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**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF INTEGRATION SERVICES IN
ASSISTING IMMIGRANTS FOR EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS**

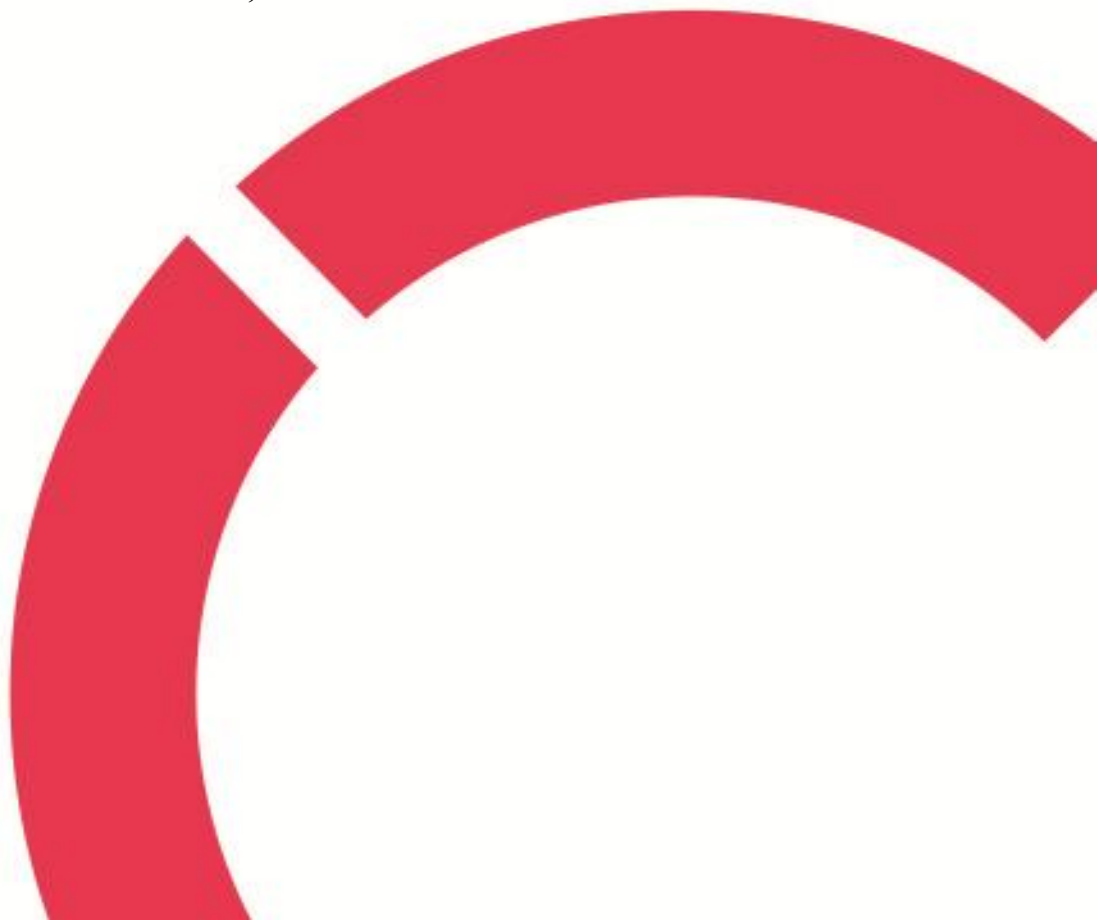
**Analysis of integration services and immigrant employment outcomes in
Jakobstad**

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ABSTRACT

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<p>This thesis was commissioned by the Integration Services in the Jakobstad region. The aim of the thesis was to evaluate the role of Integration Services in assisting immigrants for employment success, identify obstacles for job opportunities and evaluate the collaboration with regional employers.</p> <p>Immigrant labour market integration, Integration Services in Finland, employment barriers, and the role of employers in the integration process were a few topics analysed in the theoretical framework of the study. A qualitative research method was employed to investigate the study data. Semi-structured interviews with employees of the Integration Services in Jakobstad were used to collect data. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. Secondary data were collected from official reports and policy documents.</p> <p>The results identified administrative guidance, language training, career counselling, and networking opportunities as key services provided by the Integration Services. However, a few key barriers were identified, such as inadequate language skills, lack of professional networks, non-recognition of foreign qualifications and cultural differences in the workplace. Employers' engagement in the integration process was identified as a significant factor for employment success.</p> <p>The findings concluded that the Integration Services provide a vital service to achieve immigrant employment outcomes, however, decreasing employment barriers and strengthening the collaboration with employers were identified as key factors affecting the effectiveness of these services.</p>		

<p>Key words Barriers to employment, employers' engagement, employment outcomes, immigrant integration, integration services, labour market policies, qualitative research</p>

CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

ALMPs

Active Labour Market Policies

OECD

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

ABSTRACT

CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

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1 INTRODUCTION

Immigration to Finland has shown significant growth in recent years, and immigrants enter Finland through a variety of pathways, including quota refugees, work-based migration, study-based migration, family reunification and asylum. Accordingly, social inclusion and effective immigrant integration have become essential and need to be developed to secure equal rights while different demographic groups can interact positively with one another. In this context, immigrant employment in the Finnish labour market is a significant factor to pay attention to, as it affects economic growth and promoting social integration. The professional success of immigrants depends on their skills, qualifications and work experience. However, the employment prospects of immigrants face negative effects from obstacles which include their inability to speak the local language, lack of experience working in the area and restricted access to professional connections.

To overcome these obstacles, municipalities, employment offices and non-governmental organizations provide significant support to help immigrants reach their labour market goals. These organizations provide a variety of services, including language training, employment counselling, social activities and collaborations with local companies. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment manages the national immigrant integration programme on a national scale, while regional municipalities and employment authorities assist immigrants throughout their initial settlement process. Additionally, these services can be obtained in English and in additional language options while providing interpreter services based on individual needs.

The study focuses on the Jakobstad region in Western Finland. The municipalities of the Jakobstad region are Jakobstad, Larsmo, Kronoby, Nykarleby, and Pedersöre. Jakobstad is a bilingual region, where people speak both Finnish and Swedish, while immigrants speak English and other foreign languages. It is an export-orientated industrial area that includes several manufacturing, food production, technology, and maritime companies, which provide employment opportunities in the region. Hence, the study aims to examine the role of Integration Services in assisting immigrants' employment success in the Jakobstad region.

The commissioner of this study is the Integration Services in Jakobstad, which provides guidance and assistance to immigrants in the region. The organization functions under the municipality and assists

newcomers in services such as language skills, career guidance and cooperating with employers regarding immigrant employment. The Integration Services operates as a service centre providing essential information to immigrants to integrate into Finnish society. This organization coordinates the reception and integration of quota refugees and asylum seekers who have been assigned to a municipality of residence in the region. The research examines operational services of the Integration Services and evaluates the areas that need to be improved. Furthermore, the study focuses on employers' engagement in the integration process, as it is a crucial factor in gaining successful employment outcomes. Therefore, identifying the cooperation of the Integration Services with employers in the region and the areas that need to be improved, the recruitment process is significant in this study.

The key objective of the study is to identify the role of the Integration Services by examining the insights from the Jakobstad region in supporting immigrant employment outcomes. Accordingly, the study focuses on practices and consulting services to prepare immigrants for the job requirements. Furthermore, the study focuses on barriers that affect immigrants' employment success, such as degree recognition and language requirements. Finally, a few recommendations are developed to improve the services of integration organizations for integrating company requirements with immigrant skills to increase employment rates and social engagement.

