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## After Integration Training: Variation in profiles and investment in Finnish as a second language

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**Abstract.** This study examines adult migrants' situation in Finland one year after completing Integration Training, a year-long full-time labour market training. Narrative inquiry, influenced by the core story approach, is applied in analysing semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Participants ( $n = 30$ ) are clustered into nine profiles based on their work or study status and occupational orientation. In addition, the concept of investment is used in analysing the participants' small stories within these profiles. The most participants recognise a need to improve their Finnish proficiency, but their opportunities to invest in Finnish language learning and use are often limited. Many participants compensate for the lack of Finnish learning opportunities by investing in self-study. Imagined futures as students, employees, or Finnish citizens seem to drive the investment in second language learning for most participants. The results shed light on the diversity of migrants' life situations after Integration Training and make their challenges in second language investment visible.

**Keywords:** Finnish; adult second language learning; integration; employment; investment

## 1. Introduction

One of the most important measures for supporting unemployed migrants in Finland is labour market training called Integration Training (InT, *kotoutumiskoulutus*) (Ala-Kauhaluoma et al. 2018: 86), although other measures are often needed for employment as well (Aho & Mäki-aho 2017). InT includes mostly language studies, as language proficiency is considered a core skill for integration and employment (e. g. Pöyhönen & Tarnanen 2015; Dahlstedt & Vesterberg 2017). However, the language requirements of working life are changing rapidly (Strömmer et al. 2023) and it is not often clear what is needed for employment (Flubacher et al. 2018).

This qualitative study is part of a larger research on InT, and it examines the situation of 30 research participants who had recently completed the training. Although the migrants' feedback on the InT has been positive in general, many struggle to find work or suitable education after the training, and insufficient Finnish language skills are often perceived as one of the main reasons for this (see e.g. Aho & Mäki-aho 2017; NAOF 2018; cf. Pöyhönen et al. 2019). Therefore, it is important to gain an understanding of the opportunities the migrants have in investing in Finnish language after InT. To acquire a deeper insight into their investment, a small stories analysis (Georgakopoulou 2015) is applied to investigate the participants' narratives. The research questions are as follows:

1. What kind of profiles can the participants be divided into based on their work or study status and occupational orientation one year after completing InT?
2. How is second language (L2) investment constructed in the participants' small stories one year after completing InT?

First, this article presents the societal context of this study, followed by an introduction to the theoretical and methodological framework. The theory draws mainly on the concept of investment (Bourdieu 1991; Darwin & Norton 2021). The data are analysed using narrative inquiry

(Polkinghorne 1995; Georgakopoulou 2015) and the findings present the participants' profiles in connection with their small stories about their language investment. Until now, the reports on InT have mainly focused on its quantitative impact (Aho & Mäkiäho 2017; Ala-Kauhaluoma et al. 2018; NAOF 2018; see also OECD 2018). Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in the qualitative approach focusing on language investment and illustrating the diversity of migrants' life situations.

## 2. Framework of the study

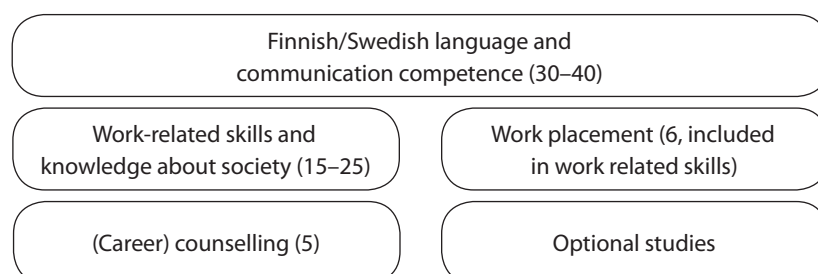
### 2.1. Integration training for unemployed adult migrants in Finland

Between 2018 and 2020, 20,000 to 30,000 individuals with foreign citizenship moved to Finland yearly (Statistics Finland 2023) while 13,000 to 14,000 migrants participated in Integration Training as labour market training each year.<sup>1</sup> Integration Training is targeted to recently arrived, unemployed migrants as labour market training, during which they receive unemployment benefits (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 681/2023). InT is free of charge, it consists of full-time studies, and it lasts for about a year, but it is possible to participate only in parts of it (FNAE 2022).

In Finland, InT is financed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and it is based on the national core curriculum by the National Agency of Education (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 681/2023)<sup>2</sup>. As opposed to Sweden (Ahlgren & Rydell 2020), a migrant cannot choose the training provider. The training focuses on studies of Finnish, or Swedish in Swedish-speaking areas, but it also includes other studies (see Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> The numbers are received from the Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration by emails 15.5.2020 and 15.9.2021. Their source is employment service statistics.

<sup>2</sup> In 2025, more responsibility of InT will be transferred to the local level as a part of a larger reform.

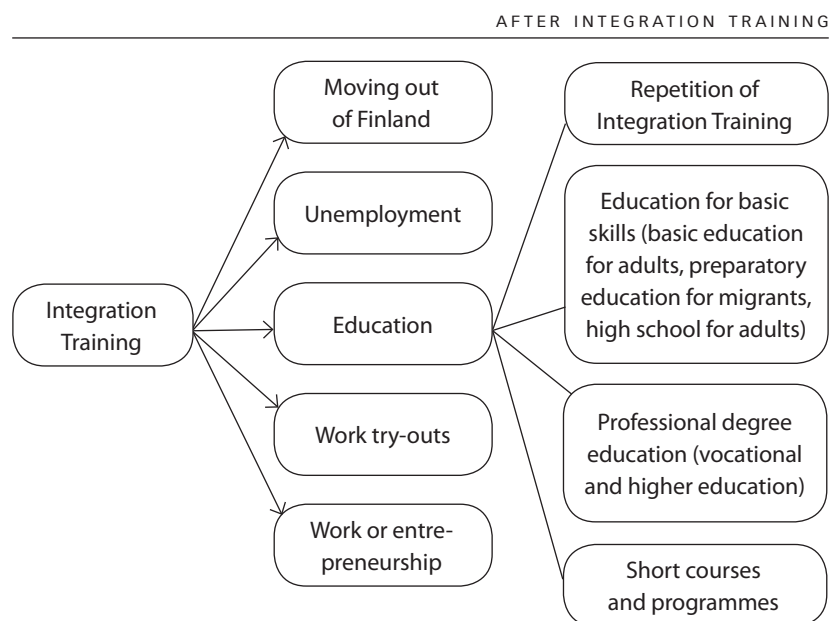


**FIGURE 1.** *Integration Training's content and scope*  
(in study weeks, study week = 35 hours of studying; FNAE 2012)<sup>3</sup>

