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“DREAM SMALL”: LANGUAGE LEARNING INVESTMENT AND DISCOURSES IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Abstract

This chapter concerns the Finnish language learning investment of one adult migrant student, Issaka. According to Norton (2013), students invest in language learning to acquire new symbolic resources and gain access to new spaces and communities. The research questions are: What kinds of real or imagined identities guide Issaka’s investment and how have they changed over time? and What kinds of discourses are present in spaces where Issaka negotiates these identities? The ethnographic data come from a longitudinal study among migrant students in adult basic education (ABE) in Finland. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that a key factor in the participant’s investment was negotiating an attainable imagined identity, including professional and personal goals. Moreover, the findings suggested intergenerational investment, which highlights the importance of investigating matters of identity and investment longitudinally.

Keywords: language learning, adult migrants, investment, imagined identities, discourses

Introduction

This chapter is about the language learning investment of one adult migrant studying in a basic education program in Finland. The concept of *investment* ties together learner identity, their previous skills and knowledges, and the wider social context surrounding them. Language learning is seen to be closely tied to the social world and its ideologies and hierarchies.

The focal participant, Issaka, is a male African-origin migrant who arrived in Finland in 2017 after a hard migration journey, with no formal education and emerging print literacy. Some time after his arrival, he was placed in a literacy training program, and after a year of learning literacy in the Finnish language, he began studying in adult basic education (ABE). That is where this ethnographic study began in 2020.

This chapter aims to show that Issaka’s investment in the Finnish language is a complex and fluid process, affected by personal, social, and institutional factors. This is done by investigating key moments in his investment over two years, starting from his arrival in ABE.

Specifically, the focus will be on the changes in Issaka's real and imagined identities and the discourses which have surrounded him during his time in ABE and in Finland.

During the construction of this chapter, Issaka did not hold a residence permit. His application had been under review ever since he arrived in Finland, more than five years ago. Yet, Issaka continued to go to school every day, investing in learning the Finnish language. This paper is about that investment. The research questions are: What kinds of real or imagined identities guide Issaka's investment and how have they changed over time? and What kinds of discourses are present in spaces where Issaka negotiates these identities?

Overview of literature

Language learning investment and imagined communities

The concept of investment was first developed by Bonny Norton in the 1990s, when she was studying immigrant women learning English in Canada. As Norton got to know her subjects' language learning journeys better, she noticed that previous theories on L2 learner motivation did not sufficiently account for the learners' connection to the social world or the role of identities in the language learning process (Norton Peirce 1995). She proceeded to coin the term investment to describe the connection between the language learner, their identity, and the surrounding social world.

Norton's work draws on Weedon's (1987) understanding of identity as multiple, fluid and complex, a constant "site of struggle" (Norton Peirce 1995, p. 15). As language learners interact with others in the social world, they must negotiate their identities, often in inequitable situations. This is especially true for involuntary migrants, who have had to start over in a new environment, and might therefore lack linguistic, economic, and social resources. Thus, when researching investment in language learning, questions of power must be taken into account.

Investment offers a way to understand why learners choose to invest their time (and resources) to learn certain skills, but also which surrounding factors, such as social issues, ideologies, or classroom practices support or stand in the way of the learning process. Norton argues that the reason learners invest in learning new skills is to acquire new symbolic resources, such as a new language, which in turn increase their *cultural capital* (Bourdieu 1987). Furthermore, the

learning process is guided by the learner's desire to negotiate new *imagined identities* and gain access to *imagined communities* (Norton 2013, p. 7–8; Anderson 1991).

Imagined communities have been defined by Kanno and Norton (2003, p. 241) as “groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination.” Based on Lave and Wengers idea about language learning being guided by and happening in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991), imagined communities guide the identity building of the learner and thus their investment in language learning. The learner imagines an identity, linking them to a community with which they wish to connect.

Imagined identities have very real consequences. As Kanno and Norton (2003, p. 246) state, being able to envision a certain imagined identity may encourage a student to seek certain educational opportunities. Imagined identities, therefore, are not a fantasy: they must be grounded in reality to be powerful enough to shape a learner's investment.

In 2015, Darwin and Norton proposed a new model for investment in the 21st century, which places investment at the crossroads of identity, ideology and capital.

