in 1993. Her first employment monthly paid she got in 2000 at an old people's home in the community. Before that she had temporary work with a duration of four to six months working in the kitchen at a school and at a day care centre. These jobs were all within the public services. Today she is permanently employed by the municipality 87.5% of a full-time job. She also works temporarily at two other work places within nursing.

#### ***Nihad***

Nihad is a 49 - year - old - man from the Iraqi part of Kurdistan. Before coming to Sweden he worked as a manager at the United Nations' World and Food Programme. In Kurdistan he

accomplished two years at a college becoming a social welfare secretary. He arrived in Sweden in 1997. He knows five languages. His native language is Kurdish. With his mother he spoke Turkish. Arabic is the language in Iraq, where he worked for several years and during a period of nine years he was imprisoned in Iran, where he learnt Persian. In 2001, he finalized his SFI studies. When he was doing a work practice at one of the municipal work places he was offered employment and is permanently employed since June, 2002. He is a supervisor of trainees including immigrants as well as native born. He also functions as a contact between the municipality and immigrants coming to Lilla Edet.

The participants came to Sweden as refugees. They have most of their stay in Sweden lived in the same community. Some months after their arrival in Sweden Arzin, Muratka and Nihad started studying “Swedish for Immigrants” in the community where they still live. Sefika came to this community after two years in Sweden. She started the Swedish education, but dropped out after a short while, since she was pregnant. When another year had gone by she started again and finalized this introductory course.

## **5.2 Getting employment**

The four participants of this study are all permanently employed and it is this employment they refer to mostly when they speak about how they succeeded in getting a job. They got their residence permits and work permits within some months after having arrived in Sweden. Arzin works at a privately owned factory in the paper industry. Sefika, Muratka and Nihad are employed at the local public services.

### ***5.2.1 Opportunities and requirements***

Nihad being a supervisor for manual working trainees claims that “Many employers do not ask for formal credentials. If you accept to work at a factory or in the woods, there are jobs”. Both Muratka and Nihad argue that there is work for those who accept a job, where the demands for theoretical skills are low. However, Sefika points out that nobody should accept a job that is experienced as disrespectful. “It is important to feel pleased. Life will be easier and the quality of life will improve”.

Arzin was one of the two selected for a three-month-practice when he applied for his job at the paper factory. In Bosnia he had studied three years to work at the paper industry which could be one reason for choosing him among the forty candidates, but he does not believe that this was the only motive. “Why I was selected for the job? I don’t know. I had been working well. This was my profession in Bosnia. I think the others had been working as well

as I had. Maybe it was pure luck!” He is also thinking of the possibility to have been supported by a higher power. “I am a bit religious. Maybe God helped me.”

In Sefika’s case it did not help that she was a physiotherapist in her native country to get a job in nursing in our community. Nor did it help that she had a document from the National Swedish Board of Health and Welfare allowing her to work as an assistant nurse. “It doesn’t matter how much knowledge you have, or how much knowledge you had in your native country or what grades you have before coming here.” To get access to the labour market Sefika felt forced to attend an education becoming an assistant nurse. “I had to attend another education. You need to have some kind of education from Sweden.” The demands for credentials seem to differ from time to time. Today Sefika claims that fellow countrymen work together with her under the same conditions as she without having been requested Swedish nursing education. “They have got the same job as me here, even if we haven’t got the same education neither in my country nor in Sweden. The market is changing all the time.”

Doing work practice seems often to be required to get a job, which could be a new phenomenon for a person coming from another country. Nihad points out “working in Sweden means to practise for a month before being employed, this is a rule here”. “You have to show that you can work. Work, work, work.” Arzin’s opinions he shares with the other interviewees and this ability seems to be something that has to be shown here in Sweden.

