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Exploring the integration experiences of African immigrant women in the  
Swedish labour market.

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the employment integration experiences of African immigrant women in the Swedish labour market. It discusses the factors which determined the integration of the African immigrant women into the Swedish labour market. The analysis of this study reveals the hindrances and facilitators that helped and challenged the African immigrant women in obtaining and how they integrated into the Swedish labour market. The result shows that self-motivation, public institutions, networking and connections, Language skills, racial discrimination, and time consumption are pertinent factors in the integration process of the African immigrant into the Swedish labour market. The result from this study were analyzed through empowerment framework approach and the application of inductive thematic analysis. A qualitative method was used with a semi-structured interview and an open ended question.

**Keywords:** Integration, Immigration, Labour, Women, Empowerment.

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# **Chapter 1- Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

In view of the rising uncertainties and several oppositions to migration issues in terms of its effects in many countries throughout the world under international migration, human mobility has become a core issue of international governance. For decades, there has been an increase in women migration due to poverty, inequalities, climate change, war, and also for the purpose of work in a feminized labour sector. This has compelled the engagement of multilateral manners (Gottardo & Cyment, 2019).

Migration problems have led to harder policies both in the United States and several parts of Europe. In 2016, The United Nations General Assembly held its first-ever summit dedicated to a large movement of refugees and migrants affirming a legal instrument to protect refugees and migrants developing two new global compacts; “one on refugees and the other for safe, orderly and regular migration” which is said to be adopted in 2018 (Gottardo & Cyment, 2019, p. 67).

Nevertheless, as years unfold with the increase in humanitarian crises around parts of African and Asian continents and beyond, migrant women move and arrive in developed countries including Sweden consequently altering their individual patterns of living that affect them in various ways. These alterations influence the mode of life, manner of thinking, and well-being of migrants. Since the 1970s immigration to Sweden has been dependent on high economic performances and the demand for foreign labour (Bevelander, 2005). Millions of people around the world have taken residence in different countries with a higher percentage of women than men (Delara, 2016). Migration, however, is caused by different reasons and most women's motive for migration includes economic incentives, family reunification, education, discrimination from a gender-based society, and as well as political violence (Delara, 2016).

Sweden, not until World War II has received a great number of immigrant folks with the immigration of women dominating from different parts of the European countries and as well as African countries (Bevelander, 2005). There has been a growing literature female labour migration for decades and an increase in the migration of women in Sweden. Notwithstanding, most women face exploitation at some stages of migration, discrimination, health risk, violence, and gender discrimination deriving in

large part of social classes, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and immigration status (Gottardo & Cymment, 2019). These challenges have become a large trend affecting large movements of people fleeing from their countries.

## **1.2 Migration**

Migration is one of the growing global phenomena which has impacts on the economy, culture, demography, and politics of a state (Meyers, 2004). An estimated 175 million people in 2000 lived outside their countries of birth. Immigration is a key demographic factor in population growth in most western societies today. In 2001, the population of the EU countries rose by 1.6million with 75 percent of the growth due to net migration and it is considered important in demographic terms in the future to further increase (Meyers, 2004). Its impact has a tremendous effect on the composition and culture of a country and has become an important political issue for the past two decades in most of the western democracies; the demographic disparity and economic growth between the north and south, the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, natural disasters and war in other parts of the world which have sent thousands into western Europe.

Sweden is known for its acceptance of immigrants worldwide and this as stated by the minister for integration Eric Ullehag, “Sweden will continue to be an open and tolerant country \_” I will never compromise on this. As a liberal, I welcome immigrants regardless of whether people come to Sweden as refugees or to work or study” (Rogova, 2014, p.10). In 2019, the number of international migrants globally was 272 million (3.5% of the world population) while 116 thousand came to Sweden and Africans made up 48,710 of the population and the females consisted of 48 percent while 52 percent were male (Swedish Institute, 2020). It is a general belief that during immigration, the receiving and sending countries both benefit from the movement. Perhaps, this can justify the motive why Sweden is welcoming immigrants into their abode.

## **1.3 Migration policy**

The varying origins and backgrounds of growing immigrants in Sweden introduced attention to minority groups. Among other things; an amendment in the Swedish constitution in 1979 stipulated that ethnic, language and religious minorities be encouraged and keep the development of cultural and social life (Lemaitre, G. 2007).

Growing unemployment among immigrants and other groups became an object of specific labour market measures. A system converting foreign educational qualifications to Swedish equivalent was another measure to integrate immigrants into the labour market.