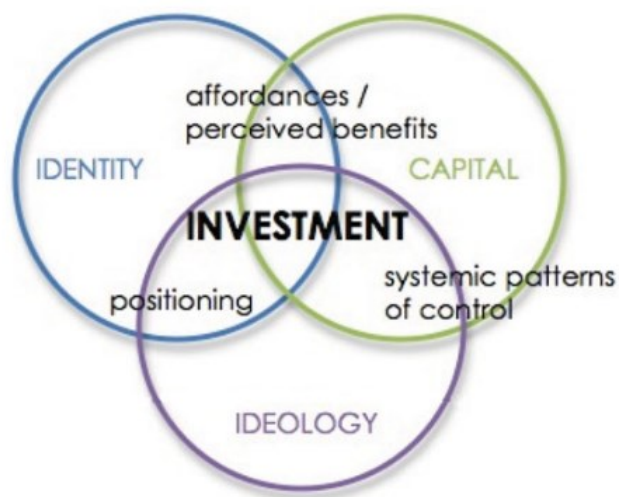


Figure 1: Model of Investment (Darvin & Norton 2015, p. 42)

Following this model, it could be said that the concept of investment links the micro-level (the learner's identity and motivation), meso-level (the social and learning community) and macro-level (the dominant ideologies and discourses) of language learning.

Next, a brief overview of investment literature is presented. Since this study is located in the Finnish ABE context, the focus will be on studies which utilised the concept of investment in

second language acquisition contexts. More extensive reviews of investment literature are available elsewhere (Pittaway 2004, Darwin & Norton 2017).

Over the years, investment in SLA has been studied in different contexts. As the roots of investment theory are in Canada, many of the earlier studies are from ESL contexts in Canada and the U.S. McKay and Wong's (1996) participants were adolescent Chinese-immigrant students in California, while Potowski (2004) focused on students in a Spanish/English dual immersion program. Skilton-Sylvester (2002) investigated the factors affecting Cambodian women's participation in ESL programs in Philadelphia. Parks (2000) showed how Canadian francophone students' investment in English fluctuated across different tasks, due to several factors related to classroom literacy practices, social relationships and personal preferences.

Recently, investment has been studied in many different contexts. Longitudinal studies have also been conducted, emphasising the fluid nature of identities and investment. Hajar's (2016) longitudinal phenomenographic study followed two postgraduate Syrian students as they tried to negotiate their L2 identities in both Syria and Britain. Wu (2017) explored the English learning histories of three EFL students in Taiwan, finding that imagined identities worked both for and against the participants' investment throughout the learning process. Teng (2019) studied three Chinese college English major students using the narrative inquiry approach, which helped reveal the learners shifting identities through time and space. He found learners experienced identity flux during their studies, as their confidence changed and so did their imagined identities.

In Finland, few studies have used the concept of investment to study the L2 learning of migrants. Strömmer (2017) applied investment theory to investigate the work-related language learning trajectories of migrants working in the cleaning industry. She found that having a meaningful, attainable career goal helps learners orient their investment, giving meaning to their language learning. Schleicher and Suni (2021) studied the investment of healthcare professionals migrating from Hungary to Finland and Sweden. On the macro level, their investment process was influenced by not only official policies, but also "language ideologies, regarding the presumed ease or difficulty of learning certain languages and the presumption that certain groups of people learn better than others (p. 209)".

Iikkanen (2019) focused on the Finnish language learning and integration trajectories of migrant parents with the help of a pre-attained proficiency in English. Her findings indicated that knowing English is helpful in the beginning of a migrant's integration process in Finland,

but in order to feel fully integrated, proficiency in the local language is needed. Ruuska (2020) collected data from highly proficient second language speakers of Finnish. Her study showed that language ideologies and social structures play a key part in the categorisation of speakers of Finnish as a second language.

Previous studies of migrant's language learning investment in Finland have therefore mostly focused on the professional context, as well as highly trained, proficient speakers of Finnish. When it comes to migrants with limited previous education, like the focal participant of this study, investment theory has not yet been utilised. Studying the investment of these migrants is essential if we wish to combat persistent discourses which regularly categorise them as "unskilled" and "unmotivated".

Discourses of migration in Finland

There has been a steady increase in the number of immigrants to Finland over the past 30 years. From the year 1990 to 2022, the number of foreign citizens living in Finland has grown tenfold. (Statistics Finland 2022). Still, the percentage of people living in Finland who were born outside Finland is quite small compared to other OECD countries, around 8 per cent in 2021 (Välimäki et al. 2023). The biggest migrant groups by far are from neighbouring countries Estonia and Russia, with some 50 thousand Estonians and 30 thousand Russians living in Finland in 2022. The next biggest group comes from Iraq, with some 15 thousand Iraqi citizens. (Statistics Finland 2022.)