### ***5.2.2 The importance of language skills for getting employment and for work***

Knowing how to introduce oneself and ability to express one’s capabilities are key factors to get employment highlighted by Nihad. “There are many jobs, where you don’t need a grade, but if you are the employer and I want to apply for a job, I must be able to tell you about my qualifications.” He does not think that mastering Swedish is the most important criterion getting a job and compares to the circumstances for deaf mute persons. At Nihad’s work place there is a deaf mute man, who Nihad considers being very good at manual labour. He argues that these people can work and that deaf mute persons’ handicap is lifelong being unable to start speaking, while the immigrants’ communicative skills will improve in the course of the years. Arzin also claims that knowing Swedish perfectly is not a key factor for getting employment. He was selected among forty applicants, where the majority was Swedish. “It is how you work that is decisive.” Sefika has similar experiences. There were twenty-five students, one more except Sefika with foreign background, finalizing the nursing education together with her and she was the one who was selected for a temporary post. However, Nihad, being a supervisor for trainees and a contact person for immigrants seeking employment, re-

veals that he has come across employers who after having met the person say that it is impossible for this person to get a job, since he /she does not know Swedish.“ These immigrants are yearning for jobs, but still it is impossible, since they don’t know Swedish.”

Sefika and Muratka think knowing Swedish is the most important thing to be able to seek a job and to get employment, especially for those, who work with people. “Perhaps, working with computers works without knowing the language, but the everyday words you have to know. It’s very, very important.” Muratka claims that from the very first day an immigrant should start learning Swedish and “think in Swedish only. The language is important, very , very important for us immigrants”. But she also argues that “if you want to have an ordinary job it is enough with just a little Swedish, to know how to read and write”. Mastering Swedish is not the most important thing, Muratka argues, but to know enough to be able to communicate with people in Swedish society.

Nihad was selected for his permanent job because of the fact that he knew several languages. Doing work place practice he was more or less handpicked by one of the employers at the local public services,when the community needed a person solving practical problems for refugees and immigrants. Nihad emphasizes that “I understand immigrants better than Swedish people.” He also points at the fact that he can introduce immigrants to Swedish society. “I can teach immigrants how to live in Sweden.”

### ***5.2.3 The importance of strengths of personality at work and for getting a job***

Arzin highlights responsibility as a key factor for getting employment. “You can’t take a break for fifteen minutes, if it is supposed to be ten. Perhaps I was better at that, than the others.” Both Sefika and Muratka working at the local welfare services stress the fact being trustworthy and loyal always prepared to work, even if this could mean temporary interruptions in their private plans. “They can always call for me, I have always been willing to help and my boss trusts me.”

Sefika states that “working with anyone isn’t always fun”. Positive attitudes and ability to co-operate with fellow workers are qualities highlighted by the participants. This means among other things to be able to show pleasure in one’s work as well as show genuine interest in others. It is especially important for an immigrant, Muratka argues, to look happy and be positive among a group of Swedish fellow workers, otherwise they will think that he/she does not understand, which in turn can lead to distrust.

Being enterprising and innovative are characteristic for the four participants of my study. Muratka went to different employers in the community. “I said to myself, it doesn’t matter if they will say no, then I will go to someone else, but it worked!” She points out the importance of trying to get employment yourself. “My advice is don’t wait for the employment office to find a job for you. Don’t wait for anyone.” Nihad claims that there are jobs for most of those who want to have a job. “If there are no jobs, you can create one yourself. I started selling fruit.”

#### ***5.2.4 Attitudes towards work***

Everyone has been very active herself/himself trying to get access to the labour market. They have assiduously worked for a common goal – to get employment. Nihad and Arzin underpin that for them and their country fellowmen not working is by them neither accepted in their home countries nor in Sweden. Arzin argues that in his ethnic group in our community everyone is working “...and our wives too, everyone is employed; we are such a people; we can’t remain seated”. Furthermore, Arzin states “I was only interested in getting a job, start working and live like a real man”.

Nihad is used to work from his childhood. His family was poor and he helped his father and mother in their shop from the age of ten. He worked from eight to twelve and went to school until five o’clock. “It has to do with our culture”, Nihad says. “Kurdish people don’t like people, who don’t work.” A desire for being accepted in Swedish society is pointed out by Muratka and Sefika as being a driving force getting a job “... it is tremendously important to get a job, to show that you manage to earn your living. I am not Swedish and I can never be, but I want to be with Swedish people doing the same things as they do.”