Overall, InT functions as a significant step on the path towards employment and integration for an unemployed migrant (Aho & Mäkiäho 2017; Pöyhönen et al. 2019). The objective of the training is that a student reaches level B1 in Finnish (or Swedish) and proceeds to work or apply to other education during or after InT (FNAE 2022; Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 681/2023). In practice, however, goals are individually set in a personal study plan (FNAE 2022: 50). After the training, migrants may be guided to repeat part of it to improve their Finnish skills, to participate in work try-outs, or to attend basic education for adults, or preparatory programmes for degree education. Figure 2 presents some of these options.

As in the other Nordic countries, migrants in Finland have a high risk of unemployment (NCM 2023). For instance, in 2016, three months after InT, 34% of the migrants were unemployed (NAOF 2018). In the Nordic countries, education is an important factor in finding permanent full-time work (NCM 2023). That combined with the lack of recognition of skills acquired before coming to Finland results in many migrants pursuing a Finnish degree, for example, in vocational education (see Kärkkäinen 2017; Mustonen & Puranen 2021). Similarly to vocational education, Finnish universities have recently established measures to

<sup>3</sup> Valid during data collection.



**FIGURE 2.** Possible paths after Integration Training (e.g. Aho & Mäkiäho 2017; OECD 2018)

support migrants in entering degree programmes (Scotson 2020). In addition to supporting employability, InT can benefit migrants in passing the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (NCLP) examination on a level that grants them an opportunity to apply for citizenship (Nationality Act 359/2003) and a right to practise certain professions.

## 2.2. Earlier research on Integration training and its impact

Despite its significance, InT has been under-researched, and it has mainly been analysed as a part of overall integration measures (e.g. OECD 2018; MEAC 2019). The training has been criticised for students failing to achieve the language learning and employment objectives (e.g. NAOF 2018; OECD 2018), which has led recent governments to take measures to increase the effectiveness of the programme (MEAC 2019). Less than

half of the participants are reported to have achieved the language learning goal of CEFR level B1, set by legislation, making it difficult for the migrants to continue further in education (e.g. NAOF 2018; about the problems of measuring those objectives, see Seppälä 2022a). The training has been observed to improve employability most when combined with other employment measures, but not to same effect as work experience during the first years in Finland (Aho & Mäkiäho 2017).

Most stakeholders consider employment as the primary goal of InT (Pöyhönen & Tarnanen 2015; Ronkainen & Suni 2019; Masoud et al. 2020). As the training has been criticised for lacking connections to working life, language teaching has consequently been more closely tied to work placements (see e.g. Ronkainen & Suni 2019). However, some attempts to connect InT with working life or vocational studies have encountered difficulties (e.g. NAOF 2018), as teachers and students are given new, demanding responsibilities (Lilja & Tapaninen 2019; Pöyhönen et al. 2019), and employers struggle to support the learners (Kärkkäinen 2017; Pöyhönen et al. 2019; see also Sandwall 2013; Lønsmann 2020). Social inclusion is another topic that should receive more attention in InT (Kokkonen et al. 2019). Thus, it is important to examine the obstacles migrants face after InT more closely.

### 2.3. Concept of investment

To analyse the linguistic practices of the migrants, this study uses the concepts of *capital*, *investment*, and *imagined identities* (Bourdieu 1991; Norton Peirce 1995; Darvin & Norton 2015). Investment means using time, money, or energy in something, and it lies at the intersection of capital, identity, and ideology (Norton Peirce 1995; Darvin & Norton 2015). According to Bourdieu (1991), capital denotes the distribution of resources. Thus, by investing in language learning, the learner gains social capital in the form of, for example, networks; cultural capital, such as qualifications; or economic capital, such as income (Bourdieu 1991; Darvin & Norton 2015). Capital affects an individual's position in

society, yet it is context-specific, and may be valued differently in a new home country (Darvin & Norton 2015; Shan & Fejes 2015). Bourdieu (1991) notes that belief in the value of investment keeps people acting in certain ways.

Identities and investment are woven together, according to Darvin and Norton (2015, 2021), as imagined futures, meaning desirable identities, are drivers for investment. Norton Peirce (1995) argues that identities are multiple, situated, and constant sites of struggle. Investment also shapes the imagined futures and vice versa (Darvin & Norton 2015, 2021). For a migrant, the imagined future can include belonging to a group of proficient speakers or working citizens. However, Flubacher et al. (2018) widen the concept of investment by connecting employability and language investment. They note that investment is often dependent on the political-economic regimes, as some migrants are supported in language investment while others are not, according to the estimated return of the state's investment.

In this study, gaining linguistic capital is considered to happen through investment in formal, informal, and non-formal learning contexts. Werquin (2012) argues that formal learning is structured, often organised in institutions, and has learning objectives. Non-formal learning, in turn, is between formal and informal learning, and therefore may be structured and have learning aims, as in an internship. In this research, active self-study is included in this category. However, in informal learning, people may not be aware of language development, since it occurs in everyday action (Werquin 2012), for example, while using the target language in communication with friends. In this study, spending time and energy using Finnish without specific learning aims is considered an investment.



### 3. Research design

#### 3.1. Data collection and participants

The data were collected from 2019 to 2021 in Finland. The participants of this study ( $n = 30$ , female = 19, male = 11; see Appendix, names are pseudonyms) completed their studies in InT between 2019 and 2020, outside the Helsinki metropolitan area. Background information of the participants was collected by conducting short, structured interviews ( $n = 54$ ) at the end of InT, and by querying the Koulutusportti register<sup>4</sup>. When participants completed InT, their Finnish language proficiency was assessed for a certificate by their teachers. However, the length of their participation varied a lot: some had participated for just months, some for the whole year.