The word discourse can take a broad range of meanings in academic texts. Foucault argues that discourses should not be treated as groups of signs, but "as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak." (1969/2002, p. 54). In this chapter, discourses are understood in a broad, Foucauldian sense, as clusters of meanings associated with certain subjects, bound by historical and social context, and largely accepted as social facts. This means roughly the same thing as Gee's Conversations, that is "all the talk and writing that has gone on in a specific social group or in society at large around a major theme, debate, or motif" (Gee 2010, p. 29).

Discourses are drawn from in everyday interactions, and global discourses can take on different meanings in different local settings. For example, Bridget Anderson (2013), who has written about immigration politics in the UK, argues that in order to be seen as a "good citizen", migrants must constantly prove themselves in the eyes of the ruling class, distancing themselves from "bad citizens", for example the undocumented immigrants or the unemployed

(p. 6). The good citizen discourse can be seen to affect migrants in various different countries globally. When Mankki and Sippola (2015) applied Anderson's theory in the Finnish context, they found both similarities and new meanings: All the migrants foregrounded their work ethic to anchor themselves to the good citizen discourse, just like in Anderson's study. However, those who had immigrated from inside the EU also emphasised individualism and strived to have somewhat of an equal relationship with their employers, a finding specific to the Finnish context.

As discourses are bound historically and by social context, not all migrants are affected by the same ones. In 2022, Finland received significant groups of Ukrainian refugees due to Russia's war on Ukraine. The discourses surrounding their arrival focused on the similarities between Finnish and Ukrainian cultures, and unlike during the previous refugee "crisis" in 2015, their refugee status was not questioned (Kauppila 2022). Whether a migrant is seen as a legitimate refugee, an asset to the economy, or even a threat, can affect their everyday life and language learning in many ways.

In a similar vein, Koskela (2013, p. 36) has suggested that there is a "migrant hierarchy" in Finland, which "places "wanted," highly-skilled, and preferably Western migrants at the top, and "unwanted" humanitarian migrants from less familiar cultures with visible ethnicities at the bottom." According to Koskela, this hierarchy has to some extent been internalised by the skilled migrants, who contrast their group identity against both the "unwanted" migrants and "the Finns". Ruottunen (2022) describes the hierarchy as follows:

Depending on their place on the 'ethnic hierarchy' of their new home country, even naturalised migrants are continuously racialised in encounters with street level bureaucrats and members of the public alike. Integration, understood as a one-way commitment from the migrant to 'common cultural values', becomes the mark of a 'good migrant'. Migrants are consistently seen as less entitled to rights associated with citizenship, including welfare provision. Paid labour is emphasised as a mark of the 'good migrant' ... (p. 36.)

As Ruottunen states, the further down the "ethnic hierarchy" a migrant is, the harder they must work to achieve the status of "good migrant" in the eyes of the citizens. (On the "good migrant" discourses in the U.K., see *The Good Immigrant* (2016) edited by Shukla.)

Closely related to the “good immigrant” is the discourse of “deservingness”, the notion that some groups are more deserving than others of societal benefits, such as housing or healthcare. Van Oorschot (2006) presents five central criteria for deservingness:

- 1) ‘control over neediness’, that is, people who are seen as being personally responsible for their neediness are seen as less deserving (if at all).
- 2) ‘level of need’, that is, people with greater need are seen as more deserving.
- 3) ‘identity’: needy people who are closer to ‘us’ are seen as more deserving.
- 4) ‘attitude’: more deserving are those needy people who are likeable, grateful, compliant and conforming to our standards.
- 5) ‘reciprocity’: more deserving are those needy people who have contributed to our group before (who have ‘earned’ our support), or who may be expected to be able to contribute in future. (van Oorschot 2006, p. 26, reorganised by the author)

Based on data from the 1999/2000 European Values Study, van Oorschot found a common pattern of deservingness for all 23 European countries involved: relative deservingness is highest for elderly people, then sick and disabled people, followed by unemployed people, and lowest of all towards immigrants (2006, p. 37). The deservingness factor can work reciprocally: in Finland, for example, the Roma people have been discriminated against in the job market because they have been viewed as less deserving, which has led to higher unemployment rates among the Roma community, further feeding the discourse of undeservingness.

Discourses are historically bound and influenced by world events, as Hsu (2015) demonstrates in her book *The Good Immigrants*, concerning the discourses surrounding Asian immigrants in the U.S. Before the Cold war, Chinese and other Asian migrants were considered “yellow perils”, but over the years, the discourses surrounding Asian immigration changed, and nowadays the most prominent discourse is that of a “model minority.” Hsu argues that this dramatic shift was the result of three things: exceptions for Asian students in immigration laws, Cold War international relations, and U.S. public opinion over racial inequalities. Partly as a consequence of policy changes, the discourses surrounding Asian minorities in the U.S. changed drastically, which means that discourses can be influenced by institutions of power.