#### ***5.2.5 The perception of having been discriminated or not***

Sefika tells about her feeling of injustice thinking about the pressure that was put on her getting Swedish education in nursing and having one already from Bosnia. Later on fellow countrymen have got similar employment without being educated. Because of these conditions, she concludes “so this has nothing to do with discrimination”. In addition, from the point starting seeking for jobs she has never been unemployed not even during periods when few jobs have been available. Muratka claims that she has always been treated very well by employers and by the staff too. She points out that “she has never been sad with anyone. Maybe they think I am good at working.” Arzin applying for his job in 1998 was the only one

of forty applicants who got a permanent position. He was one out of two immigrants, the others were Swedish.

### **5.2.6 Networks**

The first years before getting their permanent jobs, Muratka and Sefika respectively were continuously contacting different work places. They contacted the work places themselves and were not helped by the employment office. They both worked in the municipal public services and whenever there was a need for them, they tried to go working there. “I was interested in getting my foot in everywhere, everywhere. It was actually like that. The kitchen and everywhere in the community.” Little, by little they built a network, their own personal employment network. Every weekend during her education becoming an assistant nurse, Sefika worked at one of three work places within the local public services. “It was not only the money. I knew that many jobs you get via contacts.” The employers had a network too and Muratka got a temporary job through the recommendations from one employer to another.

## **5.3 Learning Swedish**

Arzin, Sefika, Muratka and Nihad have all attended SFI at my institution. After having finalized this introductory course Nihad finished school, while Arzin went on studying English and mathematics at the secondary level. Sefika and Muratka finalized the introductory course and “Swedish as an additional language” at the secondary level. Besides, the four participants have been very energetic finding ways to improve their language skills. “80 per cent of all problems you can solve by using the language”, an argument for Nihad finding ways to practise Swedish.

### **5.3.1 Encouraging factors in learning Swedish**

#### **5.3.1.1 Formal Learning**

Attending the introduction course “Swedish for Immigrants” the interviewees think is necessary. Muratka stresses the importance to register directly after the arrival to Sweden. People with other alphabets are especially underlined in this respect. Arzin who was only thinking of getting a job in Sweden was totally uninterested in studying. Looking back, he states that “I made a mistake, because of that I have missed a lot. I could have learnt much, much more! Obviously, attending SFI was a contribution, but I did not study much. I did not have many Swedish friends the first time and I only watched Bosnian programmes on TV. You know, I was yearning....”. Studying for at least one year, depending on previous schooling, is his ad-

vice about starting learning Swedish. “To know the language is important. The most important thing.”

Making the studies efficient the education should be daily, eight hours a day and compared to an ordinary working day, Arzin claims. Furthermore, the teachers should be strict and not allow students to use their native language. Muratka also points at the importance of being forced to use Swedish in the classroom instead of speaking the native language, but underlines this being a mutual responsibility. “We were twenty immigrants from the same country and we only used Swedish when the teacher was near by. On the other hand we were grown-up people.”

Communicative skills are also about mastering reading and writing. Muratka claims that this is the main activity at school but nevertheless important to learn. “It is not enough with speaking. You also need to understand documents and such things.”

### ***5.3.1.2 Informal learning***

Only studies are not enough in order to learn Swedish, the four participants state. They have purposely made contacts with Swedish people in order to practise Swedish. “80 per cent of all problems you can solve by using the language”, an argument for Nihad finding ways extending his knowledge of Swedish. Nihad went to the café after school and spoke to elderly people, who liked to speak with people from other countries. He also started selling fruit at the market place, which gave him further opportunities to speak Swedish. “Me selling oranges reminded Swedish people of their visits to Mediterranean countries. They liked to talk to me about it. I didn’t earn much money, but I learnt many new Swedish words.”