From 1985 the Swedish immigration board responsible for handling the asylum application was assigned the responsibility for the integration of newly arrived immigrants however, the authorities practice a placement policy to avoid large concentrations of immigrants in these three metropolitan regions Göteborg, Malmö, and Stockholm (Lemaitre, G. 2007). Housing became a limiting factor as newly arrived immigrants increased in number and were placed in municipalities where housing is available, with less attention being paid to the state of the local labour markets. The responsibility for integration in 1998 and the introduction of the newly arrived immigrants were transferred to the Swedish integration board established the same year (Lemaitre, G. 2007). The integration board became responsible for disbursing and introducing allowances to municipalities and issuing general guidelines in integration, although the municipalities were responsible for implementing and directing the newly arrived immigrants.

This research however will explore the integration experiences of the African immigrant women in the Swedish labour market although with a general overview of immigration as there is little research on this topic. In the mid-1960s, policy attention was focused on immigrants coming to work in Sweden as tourist immigrants and was raising a threat to Swedish society (Lemaitre, G. 2007). The living and working conditions of the immigrants in Sweden were deemed inadequate; they had low-paid jobs and could not speak much Swedish, the cheap labour environment was feared by the trade union suggesting it might hamper the working environment. Thus, a negotiation between the trade unions, employers Organizations, and the Government. In 1968, the bill was accepted regulating tourist immigration to have a work permit upon entry to the country. It has been a subject of debate in the Swedish public how these immigrants fare economically as a subject of revolving humanitarian consideration in alleviating suffering for the immigrants. However, there are challenges that relate to a barrier which immigrants face in obtaining employment (Bevelander, P. & Pendakur, and R. 2014).



It is understood that immigrants generally face barriers in accessing employment due to moving, language, lack of social capital, and limited specific work experience in their former countries (Bevelander, P. & Pendakur, R. 2014). These challenges influenced the mode of life, manners of thinking, and well-being of the immigrants. Thus, the Swedish integration policy in conjunction with agencies such as Arbetsförmedlingen and SFI and other organizations are established to integrate the immigrants into society (Dahlquist & Gröndahl, 2016). Nonetheless, these institutions do little in solidifying the integration of the migrants as a result leading to the migrants striving for themselves in different integration processes including areas of employment and schooling while struggling to adapt into the new culture. These newly arrived subgroup populations faced several difficulties in Sweden establishing themselves in the labour market as unemployment is high and has triggered debates for the reasons of the immigrants' lack of success in integrating into the society (Andersson & Scott, 2005).

Migrating to a different country and mastering the language while accessing the labour market of the host countries are two essential aspects of integrating into a society (Monica, 2018). However, there has been a double disadvantage confirmed by research that migrant women have the worst outcomes when compared with migrant men and native-born women of the host country. This is however due to immigrant women facing challenges of being migrant women who often takes care of the family along with child-care obligations which hinder them (Monica, 2018).

It is a common experience that African women migrants find the problem of integration in their daily life in Sweden such as when it comes to employment and language. Although, employment support has been one of the strategies set to help African immigrant women to enter the Swedish labour market. Agencies established in the integration process for the immigrants played great roles in integrating them into the Swedish labour market through the form of activities and education so they can learn the language and find jobs. Many of the African women were able to learn the language and find jobs as quickly as possible.

The workplace is one of the vital places for social integration for the African immigrant women to get into the Swedish labour market nevertheless, due to the diversity from inter-ethnic formation and most available jobs in the host country requiring language communication affects the eligibility of employment and

integration. Human capital in the form of education and experiences, language, skills, and work experiences are not always transferable in integrating into the labour market which is not always automatically relevant to a host country thus, has prevented most of the African immigrant women from integrating and employment.

## **1.4 Aim and the research question**

### **Aim**

The aim of this thesis will explore the employment integration experiences of African immigrant women into the Swedish labour market.

### **Research questions.**

1. What strategies do the African immigrant women use to integrate into the Swedish labour market?
2. What challenges do the African immigrants encountered in the process of integration into the Swedish labour market?

## **1.5 Relevancy of the study**

This study will provide knowledge to the goal of integration with a general overview of immigration particularly in Sweden which has moved from the idea of ‘public sector expansion’ as in the 1950s and 1960s with the labour migrants from other countries of Scandinavian to the idea of ‘a triggered wave of integration’ with the diverse migrants according to Migration Policy Institute (2006) coming from different parts of Europe and other parts of the world during 1970s.

This study also will further provide knowledge of immigrant integration which is rapidly becoming a special focus in social work and plays a vital role in its service provisions and policy sectors. The issues of integration have persisted and forcefully deepen the need for understanding especially among the professional and academic social workers now in the front line. This gap will fill in the existing offering in social work by providing critical knowledge with engaging issues arising from factors in integration processes.