The media is one instance which plays a significant role in constructing and upholding certain discourses. Näre and Nordberg (2016) found that Filipino nurses were categorised as three kinds of subjects by Finnish media: good migrant/suspect worker, global commodity and colonized subject. The good migrant discourse was constructed by emphasising how close the

Filipino culture was to European cultures, but their lack of Finnish language skills still made them subject to suspicion. Then again, for the global commodity and colonized subject discourses, the Filipino nurses were described as “import nurses” and “export hit products”, as well as having an “ancient service culture” and “respect for old people.. in their genes” (p. 24-25).

The focal participant in this chapter is an African male. Garrido and Codó (2017), who studied African migrants in Barcelona, found a dominant “tabula-rasa” discourse, in which African men are constructed as “unskilled, inexperienced and language-less labour”, despite previous qualifications or language repertoires. Unfortunately, some of the men had internalised this discourse, causing them to leave out details from their CV and pursue low-level jobs instead of keeping on the career track they had been on in their home countries. A similar discourse was found in the Finnish context by Helkkula (2014), who interviewed African men working as cleaners in Finland. The men were positioned as unskilled workforce for the cleaning industry, mainly through their Africanness and the colour of their skin, even though they were highly educated.

To summarise, migrants living in Finland are surrounded by many different discourses, such as those related to the legitimacy of their refugee claims, language skills, or worklife qualifications. They must position themselves and others will position them in relation to these discourses. Since investing in learning a language is also investing in a social identity, the environments in which students position themselves matter. As Kanno & Norton (2003) state, how a student is able to imagine their future identity can both encourage and discourage them from pursuing educational opportunities.

Adult basic education and learners with interrupted formal education in Finland

When the focal participant of this chapter arrived in Finland, he could be described as a LESLLA learner, (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults, e.g. Tammelin-Laine & Martin 2015; Young-Scholten 2015). He was in the beginning stages of acquiring print literacy and had never gone to school. Therefore, after some initial integration training, he was sent to acquire basic literacy at an adult basic education (ABE) program.

ABE in Finland is organised by schools, municipalities, community colleges and other third sector operators, and is financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Each student’s studies may be financed for up to five years, if they complete the whole program, all the way

from literacy training to the final phase. Basic education training is optional, unlike integration training.

ABE is divided into three phases: the literacy training phase, the introductory phase, and the final phase. The literacy training phase is intended for those students who are not literate in their home language, or whose schooling has been interrupted and thus would benefit from further literacy training. Successful completion of the literacy training phase requires completing a minimum of 27 courses. The length of one course is 28 hours. (Opetushallitus 2017, p. 17.)

The introductory phase focuses on strengthening the student's study skills, with a focus on the language of schooling. The minimum number of courses to complete the introductory phase is 38. It is possible to skip the introductory phase entirely, if the student is deemed to have sufficient skills to participate in the final phase. In the final phase, students must successfully complete 46 courses to receive the basic education diploma. (Opetushallitus 2017, p. 17.)

ABE comprises courses in different subjects, including maths, biology, history, social science, Finnish, and English. Subjects are taught in Finnish, and a strong focus on learning the Finnish language is present throughout the program. In the beginning of the training, each student together with the guidance counsellor creates their personal study plan, which should be based on the student's previous skills and knowledges. The training is flexible, and subject courses can be skipped if the student demonstrates the skill in another way, for example someone with English as their mother tongue will not have to attend those classes. A further education and career plan is added to the personal study plan.

After completing basic education, students can apply for further education in vocational school or upper secondary school or for a transitional training which coaches Finnish as a second language speakers for either school. A residence permit is not required for most schools or language courses, however transitional training is an exception.

Furthermore, migrants' study paths in Finland are not always linear. Hartikainen (2020) looked at migrants paths before entering ABE, and found that the paths were rarely linear, including waiting periods and moving from more advanced courses to less advanced ones. Additionally, previous education completed outside Finland was not always recognised (Hartikainen 2020, p. 25). Moreover, problems related to lack of communication and cooperation between

different education organisers were found to affect migrants' study paths negatively (Hievanen et al. 2020, p. 176).

Methodology

The research questions for the current paper are:

1. What kinds of real or imagined identities guide Issaka's investment and how have they changed over time?
2. What kinds of discourses are present in spaces where Issaka negotiates these identities?

The aim of this paper is to explore the factors affecting Issaka's investment in Finnish language learning. Investing in learning a language is also investing in a social identity. Hence, real and imagined identities are explored to find out why Issaka invests in learning the Finnish language. Furthermore, I analyse how these identities have changed over the course of ABE.