The aim of the study is to analyse the support provided by the regional Integration Services for immigrants to successfully enter the local job market. The study focuses into a few main areas including the types of services provided by Integration Services to help immigrants find jobs, the main barriers that immigrants face when looking for work in the region, and the methods used by Integration Services to help immigrants overcome these challenges. The study examines into how Integration Services collaborate with local companies to support their efforts to recruit immigrants and provide better employment opportunities for immigrants.

2 IMMIGRANT AND LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION IN FINLAND

Individuals who have a valid residence permit with a registered address, except for the purpose of tourism, are considered immigrants in Finland. Based on the purpose for entering the country, immigration can be categorized into a variety of groups, such as work-based, studies-based, family reunion, and refugee and asylum-based immigration. (Artemjeff, Attias & Kettunen 2024). Immigrant integration refers to the process of social and cultural inclusion of newcomers into the society, allowing them to use their skills, knowledge and employment abilities. The integration process depends on multiple factors which include educational requirements, training programs, social services, health care services, cultural elements, housing facilities, and employment opportunities. (Teräs, Osman & Eliasson 2024).

The recent significant growth of immigration to Finland has created a need for reform of existing policies. These adjustments aim to provide protection for at-risk individuals while preventing system abuse. According to the Finnish Immigration Service (2026), immigration to Finland reported significant growth between 2023 and 2024. Relatively, immigration-related applications decreased in 2025 due to economic changes and the implementation of new immigration regulations. These migration trends and policy changes highlight a need for strategy changes for effective future immigration trends.

As immigration has increased, a requirement has been created for public services to upgrade the mechanism to support immigrants' needs, including employment and integration (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2026). This process becomes successful when both immigrants and the host country share information and responsibilities related to social acceptance and stability. Even though the integration services provide the initial start of this process, the personal perspective of integration is a long-term process depending on the flexibility and receptiveness of the surrounding society (Artemjeff, Attias & Kettunen 2024).

2.1 Employment as a key indicator

Among all aspects of integration, employment is a key factor since it helps immigrants to reduce dependence on the welfare systems and enhances their economic stability. The employment rate and housing conditions of immigrants in Finland show lower outcomes when compared to the overall population average. The reduced living standards of these individuals result from factors which include

lower income, lack of local networks and inability to speak the local language (Artemjeff, Attias & Kettunen 2024). The local community and employment opportunities serve as essential resources which immigrants require to fulfil their labour market needs and achieve success in their integration process.

Stable employment helps to build social and professional relationships that affect a successful immigrant's integration while facilitating language skills, cultural knowledge and economic integration (Lyytinen & Toom 2019). The growth of immigration contributes to promoting integration as well as a long-term solution for issues such as ageing faced by the country. Since a lack of a skilled force affects Finland's international competitiveness, there is a necessity for work-based immigration. Economic growth in the Finnish context would require immigrants, either skilled migrants or students. The Talent Boost programme, which the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment developed, seeks to bring international experts to Finland in order to fulfil existing workforce requirements. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2026). Even though Jakobstad is a small region, it is an export-based industrial city with the requirement of skilled workers (The Jakobstad Region 2026). Hence, the necessity of employment integration is significant to regional economic competitiveness.

2.2 Integration Services in Finland

Integration Services in Finland provide services for newcomers to integrate into employment, society and personal life. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010) covers activities related to enabling immigrant participation in Finnish society. Newcomers who have valid resident permits are eligible to obtain these services. These acts promote equality and non-discrimination within society. (Finlex 2026). The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment executes policies and regulations related to immigrant integration. The ministry supports newcomers through its language learning programmes and family integration assistance services. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2026) states that integration policies require all stakeholders who work on integration processes to collaborate with each other and with international civil protection organizations. These policies promote the need for commitment to equality, nondiscrimination, and positive attitudes at all administrative levels for integration to be successful.

Services related to integration in Finland are organized through municipal integration programmes and employment services. Municipal Integration Services assist immigrants in settling in with employment, education, and integration and interpreter services when needed (Info Finland 2026). The employment authority and the municipality provide an individualized assessment to evaluate immigrants' skills to promote integration services. These assessments include language training and courses related to skill development to increase their eligibility for the labour market and integration into Finnish society.

Immigrants receive vocational education together with additional training programmes depending on their language skills and their requirement. These courses allow them to develop professional skills and the language level for their integration into the workforce. Wellbeing services also participate in this assessment preparation when required by the employment authority or the municipality. (The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2026) Immigrants receive crucial information related to Finnish society, employment and work-life and the rights and obligations. These authorities highlight that they aim to provide immigrants equal access to information and advice on settling in, integration, and the Finnish work-life balance.

In addition to municipal-level services, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) focuses on labour market and social protection measures in order to improve participation and employment possibilities, especially for those with limited opportunities that face obstacles. The OECD is an organization that acts globally to implement policies and regulations for a better life. The study, "Connecting People with Jobs", explains the impact of active labour market policies (ALMPs) on high-quality jobs and provides suggestions for improvement (OECD 2023). The OECD report shows that Finland's unemployment rate reached higher levels than other OECD countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Immigrants had a significant impact on job search in this situation, together with obstacles such as restricted professional networks and language barriers. The period during which employment returned to the pre-pandemic level was 27 months. Focusing more on ALMPs than the OECD average affected this significant growth in employment and participation rates in Finland. Labour Market Training (LMT) is one of the main aspects under ALMPs that offers a variety of services to enhance eligibility for employment by improving skills according to employer requirements (OECD 2023).

2.3 Role of employers in integration

A successful immigrant employment integration happens through cooperation between government authorities, non-profit organizations, and employers. Hence, employers' participation is essential in long-term immigrant career opportunities, including language and skills development programmes. According to the OECD (2025), employers could help immigrants succeed in the workplace by providing equal recruiting procedures, open job advertisements, on-the-job training, and a flexible work environment. The OECD highlights the importance of employers' active participation in immigrant integration pathways, as it helps the retention of immigrant workers and higher employment rates. Work-based learning programmes are another strategy to boost immigrant employment while reducing the barriers in the work environment. The Integration Works project in Jakobstad focuses on enhancing employment opportunities for immigrants by collaborating with local businesses in the region (Jakobstad 2026).

Employers' perceptions towards foreign workers affect the immigrants' integration into society and workplace diversity (OECD 2023). Further, the study explains that still many employers restrict hiring foreign workers to industries that have labour shortages due to uncertainty about foreign qualifications. The sectors such as healthcare and logistics need demanding skills, and employers' perceptions are significant to support immigrants in achieving relevant skills and qualifications. Employers' attitudes and perceptions assist in developing work diversity and effective immigrant employment outcomes.

Immigrants receive significant support from integration services to adapt to the society and the culture of the host country while improving employment outcomes in accordance with their skills and labour market needs. Artemjeff, Attias and Kettunen (2024) highlight that labour migration serves as a force that drives business growth and international expansion and innovative development. Furthermore, it supports increasing the availability of skilled personnel to meet the labour market demands. Hence, successful immigrant employment results heavily depend on the existing relationship between integration service providers and employers. The integration programmes attract employers according to their understanding of the benefits which diverse workforces bring. Employers need to implement certain measures to improve their recruiting processes in order to recruit immigrants. (Artemjeff, Attias and Kettunen 2024).