The thirty research participants are from 19 countries, speak 20 mother tongues, and were 24 to 50 years old during the data collection. They have moved to Finland between the years 2014 and 2019, for a variety of reasons: some have a quota refugee status or were granted asylum, while others followed family members or moved for degree studies. Thus, there is a significant variation in the participants' work and study experience. The participants signed an informed consent form, written in plain Finnish. To ensure that the participants understood what they were giving a consent for, the consent form was discussed in the classroom and translations were provided in some of the languages the participants spoke. Furthermore, the students were allowed to take the consent form home before deciding to participate.

The main data set of semi-structured interviews ( $n = 27$ ) was collected about 12 months after the participants had finished InT, remotely via WhatsApp or Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The length of the interviews varied from 31 minutes to 74 minutes. In addition, a few participants answered the last questions by email. The data were transcribed by the author. Three participants (Aasha, Emily, and Mike)

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<sup>4</sup> With the permission of Ministry of Employment and Economic Affairs.

answered a questionnaire instead. The data collected by means of a questionnaire are more restricted, but as everyone answered the same main questions, the data gathered via different tools are comparable. The interviews were conducted and the questionnaires answered in Finnish, English, or in both languages. Excerpts are presented in Finnish and translated into English by the author, unless they are originally in English. Some features of learner Finnish are preserved in the translation. To ensure anonymity, the research participants are referred to with pseudonyms.

### 3.2. Narrative inquiry as a method

To analyse the data, narrative inquiry was applied, as it allows to pinpoint meaningful events and goals, and to research lived experience (e.g. Polkinghorne 1995). The data were compiled and grouped in different ways until the focus and concepts for analysis were chosen (see simplification of the process in Figure 3). Therefore, the preliminary research questions were modified during the process.

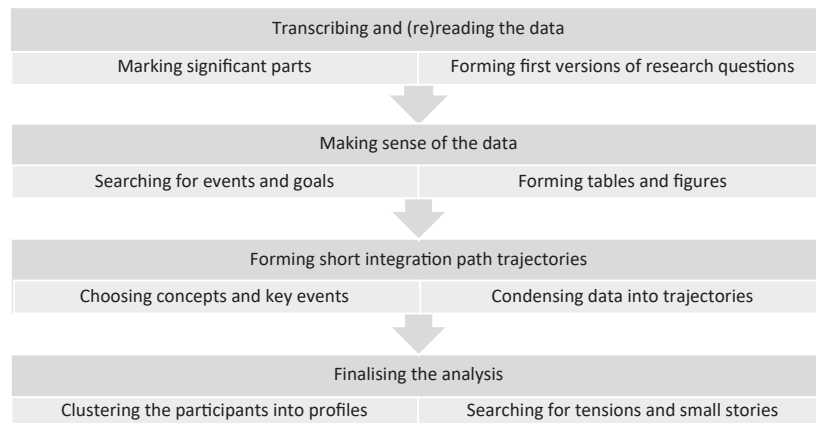


FIGURE 3. *The process of analysis*

Narratives can be used as data (*analyses of narratives*) or to produce stories as the outcome of the analysis (*narrative analysis*) (Polkinghorne 1995). In this study, both approaches were applied. The data were condensed into integration path trajectories and the participants were clustered into nine profiles (Table 1) by similarities related to their situation: work or study status and the direction of their career, which is called occupational orientation.

**TABLE 1.** *Profiles of the research participants*

| Profile |   | <i>n</i> | Status   |
|---------|---|----------|--|
| 1       | Entrepreneurs   | 2        | Self-employed (Ana Gabriela, Sara)   |
| 2       | Full-time workers   | 2        | Working or laid off (Burhan, Mike)   |
| 3       | Precarious workers  | 3        | Part-time or fixed-term work (Lena, Musa, Supason)   |
| 4       | Students aiming for their fields                                    | 4        | Studying, or studying and working (Hina, Huma, Mnasur, Sindere)                              |
| 5       | Unemployed participants aiming for their fields                     | 2        | Unemployed (Christian, Harem)  |
| 6       | Students changing their occupational orientation                    | 7        | Studying, or studying and working (Aasha, Abraham, Aleksander, Emily, Maria, Mina, Muhammed) |
| 7       | Unemployed participants constructing their occupational orientation | 2        | Unemployed (Maha, Theba)   |
| 8       | Students of basic skills  | 4        | Studying (Kaldoon, Rahel, Sandra, Satsaya)   |
| 9       | Migrants in open situations   | 4        | Unemployed or studying (Elizabeth, Gul, Riim, Xi Tian)                                       |

The analysis was informed by the core story analysis by Hanhimäki et al. (2021), who have produced career stories based on the unifying features of individual stories. As in core story analysis, key events and goals were searched for; however, traditional core stories were not produced. In the analysis, unifying features of the situation described in the stories

were brought together, and the word profile was chosen to describe the formed groups. Ennerberg (2021) has created somewhat similar groups in Sweden (Swedish learners, frustrated jobseekers, establishment strugglers, work settlers, and hindered establishers) by applying a different methodology.

In the second phase of the analysis, small stories analysis (Georgakopoulou 2015) was conducted to demonstrate individual, yet recurring tensions in talking about ordinary events, and to deepen the understanding of choices related to language investment. The small stories were identified by searching for excerpts in the data containing affection, tension or contradictions towards investment (see Georgakopoulou 2015). The tensions in the data are usually related to the conflicting needs and opportunities for language investment of the participants, and thus illuminate why some integration paths seem complex. Considering the researcher's position and power, despite attempts to remain faithful to the data, the creation of profiles and analysis of small stories reflects the researcher's voice and interpretations of the data (see e.g. Polkinghorne 1995).

## 4. Findings

This chapter presents the results by outlining the nine profiles that were formed. Additionally, it includes an analysis of recurring tensions in Finnish language investment, examined through small stories.

### 4.1. Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs ( $n = 2$ ) have employed themselves by establishing a sole proprietorship, and they aim either for a multilingual or international business. Thus, they benefit from their ethnic resources as many migrant entrepreneurs do (Forsander 2013). An example of this profile is Ana Gabriela, who benefited from InT: she runs a handcraft-based business, continuing the work she did in her InT work placement. She launched

her business while waiting to become certified in the field of healthcare. Another example is Sara, who had studied graphic design in her home country and who desired a job that "matches her goals in life". Thus, both wished to acquire economic capital in a meaningful way (e.g. Lønsmann 2020). Sara reports the entrepreneurship of her Finnish spouse as the source of inspiration and support in establishing her own business.