I also analyse the discourses which surround Issaka in ABE. Discourses are understood as clusters of meanings associated with certain subjects, bound by historical and social context, and largely accepted as social facts. Since discourses manifest in everyday interactions, they can be studied by carefully examining utterances in their social contexts. In this paper, discourses related specifically to Issaka's investment in language learning are described.

The data were collected using linguistic ethnography. The data used for this chapter were collected together with the PI of a larger project funded by the Academy of Finland (*Who knows? (De)legitimizing knowledges in a refugee-serving school*), which examines the legitimacy of student knowledges in the adult basic education (ABE) programme.

The data were collected from a community college in rural Finland, where participants are studying in a basic education program for adults. Almost all students who enter the program are migrants, many of them refugees or asylum seekers. The students come from all over the world, though a majority is originally from SWANA (South West Asian/North African) countries. All students were given a choice not to participate in the research. Documents including the rights of participants were prepared in plain Finnish and the researchers offered support in interpreting them. During the ethnography, participants were reminded multiple times that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to and could withdraw their consent at any time.

For the purposes of this paper, one focal participant was chosen. The study was limited to one participant, so that his investment could be studied both temporally and on multiple levels. The author had built good rapport with this particular participant, which meant that he shared his story with her willingly in multiple interviews and informal conversations. An initial scanning of the data suggested that data about this participant were available from multiple sources, contexts, and across two years, which is important for the triangulation of the data.

As is common in an ethnographic study, multiple types of data were collected. The data set for this paper consists of classroom recordings, ethnographic field notes, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations with the focal participant. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, audio-recorded, and transcribed. Relevant parts of classroom recordings, describing the participant's interactions or the discourses surrounding them were also transcribed. Informal conversations are not the primary source for the analysis presented but are used to give additional context about the participant. The data for this paper were collected over a period of two years, from fall 2020 to fall 2022.

The method of analysis used for this paper was thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006). I began familiarising myself with the data by carefully reading the transcripts of the interviews with the focal participant. Some initial themes related to the participant's investment were found and written down.

As suggested by Norton (1995, p. 18), investing in learning a target language is investing in a social identity. Therefore, in my analysis, I focused on the various identity negotiations which happened regularly in the classroom or in our conversations. Following McKay and Wong (1996), I also wanted to identify the wider discourses which surrounded these identity negotiations and power relations between Issaka and other interlocutors.

With these things in mind, I started coding more actively, including all the data described above in the process. The analysis was mainly inductive, as themes were pulled up as they emerged from the data. Codes used were e.g. "future plans", "Finnish learning" "issues at school". However, some deductive coding was also done, as I paid attention to some discourses which had been found by other researchers. The first round of coding turned out some categories related to language learning investment (e.g. "imagined identity"), as well as some potential discourses related to them (e.g. "good language learner"). Another round was conducted using the same method, to see if more categories could be found or if some categories could be

combined. Subsequently, the categories were grouped up under themes. The themes were revised many times (Braun & Clarke 2006) to make sure they accurately represented the data.

Data excerpts representative of the themes were chosen for the paper. All names were pseudonymised, and the examples were translated from Finnish to English by the author.

Findings

Issaka is a male participant in his thirties from a West African country. He had to leave his home because extremists started to govern the area, taking away people's possessions and even capturing them. He headed to Europe to seek asylum and arrived in Finland in 2017. Issaka has no background in formal education, yet he speaks at least 6 languages. When he arrived in Finland, he only had emerging print literacy. Thus, he was placed in the literacy training phase of the ABE programme. After a year of studying literacy in Finnish, he joined the introductory phase of ABE, and that is where the current study begins.

Investment and discourses of “good language learners”

Discourses related to language learning surfaced regularly in the ABE classroom. In Example 1, one of these discourses emerges in the students' discussion.

Example 1 (Fieldnote Fall 2021)

The conversation turns to understanding Finnish.

Issaka: If I go to the shop, person speaks blablabla fast, I do not understand anything?

Researcher: You can tell them to speak slower, I don't understand, speak slowly.

The teacher writes phrases on the board: *Could you speak slowly! I do not understand.*

Issaka: But you talk a lot with a child, my friend in Helsinki has a child, he talks a lot. If you have a child, one month two months, I know Finnish.

Zahid: Me and Issaka six years five years live in Finland, but when you are parent, you learn language.

In Example 1, Issaka and his classmate discuss how learning a language is faster as a parent. A discourse emerges: learning Finnish is possible in just two months if one has children. In reality, language learning takes time: A study by Hakuta, Butler and Witt (2000) found that reaching oral proficiency in English takes 3 to 5 years and academic proficiency 4 to 7 years.