Integration service providers collaborate with municipalities, employment authorities, educational institutes and employers in the region to ensure effective integration outcomes. For instance, the Talent

Boost programme is one of the recent programmes coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland. This initiative aims to enhance the attractiveness of work-based and education-based immigrants to reduce the current labour shortage (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2026). The section “3.9 Developing the receptiveness of working life” of the Government Integration Programme 2024–2027 highlights the necessity of improving collaboration with public integration services, employers, and labour authorities to enhance the integration of immigrants into the labour market. These developments help employers strengthen engaging in integration pathways and promote employer-orientated initiatives in the integration planning process. (Bruun 2025)

Many employers in Finland still hesitate to recruit foreign workers due to doubts about their knowledge and skills. In order to assist firms in recruiting immigrants, the integration authorities conduct national initiatives to educate employers about available support services and offer incentives for work-hour language instruction. (Artemjeff, Attias and Kettunen 2024). Furthermore, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment aims to develop labour migration and integration policies, including a diversity policy to encourage employers’ attitudes to increase hiring foreign workers.

2.4 Barriers in immigrant employment

Immigrants get several integration-related services in Finland. However, they still face many challenges when they are aiming for the local labour market. The Finnish labour market shows fundamental differences between immigrants and native citizens because in 2024, 17.8% of immigrants and 7.2% of native people remained unemployed. (Ahmad 2025, 9).

2.4.1 Insufficient language skills

The labour market presents its biggest challenges to immigrants due to lack of necessary language skills. The official languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish; most municipalities use Finnish as their primary language. However, certain municipalities, including the west coastal area, use both languages. According to Teräs, Osman and Eliasson (2024), individuals who do not have sufficient language skills face difficulties when searching for skilled employment opportunities. Lyytinen and Toom (2019) demonstrate that Finnish and Swedish language requirements create a major obstacle which

prevents companies from hiring immigrants since these languages are essential for many industries that include healthcare, trade, restaurants and logistics. This happens as employees of these job positions need to communicate with other stakeholders such as customers, service providers and superiors in the organization. The research from Lyytinen and Toom (2019) shows that customer service and healthcare positions need workers who are fluent in language; however, restaurants and trade sectors provide employment to immigrants who meet their basic language requirements without needing full fluency in Finnish or Swedish.

Bontenbal, Riikonen & Kosonen (2024) reveal that learning Finnish is quite difficult for immigrants, as it has significant linguistic differences from many other languages. Furthermore, many career positions frequently require fluency in Finnish, language skills might result in discrimination and further limit career opportunities for foreigners. Moreover, an OECD report (2018) shows that difficulties in learning a unique language like Finnish affect limited language proficiency and a significant decrease in migrant integration. Hence, immigrants face challenges in obtaining further education and entering the labour market due to accessing mostly to low-skilled jobs. These facts contribute to the increasing immigrant unemployment rate as well as discouraging their job search efforts.

The investigation of language-related employment challenges in European countries requires additional examination since language-related employment issues in Italy demonstrate the same problems which exist in other European countries. According to Ghio, Bratti & Bignami (2022), immigrants face negative employment outcomes in the Italian labour market due to inadequate Italian language skills. They often work in low-skilled fields with difficult working circumstances and minimal professional education. However, the study reveals that immigrant entrepreneurs prefer to recruit employees from their community even if they are not fluent in the language.

Language proficiency in Finland is a crucial factor as an employment requirement as well as for entering certain professional sectors. In addition, certified language proficiency has significant impact on employment possibilities, especially in the public sector and public administration posts. These regulations of language certification emphasize the importance of competence in the language to the Finnish labour market. Furthermore, adequate language skills help immigrants to interact with co-workers and consumers as well as to provide an effective service relevant to the profession.

2.4.2 Non-recognition of foreign qualifications

Finnish employers show a hesitation for immigrant employment, as they refuse to acknowledge foreign professional credentials and international work experience. Previous studies indicate that many qualified immigrants have difficulties in finding employment compared to local people in many European countries due to the non-verification of foreign education (OECD 2024). Immigrant job seekers experience challenges as they hold foreign educational credentials and issues related to the recognition process. According to the study of the OECD (2024), many industries prefer relevant credential certificates, such as recognitions from the Finnish National Agency for Education, to consider immigrant job applications. These requirements occur as employers prefer workers having the qualifications and experience according to the organization's policies and requirements. However, certain employers still doubt recruiting international workers even if qualifications are formally recognized. The recruitment process experiences these doubts when candidates lack fully relevant qualifications or when specific professional qualifications exist under law requirements.

Furthermore, immigrants often come across challenges which lead to underemployment and being less qualified when evaluating their foreign qualifications and experience. An OECD report indicates that foreign-educated immigrants have challenges related to employment suited to their abilities since their credentials are not completely recognized or evaluated (OECD 2023). Many immigrants avoid searching and applying for suitable professions due to the cost, complications and long-term process related to the acknowledgement of foreign qualifications.

The recognition of foreign qualifications of workers does not guarantee employers' positive decisions, as they consider these qualifications to have lower value (OECD 2023). The process of recognizing foreign credentials needs improvement because this will result in better job opportunities for foreigners while decreasing the employment gap between them and native-born workers. Immigrants in Finland encounter difficulties which prevent them from entering the workforce because they struggle to access employment information and translate their formal qualifications into job success. Ahmadinia (2026) explains the situation with an example of a highly educated immigrant with a Finnish master's degree. The explanation shows that the highly educated immigrant who held a Finnish master's degree could not acquire consistent work in his field for ten years. The example demonstrates how immigrants experience underemployment because they work in jobs which do not match their actual skills.

2.4.3 Limited professional networks and the hidden job market

The professional network has a significant impact on searching jobs in Finland. Most jobs are filled based on direct contacts, recommendations and internal networks. Work in Finland (2026) demonstrates that the labour market for foreigners is quite challenging, as approximately 60% to 70% of job positions are hidden from the public. Many job seekers rely on published vacancies; however, the number of opportunities is higher than the actual vacant positions. Factors such as unplanned employee exits and methods of saving time and reducing cost affect the increasing hidden job market. Immigrants face difficulties and competition since they heavily rely on published job applications, as they do not have any lasting professional connections. A few job seekers secure employment through these open job lists, while many qualified individuals select low-skilled alternative positions.

Social networks, together with community relationships, maintain specific operational boundaries, which they need to stay within their designated geographic areas. Weber (2024) shows that utilizing social networks in finding employment depends on the host country. In Sweden, the local community provides strong support to migrant men who wish to enter the workforce. The study shows that both men and women in the Netherlands possess equal access to professional networks, yet female migrants demonstrate reduced interest in using social networks for their job search. The study shows that people select which details to share with outside parties, as it affects the internal recruitment process. The process of evaluating employees' potential within a company requires assessment of their referral connections. Young people in Sweden receive immediate access to employment opportunities and successful job results because their parents refer them to work. Having referrals is one of the key aspects of evaluating employees' potential within a company. For instance, young people in Sweden get quick access to job opportunities and effective employment outcomes due to parents' referrals.

2.4.4 Cultural differences in work practices

People from various cultural backgrounds who bring different cultural practices and beliefs to the workplace create a situation which demonstrates cultural diversity. Different labour markets operate according to two main elements, which include cultural norms and workplace practices. The lack of cultural knowledge about different cultures hinders immigrants from learning to work in new job environments and from fulfilling the needs of their employers in their new job market. A study by Bontenbal, Riikonen and Kosonen (2024) explains that immigrants struggle to enter the job market since due

to lack of knowledge about how the local labour market operates and how employment offices and integration services function. Employees from the home country failed to understand their work rights because home country laws and host country regulations differed from each other. According to earlier research, employers frequently perceive different cultural norms as barriers because they rely on their own cultural perspectives and are unlikely to accept different cultural aspects. Berlina and Cavicchia (2023) explain that people should adapt their behaviour to local standards and later intercultural norms and employer expectations to stop others from undervaluing their skills and work capacity.