Being able to make contacts with people speaking Swedish at work places are stressed as a contribution to improve the knowledge of Swedish. Muratka claims that she learnt best, when she got a job. “It is not necessary to talk so much, you can listen. If I say something wrong, I can try to listen to how you use or pronounce that word.” Nihad recommends the combination of work practice and studies pointing out the importance of outlining a plan how to succeed in improving the ability using and understanding Swedish. “You need to have a plan, you can’t just sit.” He argues that immigrants have to be patient learning the new language. “If you start at zero you have to walk step by step. You can’t reach the roof at once. You need to make plans.”

Arzin and Muratka attending courses with Swedish students studying basic English and mathematics say that neither of them tried to get in touch with each other. “Perhaps it was our own fault, Muratka says. We didn’t try and they didn’t try to teach us new things either. Dur-

ing the breaks we always spoke Bosnian.” Sefika talks about her nursing education. She was one of the two immigrant students in a class with twenty-five students and started there two years after having passed SFI and Swedish as an additional language, which is a course at the secondary level. “I easily got in touch with the other students. Several of them are my fellow workers today and some of them are really close friends of mine.”

Watching Swedish programmes on TV and using the media are concluded being important getting to know about Swedish news and Swedish society. When Sefika was at home she read whatever she came across, even if she did not understand. She listened to Swedish radio, watched Swedish TV, but also listened to other people.”We have never been able to watch programmes from Bosnia. That was something we decided to exclude from the beginning.” The more skilful she became the more she dared to use the language asking about things she had not understood. Taking driving lessons was still another contribution for her extended language skills. “Now I had to learn something totally different, so many words that I did not know before.”

### ***5.3.2 Discouraging factors in learning Swedish***

Looking back at the first years in Sweden, Arzin and Muratka express their frustration of having to learn the new language. Arzin was obsessed with the idea of getting a job and Muratka thought learning Swedish was extremely difficult. She was not motivated either. She often had a headache, had difficulties in concentrating and was often crying. “I didn’t want to go to school. This was perhaps due to the fact that I didn’t understand so much. I was supposed to read and write and got irritated at myself.” They both felt forced by the employment agency to improve their language skills. Arzin states “I didn’t know the language good enough to be able to defend myself.”

During her first years in Sweden, Sefika claims that she did not use her capabilities. Those years have been “expensive” for her thinking about her unused abilities. “I could have worked at home and accelerated the studies. Then I could have been already studying at college or even having finalized my studies. I had much more capacity. Sometimes I am thinking of my study loan. Why have I borrowed so much money?” Her feelings are mixed, since she also expresses her satisfaction having achieved education in Sweden. “I felt very confident and secure being able to introduce myself as Sefika, an educated assistant nurse. I felt like the whole world opened and that I had all possibilities in the whole world.”

Using Swedish and be exposed to Swedish, always and everywhere, are stressed by the four interviewees. With fellow countrymen in the same classroom at school, Arzin and Mu-

ratka found it too easy to use their mother tongue in the first place before practising Swedish. “We were twenty persons in the same classroom. We didn’t care about school”. The participants also claim using the media of their home countries affect learning Swedish negatively. “It’s not enough to go to school and then go home watching TV of native countries.”

Arzin claims that teachers should be strict and force immigrants to use the new language. “A real teacher is strict and firm.” For him perhaps facing another perspective of learning where the learner is expected to be responsible for his / her learning, his studies learning Swedish might have been affected. “We only spoke Swedish when the teacher was nearby.”

Describing the experiences studying “Swedish for Immigrants”, Arzin claims that the time allocated at school was far too little. “Three hours a day is far too little to study a new language.” He recommends studying at school using as much time as for ordinary work. “It should be eight hours, like an ordinary job.”

## **6. Empirical analysis**

My understanding of adult life, influenced by values of Swedish society, means having access to work and education on equal conditions. Analysing the individuals' stories, I am using the perspective of the socio cultural theory as a background of my interpretations. The socio cultural theory stresses the language and its impact on our lives being a mediating tool and a tool expressing how we interpret the world. Consciously and unconsciously, the language can distort the view of the world. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 1994).

Analysing the interviewees' stories my own experiences are functioning like a filter. Benhabib (1994) argues for using universal norms for ethics, respecting each other's points of views on equal grounds. In that sense one way of living or viewing the world will not be more correct than another one. This I am trying to keep in mind.