Emotions can guide language choices (Scotson 2020), and both Entrepreneurs express frustration towards Finnish. After their InT, they participated in the NCLP examination in Finnish. Sara needs the certificate to apply for citizenship for easier business travelling, but she did not achieve the required level of B1 yet. Furthermore, Sara relies on English and invests in it for her business. Ana Gabriela, in turn, passed the exam on the level B1 (see Valvira 2024) required for the right to practise her profession in the healthcare sector. As a result, she will combine her handcraft and healthcare jobs through her business. Ana Gabriela works in the handcraft job multilingually, and describes how she feels as a customer server while using Finnish:

- (1) Eli tosi ärsyttävä tilanne ((nauraa)), mä oon vähän niinku patsas että mä ymmärrän mutta mä en pysty niinku puhumaan ja selittämään mitä mä haluan.  
'So, a really annoying situation ((laughs)), I am a bit like a statue so I understand but I can't like speak and explain what I want.'

This small story demonstrates how Ana Gabriela would like to be more fluent, and she feels frustrated because her proficiency limits her communication. Ruuska (2020: 133–134) analysed experiences of advanced Finnish as a second language speakers, and a similar experience is reported by an advanced speaker, who has high standards in her Finnish use. Consequently, in Ana Gabriela's future healthcare job, she plans to use only English and her mother tongue. It is common to avoid negative emotions by limiting the L2 use (Scotson 2020). For instance, neither Entrepreneur uses Finnish in their free time or with their Finnish spouses. Both imagine living abroad in the future, which also directs their investment in multilingualism.

#### 4.2. Full-time workers

Full-time workers ( $n = 2$ ) found a job through LinkedIn (Mike) or a friend (Burhan), which is a sign of social capital (Forsander 2013). Mike works in a permanent position in ICT and Burhan in construction. However, while they had obtained economic capital, neither was entirely satisfied. Burhan intends to stay in his work for a maximum of five years, and Mike's job is not equivalent to his competence, which is quite typical for migrants in Finland (OECD 2018; Ndomo 2023). At the end of their InT, their Finnish proficiency was at the level of A2 to B1, and now both work monolingually: Burhan does teamwork orally in Finnish and Mike uses his mother tongue English. During their InT work placement period, both worked in a field that interested them, but they were not employed there.

Formal language learning, as in InT, is not considered ideal by either of them. Burhan reports that for him Finnish came "automatically" ("automaattisesti"), so also outside compulsory InT, and his Finnish investment can be considered mainly informal. Due to being laid off from work and staying at home with his children during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, he seldom uses Finnish in contrast to earlier. Nevertheless, he has achieved the level required for citizenship in the NLPC exam. While working, Mike has had neither time nor motivation to invest in Finnish, as he reports in English:

- (2) With English as my mother tongue, I can easily get by in 95% of the situations that arise. It's maybe what leads to my de-motivation of learning Finnish language as it's easier and more clear to communicate in English.

This small story reveals that the mother tongue, English, which acts also as a lingua franca at Mike's workplace, serves as the obvious choice for communication in Mike's everyday life. Henry (2016) explains that it may depend on the background of the migrant, how highly the choice to speak English instead of L2 is valued, and relying on English instead of Finnish has been found to be common if one wants to emphasise

their occupational expertise (Scotson 2020). In everyday life, the Finnish spouses take care of administrative formalities for both Burhan and Mike. Unlike the Entrepreneurs, they both imagine staying in Finland with their families.

#### 4.3. Precarious workers

Precarious workers ( $n = 3$ ) have either a part-time contract or a full-time contract but for a short-term period. They work in a field in which they have graduated (Lena), have prior work experience (Musa), or work in a new occupation (Supason). Each gained valuable capital during their InT work placement, either by forming professional networks or by gaining insight into a field they aim to enter. This demonstrates the importance of gaining networks and work experience in the local labour market, in finding employment (Aho & Mäkiaho 2017; Alho 2020; see also Ennerberg 2021). All three were somewhat unsatisfied, as they would have preferred a full-time or long-term contract. Musa and Supason also turned down a student position that was offered to them in vocational education. Musa reported that his salary would not increase, so he did not consider the investment worth the effort (see Bourdieu 1991), while Supason prioritises work.

At work, language requirements are job and field-specific (e.g. Strömmer et al. 2023). The participants clustered as Precarious workers possess local linguistic capital, as they had obtained a Finnish proficiency of at least A2.2 level at the end of their InT, and they use some Finnish orally at work. However, as a cleaner Supason listens to others but does not speak much, which reaffirms Strömmer's (2018) findings about the rarity of chances to develop language skills while working as a cleaner. Musa, on the other hand, expresses in English that he knows enough Finnish for a restaurant:

- (3) [---] you don't really need to have a conversation about something. And, kitchen is easy, [---]. it's easy, it's simple Finnish, primary Finnish.

Language use can be closely tied to work tasks (Strömmer 2018), and in the kitchen, the only thing verbalised may be the instructions for necessary tasks (Humonen & Angouri 2023). Musa reports that the context, simple interactions, and the limited kitchen vocabulary support his understanding. In other words, he does not feel that investing in Finnish language development is needed to succeed in his work.

For precarious workers, non-formal learning is important: Musa says that he learns Finnish the best in his free time by having conversations in his broad network. Supason invests in Finnish by talking with her Finnish spouse but has not yet passed the required level of proficiency in the NCLP exam for citizenship. The third participant of this profile, Lena, is a part-time private teacher who uses some Finnish at her job and studies Finnish vocabulary related to her field by herself. In addition, she has hired an English teacher because she will need English in her dream job. Others imagine staying in Finland, but Musa has not made plans.

#### 4.4. Students aiming for their fields

Students aiming for their fields ( $n = 4$ ) are studying in their professional field to deepen their existing cultural capital and to pursue a Finnish degree, which migrants often need for employment (Forsander 2013). They are doctoral researchers, or students in either a university of applied sciences or in vocational education. All of them had established significant, field-specific networks in Finland. The tertiary level students of this profile study in English, although all four achieved at least a level of A2.2 in Finnish by the end of their InT. In Finland, proficiency of English may support a migrant in entering higher education (see also Leskinen 2023).