Language differences in a cross-cultural organization affect effective communication. Hwang (2025) reveals that multicultural organizations face difficulties in understanding individuals from different cultures due to language differences. These misunderstandings or unclear feedback often led to executing duties incorrectly and spending more time to rectify errors. The combination of active listening with necessary explanations creates a method to decrease miscommunication. Communication aspects such as tone, pronunciation and vocabulary in languages show different patterns of usage throughout various countries.

Facial expressions and body language also mean various things in different cultures. Hwang (2025) shows that some expressions such as facial movements, eye contact and hand gestures mean respect in one culture while the same signs are considered negatively in another culture. For instance, eye contact is significant in Western culture, as it builds trust among coworkers. Workplace hierarchy is another factor that needs understanding among different cultures, as it affects decision-making powers and the way of addressing employees in the organization. Research demonstrates that providing employees opportunities for language training and cultural workshops helps to reduce miscommunication and misunderstanding as well as increase productivity in the workplace (Hwang 2025).

2.5 Integration Services in the Jakobstad region

Sections 1 and 6 of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010) highlight that municipalities carry the duties relevant to immigrant equality, participation, and equal access to services (Bruun 2025). Certain policies were implemented recently to engage in employment-orientated integration and to collaborate with employment authorities and municipalities to enhance the integration process. According to this framework, regional integration service providers play an important role in converting these national policies into effective support systems in practice.

The Service Point for Newcomers in Jakobstad was founded in 2016 and financed by the municipality of the region. It acts as the integration service providing a centre for immigrants in the Jakobstad region. The Integration Services operates its services in Jakobstad, Nykarleby, Kronoby, Pedersöre and Larsmo, and the service points are located in Jakobstad, Nykarleby and Kronoby, which newcomers visit and seek assistance from. However, all immigrants living throughout the region have the possibility of receiving integration-related services. The service point provides information related to public authorities such as the police of Finland, Kela, the tax office, and TE services. In addition, the organization supports and guides regarding language courses, health care, daycare, leisure activities, housing and work rights and obligations-related services. (Jakobstad 2026).

A bilingual environment is one of the unique characteristics of the region; therefore, the Service Point provides services in Swedish, Finnish and English as well as in other languages and with interpreters whenever needed. Immigrants who are unable to obtain the assessment related to the integration process from the TE office also can receive an initial assessment from the Service Point. Moreover, the Service Point publishes information and news related to services on social media pages on Facebook and Instagram (Jakobstad 2026). Since social participation is a crucial part of integration, the service point assists immigrants by connecting them with local organizations and community events that help in finding job opportunities.

2.6 Conceptual framework of the study

The study's conceptual framework was developed through theoretical analysis of main areas which include integration services, the labour market situation of immigrants, and the employment obstacles that immigrants face together as well as the role of the employers in employment integration. The framework evaluates the role of Integration Services in Jakobstad in immigrant employment success. According to the literature, employment can be identified as a key component of successful integration since it promotes economic stability, social inclusion and long-term stability. According to previous studies, immigrants still face difficulties in finding career opportunities in Finland. These barriers include insufficient professional connections, foreign degrees remaining unrecognised, inadequate language proficiency and different workplace standards. Even though updated and structured policies related to immigrant employment were implemented in Finland, facts show that there is a significant gap between immigrant and native people's unemployment rates.

Integration services aim to reduce the employment gap between immigrants and the local labour market. These services include providing labour market training, career guidance, language programmes and skills assessment. At the regional level, the Integration Services in Jakobstad provides the services according to the requirements of regional employers and immigrants. The strategies used to collaborate with employers and address challenges in employment affect the effectiveness of these services. Since the employer's role in integration is a crucial factor in integration services related to the immigrant employment process, employers provide recruitment offers, on-the-job training and equal opportunities in the work environment. Hence, corporations with employers assist Integration Services to create a strong pathway to an effective immigrant employment outcome.

According to the previous studies and findings, the conceptual framework of this study demonstrates the relationship between Integration Services and immigrant employment outcomes in the Jakobstad region. Job training, language skills, assessing foreign skills and career guidance are all key factors in improving integration service standards. These services focus on reducing employment barriers, such as non-recognition of qualifications, cultural integration, and limited professional networks. Hence, Integration Services focus on improving the integration process, cooperate with employers and reduce these barriers to gain a positive outcome of immigrant employment.

Since the Jakobstad region is an export-orientated industrial area with a bilingual environment, possibilities and requirements are created for immigrant job seekers. The local labour market conditions together with employer partnerships determine how effectively these services function. The research investigates how the Integration Services help immigrants to achieve employment success in Jakobstad.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter describes the methodological strategy applied for examining the role of integrating services in encouraging immigrants' employment success in the Jakobstad region. The study methodology includes discussions on research design, data collection methods, and data analysis processes, as well as research limitations and ethical considerations. The research methodology was designed in accordance with the main objective of the thesis. It analyses how the Integration Services support immigrants in employment search and identifies the major challenges and success factors within the regional context. The qualitative research of study is suitable for this study, as social, institutional, and personal factors affect employment integration.

3.1 Research design

Research designs are plans which enable researchers to make decisions about their study from initial assumptions until their final techniques for gathering and analysing data. Researchers typically use two main research approaches, qualitative and quantitative research. The objective of the qualitative research is to analyse and comprehend the interpretations that individuals or organizations make of social problems. Researchers use developed questions, data generally gathered in the participant's context, data analysis according to the collected data to a broader concept and evaluating the significance of the information. To evaluate ideas and conduct statistical analysis on their numerical data, researchers employ the quantitative research approach, which focuses on measurable relationships such as testing of hypothesis and statistical analysis between variables (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 4).

The study applies a qualitative research design to explore the role of the Integration Services in supporting immigrants' employment success in the Jakobstad region. It aims to evaluate experiences, perceptions, and challenges encountered by integration service providers and immigrants. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this study since it allows exploration of social issues and identification of different individual experiences and relationships that cannot be measured using numerical data. This approach helps to identify the barriers that affect the effectiveness of services, including organizational, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors, and it provides essential facts to develop and improve service delivery. Hence, a qualitative approach is considered for the study, as it enables

in-depth understanding of how the Integration Services operate in practice towards immigrants' employment success.

An exploratory approach to qualitative research aims to provide insights with a flexible, unstructured methodology such as using focus groups and in-depth interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of challenging issues. Exploratory approach studies typically use smaller sample sizes and provide flexibility in both data collection and analysis. (Dokter 2023). Hence, this approach is suitable for analysing complex social phenomena, such as immigrant employment outcomes experiences might differ significantly between individuals. Furthermore, the study follows an exploratory approach, as the study aims to evaluate the integration services through insights into real-life situations and practices related to immigrant employment outcomes. It provides flexibility in data collection and analysis as well as manages interview questions according to experiences and backgrounds among participants.

3.2 Data collection methods

This study used both primary and secondary data as data collection methods to obtain a deep understanding of the role of the Integration Services in supporting immigrant employment success. Multiple data sources increase the validity of the research since they allow researchers to evaluate and understand results from different sources through integration. Primary data refers to data gathered by the researcher using methods that align with their research objectives. Primary data collection methods include interviews, surveys, focus groups or observations according to personal insights into participants' experiences, perspectives, and knowledge (Bryman 2016). In this study, semi-structured interviews with employees of the Integration Services in Jakobstad served as the primary data collection method.