### **6.1 Experiences of getting employment, opportunities and requirements**

Reasons why employers decide on one candidate instead of another are experienced differently by the interviewees. Arzin, probably being qualified for his work at the factory having proper background from Bosnia also refers to the possibility of pure luck or being supported by God. He thinks that others were as good at working as he was. This could indicate employers' difficulties in evaluating working skills (Löfgren & Fägerlind, 2000; Ryding & Zink, 2002) and not only immigrants' working skills, since the majority seeking for a job at the same time as Arzin was Swedish.

Rooth (1999) and Ryding Zink (2002) found that education was not a key factor for immigrants' employment, while Ekberg & Ohlsson (2000) indicated economic growth as a decisive factor for employment. The participants of my study claim that documents on education and work experience can be required for any kind of work. Sefika points at the market and the access to labour as reasons for being selected. She experienced heavy demands on her getting Swedish education in nursing, in spite of the fact that she was qualified. Some years later women from her native country without education and poor knowledge of Swedish were contracted on the same conditions as she. When she started seeking for a job the unemployment rate was higher compared to Nihad arriving to Sweden four years later than Sefika, claiming that there are jobs for those who are willing to work having got employment quite quickly himself. According to the employment office in Lilla Edet using information from the Swedish statistics the rate of unemployed people in our town was about 5 % in 1999 to compare to 2.8 % three years later. This could be still another confirmation of the importance of

the labour market in the community having possibilities getting a job. Muratka, seeking for a job during the same period as Sefika, adds that for those, who apply for a low-skill job where theoretical skills are not required there are jobs. Nihad emphasizes that getting work practice before being contracted is a common procedure in Sweden. Immigrants, who are not familiar with these circumstances, could find this policy strange.

## **6.2 The demands of language skills**

The four participants of my study stress the importance of basic knowledge of Swedish to get a job. Muratka highlights the importance of knowing how to read and write, which she thinks is the main activity at school. The most exposed and immediate capability for a job-seeker is language skills, at least on the surface, used in the communication seeking a job. Osman (1999), Löfgren & Fägerlind (2000) and Ryding Zink (2002) conclude in their studies that people are especially sensitive to pronunciation, which can get employers to draw hasty conclusions.

Nihad confirms that there are employers that after having met immigrants, very keen to get a job, decline the application even concerning low skill job referring to too poor knowledge of Swedish. However, mastering Swedish was not the key factor for any of the interviewees getting their permanent positions at the factory or at the public welfare services. Arzin and Sefika competed with quite a few Swedish candidates applying for the job and were the ones to be selected. In Nihad's case knowing five languages, language skills were decisive and a key factor for his employment but not to know Swedish perfectly.

## **6.3 Experiences of interactions and learning Swedish**

The Norwegian study conducted by Rismark & Sitter (2003) suggests extended possibilities for immigrants to interact with native speakers to improve the immigrants' understanding of work activities. Arzin, Sefika, Muratka and Nihad maintain that learning at school as well as in social life have improved their skills. The importance of interactions with others is underlined to improve speaking, especially speaking with Swedish people. Arzin claims that strict teachers should prevent learners to use their mother tongues at school, while Muratka indicates that adult learners should take advantage of the opportunities to learn themselves. Their different opinions could be explained by experiences in their educational backgrounds. In Sweden learners are supposed to be self-directed and be responsible for their own learning, which can be confusing for learners used to other perspectives, pointed out by Osman (1999).

Muratka and Arzin both come from Bosnia, but could of course still be used to different views of learning in their homeland.

Thinking about the limited amount of time for learning Swedish at school, underlined by Arzin, the combination of work and studies could possibly be an improvement of practices. Muratka thinks she learnt the best after having started working. At school with opportunities to make contacts with Swedish fellow students neither she nor the native born tried to get in touch with each other. Furthermore, the psychological distress Arzin and Muratka experienced at the beginning of their stay in Sweden could perhaps also have eased their introduction to Swedish society by mixing studies and work.