In addition, many factors, such as age, L1, and previous language learning experiences play a part. The “science language” of schools can act as a further barrier to those with interrupted formal education, as was found by Miller (2009). Unfortunately, the neoliberal goals of language courses for migrants are sometimes completely unrealistic, demanding quick learning results and a fast transition to working life (OECD 2018; Ennser-Kananen & Vanek 2020).

Of course, both input and speaking the language are crucial in learning it, so if having a child “forces” one to interact more in Finnish, it might enhance those aspects of language learning. Then again, language learners should never have to be afraid to use the language. However, the social world is not always a kind place to a migrant learner, as issues like racism and xenophobia are present (FRA/EU Midis II 2018), discouraging interactions with native Finnish speakers. This discourse, then, might just be an indication of wanting someone to communicate with in Finnish, the idea of a family as a sort of *imagined community* (Anderson 1991). This is not the only time Issaka has mentioned his friend in Helsinki, who has a child and Finnish wife. The friend, originally from the same country as him, seems to function as a role model for an imagined identity for Issaka: he has gone through some of the same hardships, but now has a good life and family in Finland. Having a role model to look up to can really boost Issaka’s investment, as a real-life example can make the imagined identity more tangible, and therefore more relevant (Kanno & Norton 2003).

Example 2 is from another class where students are discussing language learning.

Example 2 (Class transcript Spring 2021)

Oleg: Not everyone wants to study. Not all. Lots of people sleep every day.

Researcher: Oh ok

Alem: Speak Finnish normally, good idea. But if you always speak own language, you don’t learn. It is hard if you always speak Arabic or own language at home or in the city centre, very hard.

Jamil: If you learn, it is not hard. If you don’t want to learn, it is hard.

Researcher: But it could be that you want to very much but it is still hard. For you it is not hard, but it could be hard for me.

Jamil: Yes, I know it is hard when a person is old. My dad said the same. He is 55 years old and same for Hamza, it is hard.

During a long conversation, students share their ideas about what good language learning is. Sleeping, speaking one's own language at home and in the city centre, and not wanting to learn are mentioned as traits of "bad" language learners. In addition, Jamil mentions that language learning can be difficult if one is old, like his father or his classmate Hamza.

The conversation can be interpreted as performing the identity of a "good citizen" (Anderson 2013), as students emphasise their willingness to work (learn) while distancing themselves from the "bad" citizens (learners). The statements contrast the good and bad language learners: sleeping-studying; speaking Finnish-speaking own language; wanting to learn-not wanting to learn. Each student wants to emphasise their work ethic as a way of distancing oneself from less successful learners (see also Mankki & Sippola 2015).

The only "real" excuse for not learning is offered by Jamil: if one is old, it is acceptable to face difficulties. This interrupts the discourse of the good language learner, as Jamil provides an alternative discourse instead: sometimes it is acceptable not to learn. This view seems to be limited to the elderly though, which is understandable as they are not expected to become part of the workforce, and are deemed "most deserving" of social benefits in various countries as proved by van Oorschot (2006).

Imagined communities and the "dream small" discourse

Migrants must often negotiate new professional identities as they relocate, sometimes because their old qualifications are not recognised in the new context, and other times because they cannot meet the language requirements for their old job in the new country. Since he was a child, Issaka has dreamt about being an aeroplane engineer: in an interview he mentioned he would like to build a plane with his name on it. He has also talked about designing and drawing buildings on his phone, and wanting to be an architect.

The example below is from a class where students are looking at potential future professions.

Example 3 (Fieldnote Fall 2021)

Issaka: what is this profession, make plan for home

Researcher: architect

Issaka: yes architect, is it a profession

The teacher shows architect online and explains one needs to go to university. Hajar smiles and says to Issaka: “when are *you* going to university” (mocking)

Example 3 demonstrates what I call the “dream small” discourse. Employment is often seen as the ultimate goal of educating adult migrants (Strömmer 2017). Although students can choose their own careers, they are surrounded by the “dream small” discourse, which draws from the existing migrant hierarchies described by Koskela (2013). In Example 3, a classmate undermines Issaka’s career goal and imagined identity as a university student by smiling and commenting on his plan in a mocking tone. The emphasis on the word “you” can be interpreted as mocking Issaka’s chances of getting into university.

The reality for most students who graduate ABE is to become nurses, builders, and cleaners, for fields where Finland has the biggest labour shortage (see for example Näre & Nordberg 2016; Mankki & Sippola 2015; Strömmer 2017). University is often only suggested to those who have completed a higher education degree in their country of origin. Even for them, the language requirements can be a barrier.