Semi-structured interviews in qualitative research employ scheduled open-ended questions to gather specific concepts from participant responses. The research topic is defined by the open-ended question, allowing the interviewer and interviewee to engage in an extensive discussion. In accordance with the framework, the interviewer follows an interview guide; however, it enables the interviewer to ask follow-up questions or modify the arrangement of questions based on the responses given by the participants (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 94).

Interviewees were chosen based on their roles and experience within the Integration Services. These included employees working in refugee support, employment-related initiatives, administrative tasks, and employment coordination. Seven participants with different backgrounds and professional responsibilities in the Integration Services were involved in the study. All participants had from 1.5 years to over 14 years of working experience in the field of immigrant-related integration work.

Face-to-face interviews are conducted based on availability and preference. However, due to unavoidable circumstances, one interview was conducted online. Every interview took between forty and sixty minutes. All interviews, including the online session, were conducted in English. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and then used to analyse data. The data collection process used ethical guidelines by obtaining informed consent from participants while protecting their identities and providing them with the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The interviews focused on several key areas. Services provided by the Integration Services for immigrants, such as language courses, social events to enhance networks and work-life guidance, are some of the key areas focused on in the interviews. Additional questions were included on cooperation with municipalities, employers, and other organizations, as well as perceived barriers affecting immigrant employment success. Finally, participants were also asked to share their perspectives regarding the current challenges and also to provide recommendations for enhancing the integration of services.

In addition to primary data, the study also utilized secondary data, which includes data that has previously been acquired and is available from other sources (Taherdoost 2021). It is generally less expensive and more easily accessible than the original data. Secondary data for this study are often used to compare the results of primary data. Secondary data collected from municipal websites, official Finnish government institutions, and publicly available documents. The data included policy reports, integration initiatives, and guidelines related to employment integration. Utilizing these sources provided a comprehensive understanding of the administrative structure and connected with insights from the interviews to provide a deeper analysis of integration practices in the Jakobstad region.

The use of both primary and secondary data sources allowed researchers to perform a more comprehensive analysis. The interviews allowed gathering data related to real work experiences and professional challenges, while the secondary data provided information related to organizational practices, rules and regulations, and policy guidelines. Integrating both data allowed the study to gain a better

understanding of the employment assistance systems and integration strategies of the Jakobstad region.

3.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is used in the study to understand the extensive data collected through semi-structured interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis works as a method which enables researchers to find, study and present research results through patterns which exist in their data. The research method allows researchers to create an organized structure which presents the lived experiences of integration staff members as they investigate research questions through their personal narratives. This method provided a deeper understanding of how the Integration Services in Jakobstad operates including their role, challenges, and strategies in supporting immigrant employment success.

In this study, the analysis was conducted in several stages. First, according to the familiarization with the data, the study started with transcribing all recorded interviews into text for further analysis. Multiple readings of these data helped to identify key points such as language barriers and employer hesitation for a deeper understanding of the dataset. Secondly, data was separated into meaningful segments to generate initial codes. These meaningful insights were created according to research objectives such as hidden job market, employer attitudes, immigrants' challenges and the Integration Services practices. The coding process based on the real experiences according to the recurring concepts and practices shared by participating employees.

The study used initial codes from its analysis process to develop main themes through code combination of related concepts. Codes that related language barriers to the recruitment needs of companies seeking applicants with native language abilities were identified as structural employment barriers. The integration of services as a bridge to employment theme was designed by combining codes such as employment guidance, CV assistance, and skills assessment. Strategies to overcome barriers to employment themes were developed through support such as networking activities, language training, and internship programmes. The theme of employer participation in integration processes developed from data analysis, which covered employer perspectives, employment practices, and collaboration with integration services.

The research found this stage essential since it created the basis for the data analysis which followed. Then these themes were examined to ensure they accurately represented individual interview extracts and the overall dataset context. The research evaluated themes related to service delivery and employment challenges for immigrants, as well as the Integration Services collaboration with regional employers. The study presented its findings through structured components which defined each research theme and used evidence-based content to explain the themes.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the process. All participants received information related to the aim and process of the thesis. Consent from all participants was obtained, as well as voluntary participation. In the study, anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. The data obtained from interviews were utilized solely for academic research purposes and therefore required handling data securely to maintain participants' privacy. Participants could withdraw from the study whenever they chose without experiencing any consequences. Efforts were taken to ensure that interview questions did not lead to inconvenience or damage to the participants.

4 THE COMMISSIONER: INTEGRATION SERVICES

The commissioner of this study is the Integration Services, which operates under the municipality of the Jakobstad region. The organization operates as the main facility for receiving immigrants and helping them integrate into society, which was established to respond to the growing immigration rates in Western Finland. The organization assists with the processing and settlement of refugees and asylum seekers who have been assigned to municipal areas around the region. The Integration Services collaborates with multiple authorities, local municipalities, volunteers and other regional organizations to integrate these immigrant groups into the local community. The organization provides essential services to five municipalities which include Jakobstad, Larsmo, Kronoby, Nykarleby, and Pedersöre while the Service Point for newcomers operating in Jakobstad, Nykarleby, and Kronoby (Jakobstad.fi 2026).

According to the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010), Finnish municipalities are required to ensure the integration of immigrants into Finnish society (Finlex 2026). Basic municipal services, together with employment and economic administration services, implement specific measures to enhance integration through their provided services. The system provides immigrants with information about their rights and Finnish working life and social integration and the system of services that supports these efforts. Furthermore, the Integration Services functions as the key Employment Services for managing labour market operations since the 2025 National Employment Reform (TE24) assigns employment duties to municipalities (Jakobstad.fi 2026). In accordance, the Integration Services offers a friendly, approachable environment where immigrants can reach out for assistance without doubts or barriers.

The Integration Services provide services related to social and personal well-being as they influence the success of employment. To achieve these objectives, the organization functions in different ways, such as administrative guidance, social inclusion, and labour market preparation. Moving to another country presents many challenges such as language barriers, complicated administrative bureaucracy and cultural differences. Hence, the Integration Services provide quota refugees with guidance in all types of matters during the two years of integration period. The organization assists newcomers with Kela for child benefits and housing allowances and the Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV) for residency registration and personal identity codes. In addition, the organization assists work-based immigrants in applying for a tax card and for the progressive taxation system. (Jakobstad.fi 2026).

The process of integration requires assessment of both social factors and economic indicators. This process establishes healthcare, childcare and recreational facilities through its connections between immigrants and local events and non-governmental organizations. The strategy creates higher possibilities of immigrants establishing long-term residence in the Jakobstad region, as it helps them build social and community relationships. The initial assessment for newcomers who are not Employment Services customers is a key service provided by the Integration Services. This evaluation helps to identify immigrants' previous education, language skills, and professional goals to create a personalized integration plan including Finnish or Swedish language studies, vocational training, or social orientation courses.

The Integration Works project (2024–2026) is an initiative under the development project run by the Integration Services in the Jakobstad region. The organization aims to fulfil immigrant employment needs as well as to reduce the employment gap between native people and newcomers. The main target group for the project includes immigrants in the five municipalities of the Jakobstad region with less or without work. The Integration Services focuses on collaborating with employers in the region while working together with organizations including the Employment and Economic Development Office, the Jakobstad Region Development Company Concordia and educational providers. (Jakobstad.fi)

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter provides an in-depth examination of the research results which were obtained through the qualitative interviews conducted with staff members at the Jakobstad Integration Services. These staff members' professional experiences and observational knowledge serve as a bridge between theoretical integration models and the real-world obstacles that newcomers experience. The study seeks to identify the main barriers and operational deficiencies that require system improvements while investigating how the Integration Services help immigrants find employment.