After completing a Master's degree in Finland in English, doctoral students Hina and Huma participated in InT, before being accepted to doctoral studies that are conducted in English in their Finnish home universities. Practical nurse Sindere is studying to become a nurse in an English-medium programme (about a similar programme, see Virtanen 2017). In turn, Mansur has work experience from his home country in



his field of study, automotive mechanics, but no professional qualifications. During data collection, he was thus enrolled in vocational studies in Finnish.

Most of the participants of this profile invest in economic capital alongside their studies but their language investment differs. Tertiary level students Hina and Sindere established connections with their employers already during their Int work placement. Sindere works in Finnish in his field of study, the healthcare sector. Doctoral researchers, Huma and Hina use almost exclusively English in the academia, but Hina works alongside PhD studies multilingually in her field. She draws upon multiliteracy skills like many other workers nowadays (see Strömmer et al. 2023), as she attends meetings and writes, for example, emails and social media posts in Finnish as well in other languages. In the following small story, she reports the support she receives:

- (4) No ainakin mä yritän, jos mä yritän suomen kielellä [---] että he auttaa minua, että jos mä, jos he ei, ei ymmärtäneet että he kysyy, taas että tarkoititko blaablaablaablaa esimerkiksi, niin se auttoi, niin ei ole-, ei usein vaihtaa englannin kielellä. [---] Mutta sitten joskus mä itse, että ehkä mun pitää puhua englannin kielellä, niin pitää olla se, tarpeeksi tarkka, niin, että mä oon ite vaihtaa.  
'Well at least I try, if I try to speak in Finnish [---] so they will help me, if I, if they didn't, didn't understand they will ask, again did you mean blaablaablaablaa, for example, so that helped, so there is not-, not often change into English language. [---] But then sometimes I myself, that maybe I have to talk in English, so you have to be, accurate enough, so that I change myself.'

Even though others scaffold her by asking her to elaborate on what she wants to say in Finnish, the small story demonstrates how she herself sometimes changes the language when she needs to say something accurately. Advanced second language speakers may feel frustration (Ruuska 2020; Scotson 2020) and, like them, Hina invests actively in Finnish also at home, since she reports that she "cannot build better sentences" ("parempi lause että en voi rakentaa") in Finnish.

Contrary to the doctoral students, Sindere and Mansur see Finnish as their sole work language in the future. Still, Sindere says that he has no time for Finnish studies and Mansur reports that he learns best by speaking it. Alongside studies, Mansur works as a food courier but reports that he speaks Finnish only if problems occur (about food couriers' work, see Mbare 2023). He is searching for a cleaning job with more stable conditions. Mansur and Hina imagine staying in Finland, but the decision of others depends on the work situation of their spouses.

#### 4.5. Unemployed participants aiming for their fields

Unemployed participants aiming for their fields ( $n = 2$ ) have tertiary level education and some work experience from their home country, and both want to utilise their skills. Although Christian and Harem participated in InT, neither of them found a work placement equivalent to their competence, which seems common (e.g. Seppälä 2022b).

After InT, Christian has been to job interviews and attended a short course conducted in Finnish close to his field in higher education, but he did not find a place for an internship unlike other students on the course. Harem applied for a degree in vocational education despite having a Bachelor's degree in the same field, as the employment services had not been able to find a programme suitable for him. One possible reason may be that employment officials take the return of the investment in migrants into account (see Flubacher et al. 2018). Despite receiving positive feedback on his Finnish skills during the application process, Harem was not accepted into the study program.

At the end of their InT, Christian and Harem had a Finnish proficiency level of at least B1. Unlike most others, they achieved the target level set by legislation for InT but struggle to enter their fields: studies or labour market, as both of them seem to lack, for example, social capital in their field (see Alho 2020). However, they had compensated for the lack of chances to use Finnish by investing in it. After InT, Christian attended a tertiary program (SIMHE) meant for migrants, which included Finnish

language studies. Harem invests in Finnish non-formally, by studying vocabulary in online materials at home. In the following small story, he sees developing proficiency in Finnish as a never-ending process:

- (5) Koska kielioppiminen ei koskaan riitä. [---] Aina pitää kehittyä ja jatkua kielen oppimiseen.  
'Because language learning is never enough. [---] [One] always need[s] to develop and continue language learning.'

Some advanced speakers reported a similar lifelong L2 development plan in Ruuska's study (2020). Christian, in turn, imagines working in English, but mentions that Finnish can provide "bonuspisteitä" ("bonus points") in a job application phase, which also keeps him investing in Finnish (see also Alho 2020). Both had moved to Finland to be with their spouses and imagine staying in Finland in the future, as well.

#### **4.6. Students changing their occupational orientation**

Students changing their occupational orientation ( $n = 7$ ) are full-time students aiming to enter a new field, forming a relatively large group in this study. They can be seen as believing in the reward of investing in new cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991), as they believe a Finnish degree aids labour market access. Others study in vocational education, but Mina studies at an open university of applied sciences. Some are pursuing a lower degree than they already possess, which may result in the de-capitalisation of skills (Lønsmann 2020), although these students did not mention that as a problem.

Most participants in this profile were at an A2 level of proficiency in Finnish at the end of their InT, and even though there are no official language requirements for entering vocational education (MEAC 2019), they were placed on preparatory courses after InT, to improve their Finnish skills. The ones with at least B1 level in oral skills at the end of their InT are the only migrants in their current study groups, whereas those with lower proficiency were assigned in migrant-only groups.

Unlike most other participants in degree programmes, all the students aiming to change their occupational orientation are in Finnish-medium programmes, including internships. The language support they receive varies, which resonates with Mustonen and Puranen's (2021) findings on vocational education. Most of them participate in one Finnish lesson per week, but some get extra support in Finnish.

Mina reports to receive as strong support from a mentor teacher as also earlier in her preparatory programme. She receives support, for example, for essay writing, as learning academic literacies in L2 may take time (see Leskinen 2023). Maria's group was assigned teaching assistants for cooking classes because the teacher had struggled to support the migrant students in the group individually. Some students, like Aleksander, report struggling without the teacher noticing:

- (6) No itse asiassa, aina ymmärrän osittain. [...] Ja lisäksi jos en ymmärrä jotain, silloin yritän lukea tästä asiasta myös kotona. [...] Koska jos minä kysyisin joka kerta, kun minä en ymmärrä jotain, se olisi liian usein.  
'Well actually, I always understand partly. [...] And in addition, if I can't understand something, then I try to read about this thing at home. [...] Because if I asked every time when I don't understand something, it would be too often.'