So, while Issaka could imagine being an architect at the start of his studies, it would have required a great deal of investment over many years. When asked about his professional dreams eight months later, he replied he would like to become a plumber, and after working awhile, study online to become a construction engineer. This study path would lead him to apply for vocational school first, an investment that is much more likely to yield a return. If he succeeds, it could even lead to an increased investment in Finnish language learning, like with one of Strömmer’s participants, who was able to orient their investment to a realistic career goal (2017, p. 155).

The next excerpt is from a class where students were instructed to write six-word-long poems about school. In the following conversation, Issaka presents his poem.

Example 4 (Class transcript Spring 2021)

Issaka (I)	School good, head no good
	laughter in class
Researcher (R)	So your head or my head
I	Yes my head! Yes

- R Good, but. What does it mean, no good head?
- I My head is not good, I think a lot. I think about what will come, but still comes Finnish that is not such good Finnish. But you come to study. I go home. You study here, everything goes away.
- R So when you are here it feels good. But stress comes at home.
- I Yes stress comes, it comes back.
- R Is it stress about school?
- I Stress about everything. You don't know what- it comes, all good but now not good. You come to live in Finland, not live in Finland, you study, where do you go, tomorrow you go to Germany, Brazil, Italy, what do you know. You go to Africa you know. Yes everything bad comes.
- Teacher Would I be correct in saying that Issaka is an asylum seeker, so he is scared for his future.

In Example 4, Issaka describes the mental difficulties that he has had, calling his head “no good”. When asked to explain, he says that he tries to study Finnish, but when he leaves school, he forgets all he has learned. Framed this way, it seems Issaka sees this as a problem within his head, not as a problem of the school, or the community, or Finnish society. He then talks about the stress he experiences, not knowing whether he gets to stay in Finland or must migrate again.

What Issaka is describing can be seen as a type of psychological trauma which stems from the forced migration process. According to Benseman (2014), who studied migrants from 10 different countries in New Zealand, possible migration-related trauma can include “physical and psychological torture, living in primitive conditions in transit camps for long periods, sustained separation from family and friends, and cultural alienation in their new host societies” (p. 95). Stress stemming from the asylum-seeking process is affecting Issaka’s ability to invest in his learning, because the moment he leaves school, he starts stressing about his future. Not knowing whether he gets to live in Finland permanently is certainly not helpful to his motivation to learn Finnish either.

Issaka mentions his head again in an interview about a year later.

Example 5 (Interview Spring 2022)

- Issaka (I) But you study your head thinks it's important to study I want to know but think study think your own first Migri comes first

Researcher (R)	Uh-huh
I	Nothing good comes but here
R	So school is not hard but everything else Migri and everything is hard
I	Yes yes yes true yes
R	Okay I see
I	But school Finnish language first there everything is ok for you then you go good study think good re- read good but you read you don't know what will come tomorrow what will happen in the future

In Example 5, Issaka mentions his head once more, saying it is filled with thoughts about his uncertain future, which is disturbing his (language) learning. He can be seen as drawing from the same “good citizen” discourses as his classmates in Example 2, emphasising that he thinks studying is important, and he really *wants* to learn. Again, he sees no problem with school, just with his head. Issaka also mentions “Migri”, the Finnish Immigration Service, which oversees granting residence permits and processing asylum applications in Finland. He has lived in Finland since 2017, waiting for a decision on his residence permit. The fear of deportation is causing him intense stress, affecting his ability to study.

Battling the symptoms of stress has left Issaka feeling like his head is not working well, that he is forgetting things and not learning Finnish as fast as he would like. Having such issues probably affected his decision to change his career goal from architect to plumber / construction engineer, since the former would have required a university degree, while the latter can be studied at vocational school. The construction industry employs many (mostly male) migrants in Finland (Mankki & Sippola 2015), so Issaka may view this professional identity as a more realistic investment, especially when he feels like his head does not work like he would want it to.

Two more examples of Issaka discussing his imagined identities were present in the data.

Example 6 (Interview Fall 2021)

Issaka (I)	Yes but do not go to school but that aeroplan- but I want but I want my- first job child I want that my child will make here I want my child will go to school aeroplane yes but not me ((laughs))
Researcher (R)	Next

I Yes ((laughs)) yes
R Why not you
I Well but that school is hard will be hard school will be lots hard

Example 7 (Interview Spring 2022)

Researcher (R) Yes so you want to be an astronaut some day
Issaka (I) Yes
R or learn at least
I Of course first I do not learn my child I want my child learns
R Aa lovely thought
I Yes

In these examples, it seems that Issaka has accepted the “dream small” discourse when it comes to his professional career. It seems that the more time he has spent in ABE and in Finland, the more aware he has become of the realistic possibilities for migrant workers in general, and for himself in particular. In addition, he has felt like his head is not working well enough because of the stress he feels daily, perhaps causing him to abandon his original career dreams.