This study used a thematic approach to analyse the data collected from interviews, as it helps to identify the patterns and recurring themes in different perspectives. The role and responsibilities of staff members at the Integration Services and types of services provided for immigrant employment success, including language barriers, labour market challenges, employer attitudes, and networking opportunities, as well as recommendations for improvement, are a few key themes that emerged through the study. The themes have a significant impact on the objective of the study, which is to investigate how the Integration Services help immigrants succeed in employment.

The results show that while the Integration Services provide a wide range of services, a few structural and practical issues affect and limit their operational efficiency. The study findings are presented in this chapter together with a thorough analysis of their overall impact.

5.1 Overview of Integration Services in the Jakobstad region

The results show that the Integration Services in the Jakobstad Region provide diverse and efficient services to a wide range of immigrant populations. For instance, the findings reveal that these services are available to all newcomers, including refugees, foreign workers, international students, and those arriving through family ties. It reflects the region's entire approach to addressing local labour shortages and fostering long-term demographic well-being. According to the findings, different immigrant groups have different levels of knowledge of the services that are offered. For instance, non-refugee immigrants often show a lack of awareness about the resources available to them. This shows a gap between services provided and the outcomes that affect the efficiency of the efforts of the Integration Services.

5.2 Roles and responsibilities in Integration Services

The interviews reveal that the Integration Services in the Jakobstad region function through a variety of roles which provide both direct client assistance and administrative tasks. The positions described through interviews show differentiated responsibilities which extend from basic client assistance work to high-level strategic management tasks. The staff members cooperate with each other regarding the work process, as it understands that successful integration needs both detailed, personalized solutions and complete organizational coordination.

During the interviews, many participants highlighted that their work was mostly practical and client focused. For instance, one participant has over two years of working experience with tasks related to the integration of refugees and assists their adaptation process to Finnish daily life. This adaptation process applies to the statutory integration period of two years for all individuals who have been granted a municipal placement in the Jakobstad region. These tasks aim to make newcomers independent, including providing information on housing, daily activities, and access to various services. One interviewee described that the level of support depends on the customer since they have different cultural backgrounds, educational levels and digital proficiency.

Other positions are considered focused on employment-related activities. Individuals who work as employment coordinators help immigrants find jobs and opportunities for learning. Clients have different requirements such as background assessments, support with CV writing, and information regarding local employment. Another participant described the job role, which included creating CVs and related documents and providing CV links while assisting customers with their job applications. This emphasized the importance of cultural translation and the employment coordinators' role in assisting clients in showcasing their abilities according to the standards of Finnish companies for job applications and interviews.

The findings of the interviews show that some of the staff members' roles are more strategic. According to one participant's role, the job tasks include regional operations through their work with multiple municipalities. For instance, a few of the responsibilities include funds management, ensuring compliance with legislation, and supporting staff. These results demonstrate the significance of the organization's structure in providing integration services to customers.

The study's findings show that general service point officers play an important role in supporting diverse immigrant groups. They support migrants with residency permit applications and public service access, and the level of the service depends on their requirements and cultural backgrounds. Unless for individuals who enter through official refugee processes, the role serves as a main entrance point, allowing newcomers to receive necessary assistance. Furthermore, the interview results show that certain work positions need people to assist individuals with both language support and social integration. According to this role, the staff members guide people towards both structural educational programmes and other study options, which include community activities and language cafés.

The results demonstrate that employees use their employment strategies at networking events and recruiting programmes to link immigrants with local companies. The initiatives have goals such as assisting companies that consider it challenging to recruit immigrants and facilitating regular interactions between employers and job seekers to reach the hidden labour market to apply for positions which are not published. In addition, according to the findings, certain staff members engaged in project-based activities to improve integration outcomes. This team organizes training programmes including workshops, certification courses, and employment-related activities. These projects allow the staff members to investigate new approaches and adapt to changing labour market demands as well as improving operational success.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the Integration Services in the Jakobstad region work collaboratively together with various roles, including personalized client services and employment-focused jobs. In addition, the administrative and strategic functions of the organization work together to provide essential resources which facilitate efficient service operations. These findings highlight the significance of the need for strong cooperation among staff members to achieve successful outcomes for immigrants.

5.3 Scope of support and practical assistance

The findings reveal that the main objective of the Integration Service Point is to bridge the gap between initial settlement and active participation in society. The services are mainly based on practical-

ity. For instance, the staff members assist newcomers by guiding them through the complicated administrative tasks, such as the application process for residency permits. Additionally, refugees who arrive in the city will often start receiving housing and basic furnishings immediately.

The participants highlighted that direct employment assistance is a significant part of their daily activities. The support related to employment includes mapping immigrants' backgrounds, study history, and previous work experience as well as practical skills like having a driver's license. Furthermore, the staff support them in creating a CV and provide an accessible online link for newcomers who are facing language or digital literacy barriers. The study's findings demonstrate that integration services are crucial resources that assist immigrants in addressing their initial challenges as they get prepared for job search activities.

5.4 The 'Integration Works' project

The findings demonstrate that the 'Integration Works' project is a key element in implementing the current integration plan in this Jakobstad region. According to the data, the European Social Fund finances this project, which operates in five towns in the region to provide direct support for immigrants who need help finding job opportunities and developing their professional paths. One participant highlighted that the project focused on specific practical programmes which provide essential services for newcomers.

The data reveals that the Integration Services achieved its goals by providing multilingual support for Finnish hygiene certification tests which hold significant importance for the local food industry. Participants stated that it was one of the successful tasks organized through the 'Integration Work' project. Furthermore, the project conducted workshops and sessions which enabled immigrants to interact with staffing agencies and local companies. These initiatives demonstrate how successful project management can be in addressing certain labour market issues.

5.5 Employment support services and labour market entry

The research shows that integration services which connect immigrant skills with existing job requirements provide essential support for their entry into the Finnish workforce. This organization provides

job search support, educating immigrants on how to apply for jobs in Finland while assisting them in creating their resumes and cover letters. The participants clarified that many immigrants require assistance due to their insufficient knowledge of Finnish job application standards. According to participants' perspectives, the organization seeks to increase the possibility that immigrants will be contacted for interviews through these strategies. These findings show that these services related to job applications boost the effectiveness of showcasing the relevant skills and experiences and their confidence for searching for employment.

According to the findings, career coaching and assistance are another crucial service. In order to recommend appropriate career or educational options, staff members evaluate the clients' educational history, work experience, and language proficiency. Using this personalized assessment, immigrants have access to potential career paths based on their present circumstances. In addition, the participants highlighted that seeking training programmes and internship opportunities are also crucial for newcomers to gain Finnish employment experience. Even though many internship programmes are unpaid, these job placements are crucial resources for employees to improve their working skills and language proficiency while building their professional networks.

The findings demonstrate that despite these efforts, entering the workforce is still challenging. According to the participants, they encourage immigrants to accept any job that becomes available, regardless of whether it meets their qualifications. This illustrates the current labour market situation and the significance of gradual transition to employment. Furthermore, initial employment creates local references. One staff member stated that a job seeker with a local reference has a significantly greater chance of expanding in their profession since employers can verify their performance at work. These findings demonstrate that success is achieved when a client gets work at their preferred position, fulfils their responsibilities, and forms an identity for themselves in society.

5.6 Success stories

Despite institutional barriers, the interviews showed clear examples of employment success achieved through these useful strategies. For instance, a person from another country with a master's degree and extensive business experience was hired as a sales manager 6 months after his arrival. Another respondent explained that one woman faced her driver's licence tests while she studied Swedish until reaching advanced proficiency and eventually obtained a teaching assistant position.

5.7 Barriers to immigrant employment

According to the conceptual framework of this study, it was found that the respondents highlighted a variety of significant structural barriers that prevented immigrants from effectively integrating into the local labour market.