Researchers in Europe have been neglecting integration issues associated with migrant women focusing rather on the health and maternal mortality rates (Anderson, 2004; Esscher et. al, (2014). Ruspini (2015), studies in some ways show how more generalized migrant women are faced with linguistic and cultural issues that hinder them from socially integrating and seeking social support. The classification of the population of migrants for example in Sweden comprises European and non-European migrants. According to Ruspini (2015), over 203 individual countries of origin have no gender focus in their classification, especially women. However, the challenges for women may not be the same as those for immigrants in general. Thus, the study will focus on the perspectives of women and fill in the knowledge gap about the African immigrant women who established themselves in the Swedish labour market.

## **1.6 SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE**

Immigration represents significant challenges not just to migrants migrating but also pose a difficult challenge to social workers engaged in the field of social services, educations, cultural mediation in promoting integration in a society. Social work is known to be a profession that enhances the integration and promoting the well-being of people. Even though, social work addresses the need of people by promoting integration, empowering, creating relational connections between immigrants' heritage, cultural diversity, and mainstream culture, it is often seen as a voluntary practice despite the complexity in promoting and enhancing the well-being of people (Erica et al. 2018).

The process of integration in promoting immigrants' successful integration for the development of multicultural society is always crucial (Erica et al. 2018). In social work, the integration of immigrant in new settings constitute an area of specialization with a full range of generic skills (Kathleen, 2007).

Despite the difficulties in the social work welfare sectors, the main goal is to promote social cohesion, individual and community empowerment, collective responsibility by empowering and increasing social participation and commitment (Erica et al. 2018). Nonetheless, due to the wide spectrum of social work, social work services constitute relevant source of support for the whole population both in public, private, formal, and informal services. Social workers participate in different settings such as (social assistant, education etc.) placing them in a position actively engaged in the integration

process of immigrants, addressing immigrants needs and necessities to those who often face lack of resources, social barriers, intolerance, and negative prejudices of their host countries (Erica et al. 2018).

The Swedish welfare system is characterized by distinctive socioeconomic and organizational aspect of social assistant structured to ensure resources allocation and support are set to meet the needs of citizens and immigrants. The Swedish integration policy in conjunction with agencies such as Arbetsförmedlingen and SFI and other organizations are established to integrate the immigrants into the society (Dahlquist & Gröndahl, 2016). These institutions solidify the integration of immigrants in different integration process of employment through interns, language learning so as to adapt into the new society.

## **1.7 Essay disposition**

From the first chapter in this study, the introduction will give an insight into the research. The second chapter will start with a literature review explaining the process of immigration in view of the labour market with the aid of previous research giving readers knowledge of an overall study done on how immigrants get integrated into the labour market. The third chapter follows explaining the theoretical part of the study and will focus on empowerment. Thereafter, chapter four of the study will introduce the methodology examining the research design and include limitations and ethical considerations of the study. Chapter five comes next presenting the framework and analyzing the results of the study and lastly, a summary of the results and as well a discussion part connecting the overall research. Nevertheless, an inductive thematic network analysis method is applied in this study and finally, the research is concluded with a reference list and appendixes.

This research study was initially planned to be carried out by two authors from the beginning. However, due to the death of one of the authors, it was later carried out and finished by a lone author. The authors have both ways put in great effort in other to meet with the end result of this study by or through sending mails to the informants, carrying interviews, and coming up with the writings. The contribution of the late author in this study is to a large extent and cannot be compromised.

## **1.8 Explanation of Concepts**

### ***Immigrants***

These are people who left their country to another country other than the one they have citizenship with the prospects of working and settling for a long period of time.

### ***African migrants***

These are first generation immigrants who migrated from Africa to a different country with the prospect of naturalization, protracting residents either temporarily or permanently from their host country.

### ***Integration***

Although Immigration and integration somewhat go hand in hand, however, there are comparative differences in the concept of the two words. Bosswick & Heckman (2006) describe integration as an interactive process between immigrants and the host society. This study will focus on this concept of integration according to Bosswick & Heckman, (2006).

However, it is of great significance to know and understand that different countries have varying criteria and yardsticks by which the host countries can assert whether or not an immigrant integrates into their society. This criterion which can range from language, culture and lifestyle, and access to social welfare, and will therefore determine when integration has been achieved in this study.

### ***Labour market entry***

The term labour market entry in this study cannot be defined based on my personal understanding of the term. However, closed attention was considered and was defined based on what the informants in this study describe to entering the labour market with respect to the context and situation. During the interview with the informants, most of them had used the word “immigrant jobs” as temporary jobs before entering the labour market which most of them term as dream jobs. The employment immigrant jobs were jobs they believe most natives do not enjoy working with. Some of the jobs were performed as internships and some while studying. These jobs were considered a starting point for them. To some of them, getting a professional job or working a full-time job is what was considered a market entry to them.

Furthermore, owning a business after the temporary or term employment “immigrant job” is also considered labour market entering and working based on a permanent job. Nevertheless, labour market entry will be referred to when immigrants gradually and over time show the same changes in the labour market outcome as the native population.