As the small story demonstrates, students may wrestle with understanding but do not want to interrupt the teaching. Kärkkäinen (2017) sees the reasons being personal but also related to negative experiences and cultural differences. As the language support varies, students invest actively in Finnish non-formally at home (see also Kärkkäinen 2017; Mustonen & Puranen 2021).

Many of these students also report having limited possibilities to invest in Finnish in internships, for instance, because communication mainly happens with other interns, or the supervisor is the one to deal with written tasks (see also Sandwall 2013). Yet for many, internships and practical classes are easier than classroom studies, because the context supports understanding (see Lilja & Tapaninen 2019). Also, many

of these students have gained economic capital as they have a part-time work contract, but only Emily in her field of study. Despite the obstacles, all imagine living in Finland, and some plan to apply for citizenship.

#### **4.7. Unemployed participants constructing their occupational orientation**

This profile consists of unemployed participants who were either constructing their first occupational orientation or changing it ( $n = 2$ ). They had lived in Finland for five years and are looking to enter the healthcare field to find employment. Both Theba and Maha, have participated in InT at least twice, and they have attended work try-outs as well. At the end of their last InT, they had a language proficiency level of A2 to B1. One year later, both have gotten accepted to a vocational school and are waiting for the studies to begin.

The healthcare field became familiar to Theba through work placements in InT, and she will construct her first occupational orientation as a care assistant. Maha had attended a work placement and a work try-out in her original work field but was not employed. Healthcare is a new field to her, and although she reports to have chosen to pursue practical nursing degree herself, migrants are often also guided towards the healthcare sector that lacks work force (Kurki 2018).

Both participants believe they will need Finnish at work. While unemployed, they compensate for the lack of formal Finnish language learning by using it, for example, when taking care of the family matters. For Theba, it is important that she does not need an interpreter, but she still needs some support from her children with running errands:

- (7) Joskus lapsi autta että, esim vuokra-asuntohakemus laitan ja teksti-viesti ja varaa aika esimerkiksi laboratorin tai lääkärin, tai, joo, minä hoidan tämä asioita kaikki itse.  
'Sometimes child helps with that, for example I send a rental apartment application and text message and book an appointment for instance for a laboratory or a doctor, or, yeah, I run all these errands by myself.'

Sending applications and reserving appointments demand linguistic capital that Theba is still acquiring. However, in line with Henry's (2016) observations on migrants in Sweden, Theba and Maha report using L2 with officials as a chance to invest in it. This contrasts with findings of some highly educated migrants in Scotson's (2020) study, who would rather use English. Both Theba and Maha, have also learned Finnish with their children. In addition to concretely supporting learning, taking care of children can also motivate to develop L2 skills (Intke-Hernandez 2022). The women have also applied for citizenship and imagine living in Finland.

#### 4.8. Students of basic skills

Students of basic skills ( $n = 4$ ) are re-participating in InT (Rahel) or studying in basic education for adults (Kaldoon, Sandra) or in preparatory training for vocational education (Satsaya), so none of them are acquiring qualifications for a profession yet. At the end of their InT, their Finnish proficiency varied from level A1.3 to A2.2., and they are seeking to improve their language skills. They are either planning to change their occupational orientation or they are young people, only starting to construct their occupational identity.

Most are not satisfied with their studies, but they have a plan. For example, Kaldoon had applied for vocational education in the field of cleaning, and part-time work. Sandra, Rahel and Satsaya wish to apply to the field of healthcare, and to enter the field, Satsaya actively invests in Finnish skills related to healthcare non-formally as well. The linguistic capital of these learners is a limiting factor that restricts them from moving forward as fast as they would like (see also Karayilan et al. 2017).

Persistence is evident in the data for all (see also Pöyhönen et al. 2019). These participants study in Finnish and use the language with their peers as a *lingua franca*, which indicates the significance of peers in investing L2 (see also Kokkonen et al. 2019). As an example, Sandra reports that she learns Finnish the best by using it, and thus she speaks

Finnish actively both in the classroom and outside it. If she struggles understanding something at school, she studies the topic at home:

- (8) [---] esimerkiksi jos minulla on matematiikka, [---] sitten minä katson Youtube, sitten minä katso, että siellä on joku näyttää, hän näyttää, sitten minä, haa, pitää tehdä näin, näin, näin. Semmonen. Ymmärrän.  
'[---] for example if I have have mathematics, [---] then I watch YouTube, then I watch that there is someone show, he/she shows, then I, haa, have to do like this, like this, like this. That kind of. I understand.'

Sandra is committed to investing in content and language learning non-formally too, and as the excerpt shows, she is an agent of her own learning and finds joy in gaining insights. Nevertheless, studying in a L2 may be slow, as there is a need to translate and repeat study material (Kärkkäinen 2017). Sandra has completed basic education before moving to Finland, and her case shows that some learners may also need more context for learning than what is provided in the classroom.

All four participants in this profile use mostly Finnish when they run errands. They imagine working in Finland in Finnish, although Sandra imagines herself also as a volunteer worker in Africa. Overall, many seem to share Sandra's belief: "All-, life become good if, if, in my opinion, if I have a job" ("Kai-, elämä tuli hyvä jos, jos minun mielestä, jos minulla on työpaikka"). This sentiment reflects the discourse on the importance of employability in integration, which also prevails in InT (see Ronkainen & Suni 2019).

#### 4.9. Migrants in open situations

Migrants in open situations ( $n = 4$ ) are in somewhat complicated "in-between" situations and a course loop. They have lived in Finland longer than most participants, five to eight years, and completed many courses aimed at migrants. During data collection, they were unemployed, in vocational education, or re-participating in InT. All were hoping to

improve their Finnish language skills through some studies or courses. At the end of their (latest) InT, their Finnish proficiency varied from level A1 to B1. Elizabeth has no formal education, while the others have either a tertiary or vocational degree and work experience in their field from their home country.