5.7.1 Language proficiency as the main barrier

Lack of language skills was the primary obstacle that every participant found most challenging to deal with. This concern becomes more challenging to resolve since the Jakobstad region is multilingual. Depending on where they aim to live permanently and work, immigrants must choose between studying Finnish or Swedish. According to the study's findings, many Finnish companies expect a higher level of language skills before employment. This restricts newcomers from learning the language through employment.

A respondent with many years of experience in the field compared the Finnish and Norwegian systems. Companies in Norway are more likely to recruit English-speaking immigrants as they believe these people will learn the language through employment. Moreover, mothers and female immigrant workers who wish to work yet are unemployed for a lengthy period are more severely impacted by the lack of language fluency. The respondents mentioned that they provide information related to activity courses for immigrants who have lower language skills to develop useful everyday spoken language abilities that boost their confidence and keep them from failing.

5.7.2 Non-recognition of foreign qualifications

Another main obstacle to immigrant employment outcomes is the lack of official recognition for foreign educational credentials. The findings reveal that immigrants with degrees that are not recognized are guided by integration staff members toward both national degree recognition processes and translation services. Interviewees stated that they guide the clients towards the local educational institutions to affect credit transfers for university-level credentials. Moreover, the data show that this process is time-consuming and costly, applicants are forced to search for alternative employment opportunities

that will work for their clients. For instance, due to the failure to access employment possibilities based on their knowledge, many immigrants find themselves forced to choose low-skilled job opportunities.

5.7.3 Limited professional networks and the hidden job market

The study's findings provide strong evidence for previous research on the hidden job market. The findings highlighted that professional networks are crucial in the Jakobstad area. For instance, a respondent stated that applicants often enhance the possibility when the applicant knows someone who knows someone from the network.

The data indicates that the recent expansion of the hidden employment market was due to a specific legal basis. According to labour market requirements, job seekers are required to apply for a specific number of job positions per month. Employers found the recruiting process challenging because of the large number of job applications they received from applicants who lacked both interest in the opportunities and the abilities required for the specified roles. To avoid these administrative challenges, companies often rely on internal networks and recommendations, pool the best personnel, and reduce advertising job opportunities.

Data shows that staff members of the Integration Services frequently encourage newcomers to build social networks through their interests, free community events, and leisure activities in order to address this challenge. Immigrants get an opportunity to meet locals who can assure them of their personality through Social Wednesday events and language cafés, which gives them access to job opportunities that have not been publicly published.

5.7.4 Cultural differences and workplace demands

Before integrating into Finnish work culture, people need to adapt to its traditions. The integration staff members emphasize that the Finnish concept of punctuality is one of the crucial workplace principles. For instance, the term "on time" really demands they arrive five minutes before their allocated time, while coffee breaks function as scheduled times which employees need to follow. The employees provide their all to educating immigrants about their legal rights and responsibilities so they can stay

away from unethical circumstances. The statement recommends immigrants against accepting positions that do not have contracts since formal contracts and tax payments safeguard their rights to workplace safety and national insurance.

5.8 The role of employers in integration

A significant finding from this study was that immigrants' integration and employment success depend not only on the services provided by integration service providers, but local employers also need to collaborate with the integration service providers to enhance the success of immigrant employment outcomes.

5.8.1 Employer perception

The data findings indicate that a significant number of regional companies have concerns about recruiting immigrants. A few respondents explained this situation, like a few company owners consider that hiring immigrants is an uncomfortable situation due to business owners' preference for speaking Swedish, Finnish or a regional dialect and the lack of exposure to other countries. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that employers often prefer demanding fluency in Swedish or Finnish as a workplace safety method. One respondent suggested that these linguistic standards need to be flexible by citing some companies in the region that had effectively used their internal corporate language as English without it affecting business operations.

Despite these circumstances, findings show a few examples for immigrant workers with limited language proficiency being given employment possibilities by the companies. These companies often report positive feedback and successful immigrant integration through their work. A few interviewees explained that these employers see immigrant employees as highly motivated, committed to their jobs, and willing to learn new skills that will help them successfully overcome the language barriers. Eventually, workers who improve their communication abilities become loyal and valuable team members. Furthermore, these employers have access to new perspectives through cross-cultural interactions where workplaces with a diverse workforce can provide better results. These findings related to success stories demonstrate the importance of giving opportunities to immigrants, which cause mutual benefits for both employers and employees.

5.8.2 Collaboration and overcoming concerns

According to the interview data, integration staff physically visit business locations to develop strong corporate relationships in order to build confidence and share information related to immigrant recruitments. In addition, the staff members organize workshops as awareness programmes on how to create inclusive workplaces that reduce expectations based on cultural differences. The study's findings demonstrate that employer involvement is a crucial factor in determining successful integration outcomes. Hence, employers' active participation is significant to enhancing the effectiveness of integration services.

Furthermore, the respondents highlighted the importance of transparency in immigrants' job applications. The staff members stated that immigrant applicants need to present their actual language skills, other skills and experiences instead of using artificial intelligence or translation software to create a perfect Finnish-language resume. For instance, employers often accept minor mistakes such as spelling mistakes instead of identifying applicants' inability to speak the language even when the applicants highlighted the language proficiency on their resumes.

6 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to explore the role of the Integration Services in achieving employment outcomes for immigrants in the Jakobstad region. This chapter combines practical study findings with the theoretical immigrant integration framework established in Chapter 2, as well as Finnish employment and labour market research findings. The report provides realistic recommendations to the identified challenges and limitations.

6.1 Integration Services as a pathway to employment

The first significant question in this study was on the types of support given by integration services to help immigrants find employment. The findings indicate that the Integration Services in Jakobstad acts as a key connection between newly arriving immigrants and employment opportunities. The services act as a bridge between immigrants and employment systems, providing administrative support, job search services, and training resources. This approach illustrates the concept of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) by focusing on improving opportunities for employment through skill development and active involvement in the job market.

However, the data suggests that Integration Services play a more important role rather than just delivering services. According to the study's theoretical literature, immigrants require further assistance resources for the social, cultural, and administrative aspects of their settlement process in order to successfully integrate into the workforce, such as language training, cultural orientation programs, and guidance on navigating local systems. The organization acts as a bridge between immigrants and the labour market. Their role enables individuals to build up both social ties and economic stability. The study supports earlier research that shows that integration works as an economic, social, and institutional process.

Project-based initiatives, such as the 'Integration Works' project, illustrate the active approach of the Integration Services in the Jakobstad region and align with the OECD's (2023) active labour market policies. Furthermore, providing multilingual certification assistance, such as hygiene passports, the Integration Services focus on fulfilling immigrants' specific requirements of the local labour market.

To improve employment preparedness, the Integration Services could offer different language learning programmes that operate flexibly and provide training in real-life work environments. The integration of part-time jobs and language learning should be implemented to train immigrants since it allows them to improve their language skills via real-world experience rather than requiring them to develop high language fluency prior to starting a job.

6.2 Systemic barriers in immigrant labour market integration

The study's second research question aimed to identify the main barriers that immigrants face, as well as the methods by which these challenges are addressed. The findings reveal that immigrants in the Jakobstad region often face challenges related to employment. There is significant proof in the available research that language proficiency is the most significant barrier. The study provides strong evidence for the findings of Teräs, Osman and Eliasson (2024) that individuals with limited language skills encounter significant challenges in finding professional positions.