Showing the same changes in the labour market outcome can be said when the immigrant starts to take positions and becomes stable as the native population irrespective of their labour (Pinar, 2019).

## **Chapter 2**

### **2.1 Previous research**

In this chapter of the research regarding immigrant African women, the author will discuss the context of integration that impacts or influences the integration of immigration in the Swedish labour market in a broader perspective of immigration. In order to search for relevant literature that is in connection to the aim and research questions, the author sought previous research on databases using keywords that are closer in meaning. Using databases such as the discovery search engines at Högskolan i Gävle University (socINDEX, Google scholar) and related literature from the reference list. Some keywords such as Integration, Immigration, labour, Sweden, Women were searched with closely related meanings from each of the words linking them with the word OR on socINDEX so as to get related literature and were also selected by Title. Several pieces of literature were obtained after researching each of the terms. However, combining each term from the history with a (search with AND), no results were found. After several searches were made from history, few pieces of literature were obtained and among the few ones, only the relevant ones were sought for the study which was presented below in themes. More so, during the search, there was limited literature specifically with gender perspectives and African migrants. However, themes among education, neighbourhood effect, cultural differences, and lack of language skills, lack of social capital and networks and discrimination will be elaborated below.

## **2.2 Education**

Several studies have shown it to be challenging in integrating immigrants into the labour market. According to Dahlstedt and Bevelander (2010), education is one of the utmost importance that can affect an individual's chances in the labour market. Most often the acknowledgment of the immigrants' education obtained abroad is problematic and gets affected by employers' uncertainties about the level and type of individual's education.

It is also found in a study by Vogiazides and Mondani (2019) that for several socio-demographic variables influencing migrants' transition into the labour market, the chances of getting into the labour market increase with the level of education.

Education has however been a challenge in the outcome of integration in the labour market among immigrants in different countries including Sweden. It also shows the differences in the labour market outcomes with low employment rate and a high proportion of unemployment, and this is noticeable among migrants with secondary and post-secondary educations (Alden & Hammarstedt, 2014).

Education in this study is relevant as it is considered to be a factor that enhances the integration process of immigrants in a host country as it enables the immigrants to stand almost the same position in the labour market.

## **2.3 Neighbourhood effect**

Another struggle of immigrant integration into the labour market is the residential environment for socioeconomic integration. Studies have shown in Sweden that residence in deprived neighborhoods hinders their labour market integration prospects. Neighbourhood effect advances the view of residence in high poverty and ethnic minorities are detrimental in the labour market (Vogiazides & Mondani, 2019). Studies put forward the negative association between residential segregation and socioeconomic outcomes that can hinder the integration of immigrant involvement in the labour market.

The concentration of immigrants in ethnic and high poverty areas can lead to an unfavorable social network which can hamper employment integration. However, studies also highlight some positive effects of immigrant integration. The neighbourhood effect provides rather a mixed result in labour market integration. A study by Musterd et al. (2008) found that living in a neighbourhood with a high

concentration of members of one's ethnic group improves the labour market integration for low-skilled migrants. It is seen that the ethnic social network and ties existing within ethnic neighbourhoods constitute a source of information, labour, and capital for the members of those ethnic communities. (Musterd et al. 2008).

## **2.4 Cultural differences**

Most immigrant ethnic groups have different family views about males and females, wives and mothers working outside the home, household composition, family size, and value placed on children, and the education of women. All these views shape the economic circumstances which have either direct or indirect effects on behavior in the labour market. Bevelander (2005), affirmed the negative effect as it directly affects the allocation of time between home and market work among women of the same education, labour market experience.

It also affects fertility and decision on education which influences the decision of the labour market and the value of home time thus indirectly affecting the participation in the labour force among women of different ethnic groups (Bevelander, 2005). A study referred in Bevelander (2005) In a seminal work carried out by Macpherson and Stewart using the 1980 census in the United State that they found that the differences in labour force participation of women from various countries are mainly due to the transferability in differences of human capital and cultural differences with regard to market work and child, being married prior to migration is a negative correlation to labour force participation. This can be rooted in the differences where immigrants from less-developed countries are more likely to participate than comparable migrants from a host country (Bevelander, 2005). However, cultural integration regarding immigrants is an important aspect in which migrants can relate and adapt to their needs by implementing integration policies, taking account of society's ethnic and cultural differences, within the framework of available resources, services should be provided regardless of ethnic or cultural background which ensures relevant information about activities and opportunities reaches them (Rogova, L. 2014)

## **2.5 Lack of language skills**

Language proficiency is an important factor in the integration into the labour market in Sweden and almost every part of the world. It stands as a barrier and challenges the immigrants face in integrating into the labour market (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2014).