#### **6.4 Work attitudes, strengths of personality and employers' broad-mindedness**

Experiences of struggles in the native country were found to be a key factor in the American study carried out by Alfred (2001). Arzin coming from Bosnia, like Sefika and Muratka, claims that all their fellow countrymen living in Lilla Edet are employed. Working is their national code, he maintains. Nihad coming from the Iraqi part of Kurdistan has the same opinions about his compatriots. The study conducted by Ekberg & Ohlson (2000) found inconsistent differences investigating Bosnians and their employment rate.

My study is far too small to make generalisation, but what I think characterizes Arzin, Sefika, Nihad and Muratka is a sense of responsibility, reliability and loyalty and they have a drive being included in Swedish society managing on their own without public support. They are all positive, goal – oriented, industrious, energetic and imaginative. The opposite, like being quiet looking dull can contribute to misunderstandings and distrust, Muratka claims. The rate of employers' broadmindedness could be still another factor important for getting employment.

#### **6.5 Discrimination and employment**

In the studies reviewed big differences were found concerning the employment rate comparing native born to immigrants (Ekberg & Rooth, 2001). Ryding Zink (2002) claims that people are discriminated. This could be confirmed by Nihad arguing that there are employers who refuse candidates seeking low skill jobs referring this circumstance to a request of better knowledge of Swedish. The language is easy to use as an excuse for refusing employment, since language is the mean used in communication and open to criticism.

In contrast, both Sefika and Muratka argue that they have not been discriminated against at work nor during the process of applying for a job. Sefika, experienced in nursing,

refers the demands that were put on her to the market having to attend nursing education, since her uneducated compatriots got employment under the same conditions as her some years later. Still, I cannot totally ignore the possibility of discrimination in her case. At the same time it is impossible to investigate the case. This happened about five years ago. I think, the principle point is her perception of the situation then, and later on at her work places. Now she has a feeling of injustice, but not being discriminated, comparing with the other Bosnian women getting employment without having to finalize education in nursing. On the other hand, she points out that she now is very pleased with being able to further her education taking into account both her Bosnian physiotherapist certificate and her Swedish assistant nursing certificate.

## **6.6 Networks and employment**

Investigating differences among Bosnians' rate of employment, Ekberg & Ohlsson (2000) indicated informal networks with short ways for decisions as a possibility for getting employment. These conclusions could be supported by Sefika's and Muratka's experiences. Firstly, they goal-directed built a network of employers themselves that could contact them, when there was a need, but their employers also used a network together with other employers. This was a key factor for getting employment for Sefika and Muratka. Getting more and more experienced, they became reliable and loyal back-ups, diligent, co-operative and popular at work.

## 7. Conclusions

I might have got more details about learning Swedish and getting a job in our community, if I would have been an immigrant myself. At least I would probably have got other details. Being a teacher at the municipal adult institution where the participants of my study were introduced to Swedish and Swedish society could have affected their openness. On the other hand, working full-time they chose themselves to participate in the study in their spare time. We share some common knowledge about learning Swedish, the institution where they were introduced to Swedish and about the community where they started seeking employment. We also had some kind of relationship before the interview and I think they trust me, an important element in interviews (Seale, 2002).

After having analysed the data of my study, I first of all conclude that one main contributory factor for the participants getting a job could have been networking. Sefika and Muratka respectively started building their individual networks by using Swedish as a tool introducing themselves describing their capabilities. Therefore, a basic knowledge of Swedish is also a factor to be taken into account. They were able to interact with employers and employees. Besides, their employers had existing networks of their own and could recommend members of staff to each other.

Secondly, the strengths of personality comprising different elements such as being responsible, goal-oriented, positive, industrious and imaginative could have been another decisive factor for the four interviewees getting a job. This could be confirmed by Brown et al. (2001), who argue that the change of society “has challenged existing models of ‘worker’” (Brown et al., 2001:258) which in turn have transformed the work skills required. These ideas are in line with “Western individualism” (Brown et al., 2001:260) characterized by “creativity, self-reliance, and empowerment” (Brown et al., 2001:260). Such characteristics might be recognised and appreciated differently by those, who apply for a job but also recognised and appreciated differently by employers. Besides, thinking of my own background influenced by Western values I can of course in the analysis of data have overestimated the participants’ individual characteristics as being key factors getting a job.