All these participants report that they would rather study something than stay at home, but they seem to have either a long or uncertain path ahead of them. For instance, after her InT, employment services guided Riim to study practical nursing in vocational education to acquire field-specific vocabulary skills. However, as a medical doctor, Riim resisted such a move (on the positioning of migrants in integration, see Lønsmann 2020) and successfully argued to return to InT once again. Earlier, her learning path was interrupted by maternity leaves. During the interview for this study, InT had just ended, and she was unemployed.

Xi Tian is studying for a vocational degree in a new field because, according to her, the employment services could no longer place her in InT. In fact, her plan is to improve her L2 skills to apply to study in her original field at a university. It is possible that her participation in vocational studies indicates that she wants to prove to the society to be an active migrant (see about active, flexible migrant discourse Masoud et al. 2020; Riuttanen 2024). Gul struggles in InT, as languages become "porridge" ("puuro") in her head and she understands the teacher only partly. She does not know what she could do in the future, as she believes she cannot find employment in her field, which is sewing. Elizabeth, in turn, completed a successful work try-out in the cleaning field. Her positive experience of the work try-out is connected to language: she reports that her colleagues spoke slowly, which indicates that they adjusted their speech for her to support her investment in using Finnish. Elizabeth was hoping to find any work or be able to participate in a language course, like InT, once again.

All these participants imagine working in Finnish in the future. Riim and Xi Tian see themselves in their original fields, despite the difficulties



in finding any work placement in those, for which Riim saw the lack of Finnish skills as the main reason. Work as a medical doctor demands a high proficiency in Finnish (Tervola 2019), and for Riim learning Finnish in a formal context is just one part of the process:

- (9) Joo, minä ajattelen, että opiskelen koulussa, vain, ei riitä, tarvitsen tavata paljon ihmisiä ja keskustelen hänen kanssa.  
'Yeah, I think that, studying in a school, only, is not enough, I need to meet lots of people and discuss with them.'

The small story demonstrates that Riim considers using Finnish as an essential investment in L2 development. Unfortunately, Riim, similar to Xi Tian and Gul, lacks Finnish-speaking friends. Despite being goal-oriented, learners cannot always choose the conditions of interaction (Darvin & Norton 2021). Taking care of the children restrict Riim and Xi Tian from participating in evening courses, however, all four use Finnish to take care of family matters (see also Intke-Hernandez 2022), and they imagine staying in Finland permanently.

## 5. Discussion

InT promises faster employment by reskilling (see Masoud et al. 2020). However, the results show that migrants are in a wide variety of situations one year after InT. Out of 30 participants, a few had achieved stable employment, and less than half of those who study for a degree continue in their original field. Many are unemployed, but most of them are headed towards education. Often paths to employment are not straightforward, as Leskinen (2023) has also observed in Finland. Furthermore, migrants' backgrounds and Finnish language proficiency at the end of InT are diverse in the first place (see e.g. Seppälä 2022a). In conclusion, the results align with the ideas of identities being situated, being sites of struggle, and relating to language investment (Darvin & Norton 2015).

Findings demonstrate that most participants have somewhat limited opportunities to invest in Finnish, as some do not use much Finnish at work, some study in English, and some struggle with their studies. As

investment means using time, money, or energy in L2 (Norton Peirce 1995), the lack of those has a negative impact on investment. The lack of time, due to, for example, prioritising work, was a recurring theme in the data (see also Strömmer 2018). In contrast, the lack of money was not mentioned. The lack of energy played a role in L2 investment, as many reported that negative emotions were a limiting factor (see also Scotson 2020). In addition, a significant limitation was the lack of opportunities to use L2 (see also Ahlgren & Rydell 2020). This study confirms that motivation does not guarantee investment, as opportunities to use L2 are socially constructed (Norton Peirce 1995). Furthermore, the COVID-19 restrictions limited the opportunities for Finnish investment.

A notable finding of this study is that many participants invest actively in Finnish non-formally through self-studying. Most of them imagine they will stay and work in Finland, indicating that one of the main drivers for investment is the imagined future in Finland as a student, an employee, or a Finnish citizen (see also e.g. Darvin & Norton 2015; Riuttanen 2024). According to the participants, Finnish language skills will support them in finding work or gaining an entry to studies. The studies would lead to acquiring a local degree, which would provide work. Ultimately, work would lead to a good life. In other words, the participants believe that linguistic capital leads to economic, cultural, and symbolic capital (see Karayilan et al. 2017). Similarly, migrants in Sweden see Swedish as a ‘door opener’, for the present and the future as well as for work and social inclusion (Ahlgren & Rydell 2020). However, in this study, it was evident that many participants lack social capital needed for investing in Finnish. This indicates the need for stronger support for networking during InT (see Kokkonen et al. 2019).

Even when sufficient language proficiency and an official qualification are obtained, acquiring a job is not certain (Shan & Fejes 2015; Masoud et al. 2020; Ennerberg 2021). Employability is a complicated target, since it is not always clear what are the required components to achieve that (Dahlstedt & Vesterberg 2017; Flubacher et al. 2018). For example, in this study, high proficiency in English was a key to

continuing studies or working in one's field, especially for those with a degree in higher education (see also Leskinen 2023). On the contrary, for those who do not speak English, investing in Finnish is a necessity. Finally, it must be recognised that although Finnish was the focus of this study, all participants led multilingual lives.

## 6. Conclusion

InT provides essential capital for the migrants, but the expectations about and targets set for InT should be re-evaluated critically, as they seem quite difficult to reach for some. As many former InT participants are changing the direction of their career for faster employment, it may lead to the decapitalisation of the migrant's skills: the loss of previously achieved capital (Lønsmann 2020). In Finland, Riuttanen (2024) has recognised a "dream small" discourse in which migrants begin to adapt employment goals to local labour market conditions. Thus, it is important to research the reasons for career changes, how migrants are guided to the labour market (Masoud et al. 2020; see also Ndomo 2023), and whom the state is willing to invest in (Flubacher et al. 2018). However, for some the career change may be also a positive opportunity.

This study contributes to the research on migrant experiences by highlighting the diverse and individual situations of migrants after an integration programme, and the challenges they face in language investment. The profiles formed in this study depict the varied paths, and the narrative approach enabled the construction of a deeper understanding of migrants' varying experiences behind the statistics. However, the time span of this study covers only the beginning of the integration for most of the participants. Thus, it provides a partial picture of the integration paths, as, for example, the employment rate rises together with years lived in Finland (Aho & Mäkiäho 2017). Also, the sample is not representative of all migrants participating in InT in Finland.