It is one of the greatest challenges getting into the labour market and according to the European Commission, the lack of language skills is seen as a barrier to labour integration in many European countries and has been one main barrier in Sweden (Mesfin & Mamuye, 2020). Many jobs in Sweden require language proficiency which hinders the immigrants' involvement in the labour market.

Nevertheless, having a good command of the language acts as a stepping stone. Thus, in Sweden, the government came up with a language training program for immigrants. According to Bevelander and Endakur (2012), one of immigrant's farewell in a host country is due to the language training eligibility assisted by government.

## **2.6 Lack of social capital and networks**

Social networking is another factor found that influences the integration of the labour force. Many studies indicate that migrants find their first jobs through social networking such as family members, acquaintances, or friends (Mesfin & Mamuye, 2020). It is argued by Selvi in Mesfin and Mamuye (2020) that these networks and structures are determinants for economic integration. However, humanitarian immigration tends to have fewer opportunities in social networks. They have limited networks that provide access to formal opportunities to gain employment (Mesfin & Mamuye, 2020).

In a study carried out by Ekström about the recruitment behaviour of Swedish employers, informal channels were found to be the main channel of recruitment (Cited in Behtoui, 2004). Nevertheless, personal homogeneous relations by class, ethnicity, religion, etc. of recruitment can reproduce existing inequalities.

Although, networking can be argued to be resourceful but are not distributed evenly in societies. It is said to be conceivable that social groups (gender and race) have different access to social capital (Behtoui, 2004). Thus, inequality of social capital can offer fewer opportunities for attaining or promoting a career for integration. Different sources in Sweden indicate that one of the factors hindering the inclusion of immigrants in the labour market is the lack of social networks. (Mesfin & Mamuye, 2020). Access to the use of social networks and capital is pertinent for labour market opportunities and outcomes.

However, humanitarian immigrants in Sweden are said to lack that capital and have become a good reason why migrants have deteriorated from the labour market

situations in Sweden (Mesfin & Mamuye, 2020). Hiring is and has become a common strategy for network recruitment, however, migrants lack the social capital which has excluded them from integrating into the labour market (Mesfin & Mamuye, 2020).

## **2.7 Discrimination**

Discrimination against immigrants according to the European Commission is one of the frequent obstacles to labour market integration (Mesfin & Mamuye, 2020). The opportunities and chances of getting a job according to Englund in Mesfin and Mamuye (2020) depends on one's originality, nationality, and religion as some employers prefer given jobs according to one's origin rather than their competence or high qualities.

The low level of employment of immigrants is a result of discrimination and it has been a problem immigrant's face in Swedish society. The exclusion of the immigrant from the Swedish labour market is drawn to discrimination from employers and people at the workplace and as a result, the Swedish labour market is to a large extent segregated between the natives and the foreign-born (Mesfin & Mamuye, 2020).

Research has also shown that in Swedish societies, there have been various spheres and evidence of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination against the ethnic minority with a noticeable tendency towards segregation between different ethnic groups and including in the labour market (Mesfin & Mamuye, 2020).

## **Chapter-3.**

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

This chapter of the theoretical framework for this study will focus on empowerment theory. Empowerment according to Adam (2008, p.17) is "the capacity of individuals, groups, or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieved their own goals and the process by which individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives". The concept of empowerment provides various strategies to guide and help immigrants in a new society to integrate into the labour market.

Empowerment is a multifaceted idea that means different things to different people. It is viewed as holistic and non-hierarchical. In this study, the Author has chosen the empowerment theory in order to understand how the African immigrant women take

control, achieve self-direction, and inclusiveness rooted in connecting with the experiences with other people and viewed individual achievement and social action since it theorizes the relationship of people with power and powerlessness in a society (Humphries & Rees cited in Adams, 2008). The definition of empowerment is not an approach that is a straightforward approach. In other words, its concept is understood in different and competitive ways. In social work, its concept challenges and points to the imperative for those who are treated most unjustly in a society and have the least to take power against injustices, people, and structures that oppress them (Adams, 2008).

It is an approach that seen as a therapeutic approach that seeks the well-being of individuals, groups, and communities in society by promoting and facilitating growth and self-fulfillment (Payne, 2014). This approach, however, guides practitioners to help in the direction of power recovery of their own or personal feelings and personal ways of life and enable them to overcome or rise above suffering and disadvantages (Payne, 2014).

Empowerment is furthermore rooted in self-help associated with political conservatism since in the 1980s. the equality-based and left-wing elements of empowerment, dramatically benefited from the movement of liberation, rights and social activism, feminism, and critiques of inequalities, strengthened by anti-racism and the oppression which arise from different social class, age, sexuality, disability, religion, culture and so (Adams, 2008). From all views of empowerment, it literally means 'becoming powerful. Nevertheless, it embraces both theory and method in social work. According to Thomas and Pierson cited in Adams, (2008, p.18) "the theory concerns how people may gain collective control over their lives so as to achieve their interest as a group and the method by which social workers seek to enhance the power of people who lack it".