Thirdly, pure luck could be still another reason for getting employment. Since individuals are complex (Benhabib, 1994) we cannot exclude the possibility of chance. Why was Arzin chosen? He himself gives pure luck or being supported by a higher power as possible reasons for being selected. Getting her first temporary job Sefika states “Perhaps I was in the right place at the right time”. This factor, a factor of chance, is always present, I think, when

employees are contracted. This factor is also the most difficult one to handle, since it might be difficult to prove it and it is also difficult to improve thinking about possibilities getting a job.

Ekberg & Ohlson (2000) searching reasons for Bosnians' unemployment found inconsistent differences. They concluded networks and the conditions of communities as likely to be factors affecting the results. Three of the participants of my study are Bosnians and networks could have been contributing to at least Sefika's and Muratka's employment. Concerning the condition of the community and its impact on their possibilities getting a job further research has to be carried out.

Other studies like those conducted by Rooth (1999) and Ryding Zink (2002) stressed nationality as a factor decisive for employment. Thinking about Arzin and Nihad arguing that working is an important factor of their culture, there might be links between nationality and work, but these issues could be further investigated.

Rooth (1999) and Ryding Zink (2002) found that neither the length of education in the native country nor in Sweden was a key factor to employment. Arzin, Sefika and Muratka have credentials from the upper secondary level in Bosnia and Nihad has an exam from college in Iraq. The first few years before they had got a basic knowledge of Swedish their previous education did not contribute to a permanent post. To what extent their documented education from their homelands played a role, when they finally got employment is not confirmed by my study. However, Sefika is an exception. Sefika's exam from Bosnia did not help getting employment, but still she was sought after doing extra work during her education becoming an assistant nurse in Sweden. Her exam here she considers contributing to finally getting employment. In Lilla Edet 27% of the population have not further their education at the upper secondary level or higher. In Sweden as a whole the average percentage is 18% (Lilla Edets Kommun, Årsredovisning 2002). These statistics could indicate that the participants' education actually has played a role for them getting employment.

In my study, other factors than mastering Swedish seem to have been decisive for the participants getting their permanent posts. However, the interviewees claim that a basic knowledge of Swedish is one of the factors getting employment. Data concerning learning in formal contexts found in my limited study point at a need for improvements increasing the possibilities for immigrants to learn Swedish. How to extend the amount of speaking activities and opportunities using the language? The demands concerning language skills are said to differ depending on what kind of work it is about. The importance of language skills for those, who are working with people like in nursing is stressed and also the importance to

know how to read and write in Swedish. Knowing Swedish together with other languages Nihad claims being the key factor when he was contracted.

Observing and interviewing teachers, native students and immigrant students at two adult educational institutions, Osman (1999) did not notice much about pedagogical debates on issues related to diversity in his observations at two Swedish adult educational institutions. He points out that the teachers were dedicated but “seem to find it easier to do as little as possible as long as they show “results” or fill the teaching hours” (Osman, 1999:215). Moreover, the participants in the studies conducted by Löfgren & Fägerlind (2000) and Ryding Zink (2002) were also very critical experiencing stereotyped ideas of the concept “being an immigrant” from their introduction courses in Swedish. These statements could be issues for more research.

The language can be used as a mean refusing applicants getting employment, using poor knowledge of Swedish as a reason. Sefika had to attend Swedish education in nursing in spite of the fact that she was experienced and also had a document from the National Swedish Board of Health allowing her working as an assistant nurse. These instances could be examples of discrimination but also employers’ difficulties in evaluating working skills underlined in the studies carried out by Löfgren & Fägerlind (2000) and Ryding Zink (2002). In spite of the measures taken to promote equality and combat discrimination (the Swedish Integration Board), the account “Rapport Integration 2003” published by the National Swedish Integration Board ([http://www.integrationsverket.se/templates/ivNormal\\_5847.aspx](http://www.integrationsverket.se/templates/ivNormal_5847.aspx)) reveals that the improved conditions for immigrants in Sweden at the end of the 1990s has declined both for those who are high educated and low educated. These conditions could also be subjected to further research.