For almost all participants, interviews were conducted and questionnaires answered in Finnish or in English which affects the way they

told their stories. Also, the data are filtered through the researcher, and the findings are based on what the participants were willing to share. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that support for L2 learning and use is needed from peers, native speakers, educational institutions, and workplaces, also after integration programmes.

### Transcribing conventions

|            |                         |
|------------|-------------------------|
| [---]      | omitted part            |
| ,          | short pause             |
| ((laughs)) | laughter                |
| []         | missing word / ellipsis |

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**Appendix. Participants, their situation one year after Integration Training (InT), and the profile into which they are grouped (see Table 1). Participants ( $n = 3$ ) who answered via questionnaire are bolded**

| Participant  | Status one year after Integration Training   | Profile (1–9) |
|--------------|--|---------------|
| <b>Aasha</b> | Vocational education (social and healthcare)   | 6             |
| Abraham      | Vocational education (restaurant and catering), zero-hour work contract (cleaning)       | 6             |
| Aleksander   | Vocational education (automotive mechanics)  | 6             |
| Ana Gabriela | Entrepreneur (social and healthcare and arts)  | 1             |
| Burhan       | Work (full time, lay off, construction)  | 2             |
| Christian    | Unemployed (short course in ICT), job interviews   | 5             |
| Elizabeth    | Unemployed, finished work try-out  | 9             |
| <b>Emily</b> | Vocational education (social and health-care), zero-hour work contract in the same field | 6             |
| Gul          | Integration Training   | 9             |
| Harem        | Unemployed   | 5             |
| Hina         | Work (projects on her field), doctoral studies (education)                               | 4             |
| Huma         | Doctoral studies (economics)   | 4             |
| Kaloon       | Basic education for adults   | 8             |
| Lena         | Part-time work (arts and culture/teaching)   | 3             |
| Maha         | Unemployed, entering to vocational education (healthcare)                                | 7             |

|             |  |   |
|-------------|--|---|
| Mansur      | Vocational education (welding), part-time job (food delivery), job interviews (cleaning) | 4 |
| Maria       | Vocational education (restaurant and catering )  | 6 |
| <b>Mike</b> | Work (full-time, ICT)  | 2 |
| Mina        | Higher education (social and healthcare, open university), part-time job (storage work)  | 6 |
| Muhammed    | Vocational education (property maintenance)  | 6 |
| Musa        | Part-time work (restaurant), turned down an offer to apply to vocational education       | 3 |
| Rahel       | Integration Training   | 8 |
| Riim        | Unemployed, finished InT   | 9 |
| Sandra      | Basic education for adults   | 8 |
| Sara        | Entrepreneur (arts and handcraft)  | 1 |
| Satsaya     | Preparatory education for vocational education (VALMA)                                   | 8 |
| Sindere     | Higher education (social and healthcare), occasional work in his field                   | 4 |
| Supason     | Work (fixed term, cleaning), turned down an offer to study in vocational education       | 3 |
| Theba       | Unemployed, entering to vocational education (healthcare)                                | 7 |
| Xi Tian     | Vocational education (restaurant and catering)   | 9 |

## Kotoutumiskoulutuksen jälkeen: variaatio profileissa ja investointi suomeen toisena kielenä

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Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan aikuisten Suomeen muuttaneiden ( $n = 30$ ) työ- ja opiskelutilannetta sekä suomi toisena kielenä -investointia vuosi työvoimakoulutuksena järjestetyn, noin vuoden mittaisen kotoutumiskoulutuksen jälkeen. Kotoutumiskoulutuksen tavoitteena on tukea maahanmuuttajia suomen tai ruotsin kielen oppimisessa ja koulutukseen tai työelämään pääsemisessä. Aineisto on kerätty vuosina 2019–2021, ja siihen kuuluu puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja ( $n = 27$ ) ja kyselylomakevastauksia ( $n = 3$ ). Aineiston analysoinnin lähtökohtana oli tyyppitarinamainen tarkastelu ja osallistujat ryhmiteltiin työ- ja opiskelutilanteen sekä urasuuntautumisen mukaan, minkä tuloksena osallistujat jaettiin yhdeksään profiliin. Lisäksi profileittain on tarkasteltu small stories -analyysillä eli pieniä kertomuksia tutkimalla suomen kieleen investointia eli ajan ja energian käyttämistä toisen kielen oppimiseen ja käyttöön.

Tulosten perusteella useimmilla osallistujilla on tarve investoida suomen kieleen ja kehittää suomen kielen taitoaan, mutta monilla on erittäin rajalliset mahdollisuudet siihen. Monet osallistujat kompensoivat suomen kielen oppimis- ja käyttämistilanteiden puutetta investoimalla nonformaalisti kotiopiskeluun. Toisaalta osalle, etenkin korkeakoulutuksessa, englannin taito on tärkeä toivotulle uralle pääsemisessä. Kuvitellut tulevaisuudet työntekijöinä, opiskelijoina tai kansalaisina näyttivät olevan useimpien investoinnin kannustimena. Vain erittäin harva oli kuitenkaan vakaassa työsuhteessa. Lisäksi monet ovat päätyneet vaihtamaan uransa suuntaa, mikä voi johtaa pääoman ja osaamisen menettämiseen.

Osallistujat ovat saaneet kotoutumiskoulutuksesta monenlaista, olennaista pääomaa, mutta monien polut työelämään näyttävät siitä huolimatta monivaiheisilta. Tämä tutkimus edistää toisen kielen alan tutkimusta tekemällä

näkyväksi maahanmuuttajien toisen kielen investoinnin jännitteet sekä moninaiset, erittäin yksilölliset tilanteet, joissa maahanmuuttajat ovat kotoutumiskoulutuksen jälkeen. Tulokset myös osoittavat, että kotoutumiskoulutuksen jälkeen suomen kielen kehittämiseen ja käyttöön tarvitaan tukea vertaisilta, syntyperäisiltä puhujilta, oppilaitoksilta ja työpaikoilta.

**Avainsanat:** suomen kieli; aikuisten toisen kielen oppiminen; kotoutuminen; työllistyminen; investoiminen