Importantly, empowerment concerns participation where people play a more active part, have greater choices, exercise more power, and contribute to decision making and management (Adam, 2008). The concept of empowerment would, however, be a vital aspect in this study to provide various strategies to help and guide immigrant African women to get integrated into the labour market. Also, the concept in relation

to the aim of the study would explore the strategies of how the African immigrant women integrated into the Swedish labour market.

## **Chapter 4- Methodology**

### **4.1 Research design**

This research is aimed to explore the experiences of how the African immigrant women integrated into the Swedish labour market. A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was carried out. Since the author of this research seeks an in-depth understanding of the research, a qualitative method was used as it is said according to Rubin and Barbie (2010) that qualitative methods are better understood for interpreting, describing, and gaining in-depth understanding. The interview method applied in the study involves face-to-face conversation and the use of the media such as Facebook for video calls to contacting some of the participants for the research. This was as a result some of the informants could not make time for a face-to-face interview due to the pandemic and the fear of any means of contracting the Covid-19 virus. Nevertheless, the research will apply the inductive thematic network analysis method.

### **4.2 Participants selection**

The authors of this study wanted to have a better understanding of how the African immigrant women got integrated into the Swedish labour market. For enough data to be gathered for the study, five participants were suggested for the study. However, only four were available. In the limited time frame for the study, four interviews seemed feasible to obtain enough data for the analysis. This study was carried out by two active authors from the beginning of the study, however, at one stage of the research, due to health issues, one of the authors could not further with the research and was later continued by a lone author. Nevertheless, the participants in this study were sent emails asking for their participation in the study. The participants in this study were known African immigrant women from different African countries who were one-time colleagues to the authors and are all living in Sweden and were not randomly selected. The authors suggested the participants are best suitable for the research and as such, purposive sampling was used in this study.

Purposive sampling is also known to be a judgment sample which is an informant selection tool and due to the qualities the informant possesses. It is a deliberate choice of the informant, a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or number of informants (Tongco, 2007). Thus, the known African immigrant women seem eligible and fit the selection criteria for this study.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions using an interview guide (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The semi-structured interview with an outline of open-ended questions gave the participants the ability to answer the questions in their own view of experiences rather than a yes or no answers and each of the interviews conducted lasted for about 60-80 minutes as agreed with the participants. All interviews were recorded with a digital audio device. While carrying a qualitative interview, this is important not only to collect vital words but also, to free the interviewers to keep full attention focused on the respondents (Rubin & Babbie, 2011).

In the proposed interview study, an anticipated understanding and interest as well as describing the specific questions (semi-structured questions) were used. Mails were sent to the informants on the designed study and this is mandatory according to the ethics of social work. At the beginning of the research, we had high expectations and believed that it would be easy to find interviewees since the area of interest is “African immigrant women and the labour market” however, it became very difficult and challenging due to the ongoing global pandemic. Hence, the process became time-consuming. Although the agreed mode of extracting information from the informants was through personal and face-to-face conversation. This was modified at some points in the interview stages when it became very difficult to either fix a date and time with the interviewee due to busy schedule from the interviewees and was furthered prompted by the ongoing pandemic. We had to adhere to the guidelines making us have some session over the internet on Facebook. However, the authors were able to maintain the initial structure of a “semi-structured interview” which according to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) allows for a discussion and not a question of yes or no answer format irrespective of the platform and distance.

### 4.3 Analysis

The form of analysis in this study is thematic analysis. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) thematic analysis helps to break down interviews by identifying, describing, organizing, and reporting themes found in the data. It is arguable that the transcription of interaction is still a necessary step needed in the analytic process because a written record of interaction provides a handy document that an observer can return to repeatedly re-read and reflect on (Leandro & Fernanda, 2019).

Although, Brinkmann (2013) stated that there is no standard form of code for transcription of a research interview. However, valuing the steps of the research process and getting to understand the researcher will come to know that qualitative research is exploratory and experimental. All four interviews were held in English. Although, despite the use of an audio device for the interview, notes were still written down. The four interviews were transcribed into written words. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) acknowledged, a transcript is a translation from one narrative mode into another narrative mode. For the case of this study, the author transcribed one narrative mode; the oral conversation from the interviews into another narrative mode which is the written source which later serves as a tool for the analysis of the study.