Since Jakobstad is a bilingual region, immigrants must choose between the Finnish and Swedish languages according to their preferences and career goals. The Integration Services provide guidance related to both language training programmes such as structured language courses and language cafés that allow customers to improve their language abilities. The findings suggest that language competency serves as a tool to facilitate communication and creates fundamental requirements for job assessment. The requirement for advanced language abilities prior to employment makes it difficult for immigrants to obtain work since they are unable to apply their language skills in practical situations. To address this issue, it is recommended to introduce employment-based language training programmes that will result in improved language training opportunities.

The study provided strong evidence for the presence of a hidden employment market in Finland. Work in Finland (2026) revealed that up to 70% of jobs are not published, as well as interviewees indicated that local companies rely on their internal networks and employee referrals to fill job vacancies in order to avoid the administrative burden of open applications. To overcome this situation, the integration staff members assist immigrants in creating social connections through community events and Social Wednesday events, which supports the argument of Weber (2024) that social networks are necessary

for accessing the labour market. According to these findings and arguments, integration service providers could be boosting ongoing networking activities, including social events, mentorship programmes and community-based activities, while encouraging engagement in cultural and social activities to find out hidden job opportunities.

The study's findings show that immigrants in Finland experience low levels of employment, which is in alignment with OECD 2024 studies that show employers are hesitant to recognize foreign qualifications. The Integration Services encourages immigrants regarding the process of degree recognition and credit transfers, however, this process is time-consuming and expensive, which leads immigrants into unskilled professions, as noted by Ahmadiania (2026). As a recommendation for recognition processes, financial and administrative resources can be distributed while introducing programmes and short certification courses and clear qualification pathways.

The theoretical framework emphasizes that the lack of understanding of the labour structure reduces integration progress. The participants stated that immigrants need to learn Finnish punctuality and workplace standards since these norms are necessary for their adaptation. Integration staff often arrange workshops to educate newcomers on workplace cultural expectations as well as their legal rights in order to protect them from exploitation and misunderstandings. Continuing and expanding these workshops and training programmes could help immigrants to increase their understanding and opportunities.

6.3 Employer engagement and labour market dynamics

The following research question addressed how successfully Integration Services collaborated with local companies to increase immigrant recruitment. The data of the study revealed that successful employment of immigrants is highly dependent on the immigrant's preparedness and the employer's openness, which aligns with the concept of "two-way labour market integration" discussed by Lyytinen and Toom (2019). Furthermore, as evidence to OECD's (2023) findings that many employers are concerned about hiring foreign workers due to uncertainties, the findings of the study demonstrate that many employers face challenges to hire immigrants due to workplace safety concerns and cultural differences.

The Integration Services implements several strategies to overcome this situation. Staff members at the Integration Services visit companies in the region to build trust, share information and conduct workshops to create a diverse work environment. These strategies align with the objectives of the Government Integration Program 2024-2027, which is stated in the theoretical framework. However, there is evidence that some companies receive positive outcomes through hiring immigrants even with low levels of language skills since they are motivated and provide a variety of perspectives to the workplace. This reveals that the effort of the Integration Services in promoting openness and skills-based recruiting have a significant impact on immigrant employment outcomes. Furthermore, to address this situation, the Integration Services could expand services such as awareness programmes, experience-sharing events, mentorship schemes and wage support initiatives as well as promote stories of success from companies that hire immigrants.

7 CONCLUSION

The main objective of the study was to explore the influence of the Jakobstad Integration Services in promoting immigrant employment success. The study focused on how the Integration Services assists immigrants in finding employment, as well as to identify the main challenges to their employment and to evaluate their collaboration with companies in the local area. The study employed a qualitative methodology, and data collected through semi-structured interviews with seven staff members in Integration Services. The semi-structured interviews delivered flexible in-depth insights that numerical data could not provide and comprehend the complex social issues related to integration. Thematic analysis was used to explore key patterns related to service delivery and employment challenges, as well as community integration strategies. The qualitative exploratory method effectively carried out lived experiences and operational realities of the integration staff successfully. The research used secondary data collected from government publications and policy papers.

The findings reveal that the Integration Services in Jakobstad region plays a significant role in immigrant employment process. Integration Services provides multiple services for newcomers in the region such as support for administrative tasks, offering language learning opportunities, career counseling and enhancing networking possibilities. These services focus on assisting newcomers in integrating to the Finnish labour market and increasing their possibilities of finding work. Furthermore, the ‘Integration Works’ project, along with other project-based efforts, enhance practical pathways for immigrants to find jobs with local businesses.

Moreover, the study identified several significant barriers affecting immigrant employment outcomes. Inadequate language proficiency identified as the main barrier, particularly in the Jakobstad region where Finnish and Swedish are essential due to multilingual environment. Non-recognition of foreign qualifications, less access to local and professional network and cultural differences in the workplace were highlighted as a few obstacles affect decreasing immigrant employment opportunities. In addition, the hidden job market affects reducing job opportunities since many jobs are filled through internal networks.

The results reveal that the cooperation between the Integration Services and regional employers is important to achieve positive immigrant employment outcomes. While certain companies are willing to

recruiting immigrants and benefit from this approach, others face recruitment challenges due to language barriers and the difficulty to verify foreign educational qualifications. This recruitment process can be improved through collaboration and employer awareness. The study achieved the objectives set for the commissioner including evaluating the services provided by the Integration Services, identifying significant barriers affect employment and suggestions to improve the employment outcomes. These factors addressed both theoretical and practical frameworks in the Jakobstad region.

The study process provided the author valuable learning, particularly of qualitative research methodologies, data processing, and the difficulties of immigrant integration. The study demonstrated how various entities, including organizations, companies, and individuals, must collaborate to ensure effective employment integration. The study provides useful information, however it has a few limitations. The research is aimed at only the Jakobstad region and data collected from only the Integration Services staff members. Consequently, the findings are institutionally driven and do not fully capture the experiences of immigrants or employers, and the findings cannot be directly applied to other regions of Finland.

A potential future study could look at the perspectives of both immigrants and employers, since their insights will enhance the understanding of the research topic. Overall, integration services are essential for immigrants to achieve a positive employment outcome. However, the effectiveness of these services depends on how they address the main barriers and develop stronger connections with companies.

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Research questions

- 1) Could you describe your role and responsibilities within the integration service point in Jakobstad?
- 2) How long have you been working related to immigrant integration related work?
- 3) Have you engaged in any specific programme or department related to services provided by the integration services?
- 4) What are the services available for immigrants to enter the job market?
- 5) What are the initial steps to assess work preparedness of immigrants when they first come to your service?
- 6) How do you measure success in employment of your clients? To obtain any position at the starting point, or one that makes use of their credentials?
- 7) Have you identified any significant barriers affecting newcomers for the job search in Jakobstad?
- 8) What are the services available for immigrants to overcome the language barriers to meet the work requirements?
- 9) How do you support immigrants with foreign education qualifications and skills, but formally not recognized in Finland? (Non-recognition of qualifications)
- 10) What are your opinions about publishing job advertisements and the hidden job market here? How do you help immigrants build professional networks in this situation?
- 11) How do you assist immigrants to adapt into the Finnish culture and workplace demands?
- 12) How the integration service point in Jakobstad collaborates with employers in the region regarding immigrant integration process?
- 13) In your perspective, how do employers consider immigrants' job applications? What are the main barriers or concerns that affect employers in immigrant recruitment process? How do you help newcomers overcome these concerns?
- 14) How can you encourage employers in the region to expand their immigrant recruiting efforts?
- 15) Could you give examples of success immigrant employment integration into the labour market in Jakobstad?
- 16) Would you like to suggest or recommend any ideas for further improvement of services provided by the integration services?
- 17) Would you like to add anything else that we haven't discussed?