On the other hand, counteracting the “dream small” discourse is his hopeful attitude regarding his future children: instead of giving up on these dreams, he transfers them to the next generation. As mentioned previously, imagining having a child of one’s own can be viewed as an imagined community (Anderson 1991). Based on what Issaka has said about his friend living in Helsinki, he might be basing his imagined identity on that of his friend’s, who he sees as having succeeded in both language learning and family building. Issaka imagines these same things for his own future, continuing to invest in the Finnish language and his future identity as a father.

Discussion

The findings indicate that throughout his time in ABE, Issaka has been surrounded by multiple discourses related to language learning, studying, and working in Finland. The “good citizen” discourse (Anderson 2013) was drawn from in the classroom regularly; learning the language

and finding work were seen as essential, but also the sole responsibility of the migrant. These findings resonate with the study by Bauer et. al (2023) in Swedish Civic Orientation, where the “good citizen” was constructed by phrases such as “compliant”, and “sociable, hard-working and not isolated, distracted, or a burden on the country”.

Additionally, discourses related to “deservingness” (van Oorschot 2006) surfaced in the classroom. Old people were seen as deserving more time for language learning, while other migrants were seen as unmotivated if they did not learn fast. These discourses, along with the generally unrealistic language learning goals of migrant education in Finland (OECD 2018), put pressure on all adult migrants to succeed, not considering how their traumatic experiences might affect their learning processes. Migrants like Issaka, who are suffering from constant stress due to the migration process, cannot be expected to meet these goals.

Negotiating an attainable imagined identity was a key factor in Issaka’s investment. He came into ABE with hopes of becoming an architect. During the training, his professional dreams changed, perhaps due to the “dream small” discourse and others that surrounded him, or his perception of his limited mental capacity. He opted to aim for the professional identity of a plumber / construction engineer. Becoming an architect according to his initial plan would have required university training, and only a handful of students from ABE, mostly those who have had previous higher education, ever apply for university. The reality for most of Issaka’s classmates is to go into fields where Finland has the biggest labour shortage, such as nursing, cleaning, and construction work. Näre (2013) has noted the dual nature of how employers categorise migrant workers: on the one hand, they are seen as “ideal workers” with better work ethics than Finnish workers, on the other hand as “suspects” whose qualifications and language skills it is acceptable to question. Seeing migrants as a uniform group is highly problematic. What is the intellectual potential we lose if the architects, astronauts, and artists are practically forced into entry level jobs, squeezed through a mould designed to pump out “ideal workers”?

The “dream small” discourse might have affected the identities that Issaka was able to imagine for himself, but he still did not completely give up on his professional dreams. He continues to have high hopes for his future, imagined, children. The imagined identity of a father, linking him to the imagined community of a family, was influential in Issaka’s investment. The prospect of a family of his own in Finland was essential to Issaka, as it represented a stable and secure life in Finland, an imagined community, and fast language

learning. Despite his current difficulties, Issaka was able to imagine his future as a family man, represented by the real-life example set by his friend in Helsinki.

Conclusion

The aim of this research has been to show that the language learning process for someone like Issaka is a complex combination of personal, social, institutional and societal factors. These factors were inspected through the lens of language learning investment, which captures the multifaceted and fluid nature of the process.

This study has contributed to the growing literature on language learning investment among migrant communities. As has been shown in this chapter, investing in language learning is a process, and language learners sometimes have complex feelings about their investment and what they hope to gain from it. By studying Issaka's investment longitudinally, new insights into the fluid nature of investment were gained. Further longitudinal studies on the investment of migrant learners, especially those with limited previous education, could provide educators with crucial information on why some students thrive while others drop out. Investment could even be studied intergenerationally, seeing whether parents' investment in language learning has implications for their children's investment, as was implied by the findings of this chapter.

In addition, more research concerning adult basic education in Finland is needed. Especially interesting are the paths the students take after graduating from basic education. Hartikainen (2020) looked at migrants' paths before entering ABE, and found that the paths were rarely linear, including waiting periods and moving from more advanced courses to less advanced ones. Whether basic education truly prepares students for further education would be an interesting avenue of study.

At the end of the year 2022, Issaka is still waiting on a residence permit. Whether he gets to stay in Finland, after five years of learning the language and customs, is unclear. Meanwhile, he continues on with his life, in a constant state of uncertainty, dreaming about a future where the wait is finally over.

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