All the text was re-read separately by the authors for credibility and accuracy of the work thereafter, highlighting the sentences in order to form themes and coding. The authors went through the transcript of the interviews and marked interesting parts that were related and that meet the aim of the study. For clarity of the work, the transcript was photocopied as a document. Coding is the next phase after transcription which justifies the recurrent collection of data from the interview. During the process of the interview, some sentences and statements were mentioned repeatedly and emphasized. These conscious and unconsciously repeated words led to hints to the data intimacy which enabled easy coding of the sensitive statement. The same goes for thematizing the coded words and sentences. During the process, words are being selected, organized, and matched with other similar classes to form a body of title or subject independently. Themes were generated and later reviewed so as to ensure a broad understanding of what is to be used in the findings. Relevant findings in relation to the research aim and questions were classified into different units.

However, the coding was not conducted or identified using Atlas Ti. But rather it was framed while carefully reading and was spotted while reading.

#### **4.4 Limitation**

Due to the ongoing pandemic, it has made it difficult to reach out to the target participants for this study for interviews due to the fear of contracting the virus. It was difficult fixing a date for the interview since it requires a face-to-face interview and as a result, this took very much time in the study. The result in the study might one way be affected. As a result, during the interview, some of the participants could not explain in detail in some of the cases. The interview was held on Facebook and was recorded and written down. However, not every word was able to be grasped or written due to the limited time we had with the participants. We fear some of the vital information might also not be written. Each of the authors in this research analyzed the written answers differently in order to criticize and compare the answers obtained for the result so as to reduce biases when interpreting the result. Nevertheless, the result of this study cannot be generalized since the interviews were reached out to only four participants.

#### **4.5 Essay credibility**

When findings are to be used and utilized for a practice, evaluating the quality of the research is essential. The aim of credibility of research should outline the rigor and integrity in which research should be conducted and also ensure the credibility of the findings in relation to the qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015). The concept of generality, reliability, and validity associated with the study in relation to qualitative research will be elaborated. Nevertheless, Flick (2007) and Mills (2010) see the credibility for evaluating the qualitative nature of research and refer to it to the extent research is believable and appropriate and especially the agreement between the participants and the researchers.

Qualitative research is said to be often criticized when it lacks scientific rigor with the poor justification of the adopted methods, transparency in the analytical procedures, and furthermore, when the findings are merely a personal collection of opinions subjected to the researcher's bias (Noble & Smith, 2015). However, undertaking qualitative research as a novice can be challenging, demonstrating rigor due to no acceptance of the standard by which the research should be judged. Although, one way

to maximize the credibility of this study is the method of asking the participant's involvement in this study by sending letters of their consent in the study.

#### **4.51 Reliability**

This describes the consistency within an employed analytical procedure in a study (Noble & Smith, 2015). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), reliability is the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings which concept concerns the replication of a study. However, in this study, the trustworthiness by the methods undertaken and dependency by the researchers was clear and transparent. Open-ended questions from interview guides were used and both researchers were involved in transcribing the interviews conducted and analyzing the findings. Again, the cross-checking of each other's work was put into practice in order to enhance the credibility of the findings. Nonetheless, the reliability of this study cannot be measured thus, can be questioned due to the interviewees' individual interpretations and opinions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviewees' interpretations might be inconsistent over time, perhaps due to an influence, bias of thoughts or feelings. Nevertheless, the reliability of this study is difficult to measure as a result of inconsistency.

#### **4.52 Validity**

This refers to the integrity and the application of the methods undertaken and the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Recognizing the multiple realities that may exist between the researchers' personal experiences and viewpoints that may result in bias in the method in this study was put into consideration. Kvale, (2007) explains that the validation of a study rests on the quality of the researchers' craftsmanship in an investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings. This explanation was moreover taken into consideration when conducting the findings. Although validity in this study cannot be proof worthy due to the lack of experiences of the Authors and as a result, the study can be scrutinized and observed.

Cultural differences can be said to affect the communication between the Authors and the respondent. However, this was considerate to avoid the cultural clash. (Kvale, & Brinkmann, 2009). This was done by clearly and accurately letting the respondent respond in a way they feel safe and accurately presenting the respondents perspectives. To reduce bias during the interview, the use of a phone to record the



interview was used and the analysis was approached separately and compared the findings from the interpretation.

### **4.53 Generalization**

One central capability of learning is taking account of a larger specific number of observations then extracting and retaining the pertinent common features which characterize the classes of the observation. However, the extent to which research findings can be generalized in a larger context or populations and in different settings can be said to be generalizing (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Based on the personal biases and opinions from the four informants in the study, however, the result of this study cannot be generalized since it is based on a small group. As said by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), drawing general conclusions from qualitative research is difficult although having a larger sample might be possible with the help of previous research making cautious generalizations on aspects of the same investigation.