Increasing the number of work practices could improve the possibilities for immigrants getting a job in more than one sense. In the first place, extending the opportunities interacting with Swedish people could probably improve immigrants’ ability to speak Swedish using the language in a natural context, since the time practising Swedish at educational institutions seems to be far too little. However, learning should never be taken for granted. Rismark & Sitter (2003) found that the participants of their studies had different opportunities to communicate and as a consequence managed to improve the language with different results. Offering work practice combined with studies could be an improvement of the conditions for newcomers having to face challenges learning a new language and starting a new life in a foreign environment.

Arzin and Muratka, both having a difficult time during the first part of their arrival in Sweden strongly recommend starting studying Swedish as soon as possible. The first period after having arrived in Sweden, especially refugees are in a bad condition and have many problems to solve. These circumstances might worsen the learning environment in immigrant classes, an important issue to consider, since the learning environment is claimed to be even more important to learning than the subject itself (Ziegler & Durant, 2001). I think, working could bring about a stimulating change of tasks, an offer concerning learning in practice both considering language and society and besides, an opportunity to networking. The learning environment Last but not least it could be an opportunity to show one's capabilities besides language skills. In the long run, this could strengthen the individuals and their self-esteem without putting their ability in Swedish in the foreground.

The participants of my study have told me about their experiences getting employment and learning Swedish. Since then conditions are likely to have become different. Societies change in a speed faster than ever (Castles, 2000, 2003; Friedman, 2000; Giddens, 2000) and Sweden is not an exception (Broomé et al., 2001). Different kinds of initiatives have been tried out to integrate immigrants in Swedish society and institutions learning Swedish for immigrants co-operate with municipal employment offices (the Swedish National Agency for Education. Vuxenutbildning). These activities could possibly be improved by using some kind of incentive making employers attracted to make an effort enhancing the number of jobs and work practice. Welcoming newcomers to their company and contracting trainees involves extra work and responsibility.

Finally, my study is limited having based my conclusions on four immigrants' experiences of getting employment in Sweden and learning Swedish, but my overall understanding of the development of Swedish society is that everyone has to contribute to the facilitation of immigrants' inclusion. One contribution could perhaps be to continue investigating the possibilities finding more examples of opportunities for immigrants to use their strengths and skills.

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## **Appendix**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### **INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS**

Where do you come from?

How long have you been in Sweden?

When did you get your resident permit? After how long time in Sweden?

When did you come to Lilla Edet?

Have you attended courses in Swedish for foreigners, Swedish as a second language or Swedish? How long? Do you have a grade in Swedish?

#### **QUESTIONS DIRECTED TO THE ISSUES:**

##### **A . Immigrants' view about contribution / hindrance to learning**

Tell me about the first years in our community attending the adult education.

What was your first impression?

How have you managed to learn Swedish?

Can you tell me about your best learning strategies?

What do you consider important learning Swedish?

What kind of contact did you have with Swedish students at Komvux in Lilla Edet?

What is your advice for immigrants who want to succeed in learning Swedish?

##### **B. Immigrants' view about contribution / hindrance to employment**

When did you get your work permit?

When did you get your first Swedish employment? When did you get your first employment in our community?

Where do you work now?

Do you work full time or part time?

How did you get your job?

Why did you get this job?

Why were you chosen?

What are the credentials needed to get Swedish employment?

What do you think about the demands of knowing Swedish?

What are the reasons for not getting a job in Lilla Edet?

What is your advice for immigrants who want to succeed in getting a job in Lilla Edet?

#### **COMPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

During the interview I will try to analyse the answers and ask complementary questions getting clearer data (Kvale p.124. The questions translated by me):

Can you tell me more about it?

Can you give a more detailed description of this?

What did you come to think of then at that moment?

Do you mean that.....?

If I have understood you correctly you mean that.....