### **4.54 Ethical consideration**

This research is expected to follow the ethical principles that go in line with what Grinnell and Unrau (2018) advocate that includes requirements of information and consents in addition to confidentiality and the use of materials. In other words, it is the authors' duty to inform the African immigrant women's participation in the research and explain what the study is about and its purpose prior to the commencement of the interviews. The migrant women were also informed that their participation in the study was purely voluntary with their rights of interrupting their participation at any time during the course of the interview as advocated by Grinnell and Unrau (2018). The study and interview however, was carried out such that the informants cannot be known now or in the future. The data collected was protected so that no unauthorized person can have access to it. Under the requirement for use of materials in line with Grinnell and Unrau's (2018) principles, the collected material for the study is intended to be used only for scientific manners which the authors uphold to. An appendix form containing the above-mentioned principles was provided through a written Broken- English and English language and signed by the authors and migrant women before the interviews were carried out (see appendix 2).

Furthermore, in order for the informants to be anonymous, their names and names of specific areas like workplaces and parks would not be stated in this study because of

the identity protection of persons involved and since the material collected would be used solely for this particular research.

## **Chapter 5- Analysis and Research result**

### **5.1 Analysis**

From the result and analysis, two themes were discovered and are related to the research questions. These themes are named as the “Facilitator factors” and the “Mismatch in the new settings”. These themes elaborate factors that enables and renders the participants integration into the labour market. However, there are sub-themes from each of the themes obtained which represent the findings to be presented. To back up some of the findings, some quotations from the interviews are used when necessary. Information gotten in this study are all from African immigrant women from West African countries. However, due to the confidentiality and ethics of this research, these African women would be assigned as informants 1, informant 2, 3, 4 respectively so as to explore their experiences of integration into the Swedish labour market.

The study shows that the African Women were able to integrate into the Swedish labour through various aspect despite the challenges. It is shown that seeking education through language learning plays a vital role in the integration process for the African women before integrating into the Swedish labour market. It has also been shown that the Swedish language stand as a prerequisite to having a dream job of interest for the African immigrant women and it is noticeably that most of the African immigrant women have a background jobs from their home countries making it challenging for them working in a different choice of interest. Education was important and realizing to the African immigrant even though it is time consuming starting from the basic level to achieving their dream jobs.

It has been shown that the motive of having a better life by motivating oneself has helped the African immigrant women integrating into the Swedish labour market. Religious believe is a source of resilience for some of them to keep with their struggle until they are fully integrated into the labour market.

It has also been shown that the public institution for example the Arbetsförmedlingen and SFI plays vital role in the integration of the African immigrant women in the Swedish labour market through language learning, job opportunities, support for basic understanding in terms of securing jobs and also programs set to ease the affairs of the activities of the African immigrant women.

Networking and connection have also been shown to be a factor that facilitate the integration of the African immigrant women into the Swedish labour market. It has been shown that the networking and connection of relatives among ethnic groups, friends, and people of particular religion are valuable factors that provides great support and opportunities in navigating into the labour market.

Racial and discrimination is something done directly or indirectly towards people from different sectors either on a private or public level. The result of this study shows that the chances of immigrants from a different background being employed are slim as most of the employers preferred the natives and also employees who comply with the norms and values of the mainstream. Although, there are policies in place to integrate everyone in terms of equal right, obligations, and opportunities for all regardless of people's background. However, in this study, some of the African immigrant women have face cultural and racial barrier in integrating into the Swedish labour market

## **5.2 Results: Theme 1 The Facilitating factors**

This theme represents the facilitator factors that enable African immigrant women to succeed in integrating into the Swedish labour market. These factors include Self-motivation and personal commitment to having a better life, Education, Public institutions, and lastly, Networking and connection. Integrating into the labour market can be seen differently depending on the individual. This also depends on circumstances surrounding the individuals. However, the author will examine the interpretation of what the participants have said which facilitates their integration.

### **5.21 Self-motivation and personal commitment to having a better life**

While transiting the process, the African immigrant women themselves have chosen to remain self-motivated in various ways during these hard times. According to Corley & Bushra (2020), Religious faith was an important source of resilience or

staying motivated for some of the African immigrant women. Religion is rather sense as a blessing to keep holding on to and that things might change along the way.

Informant 3 had said when she was asked how she found her strength during this challenging period, she had noted that

*“I am a Christian and I pray. My belief might not cut across to everyone but my daily prayer kept me going. Therefore, when I am faced with challenges, I see it differently as a blessing and this keeps me going”.*

This response affirms (Corley & Bushra's, 2020) claims. It is important to note that many women demonstrate strength and resilience throughout the stressful migration period, one of the informants affirmed that at some point she felt she was not going to learn the language but she kept motivating herself, although the process took her time but realized the future was very important. Although the language has been a challenge but has been a positive one that has helped her integration. This informant had shown the capacity of how she recovered herself from her inner strength after the transition from her home country to Sweden. Informant 3 also noted that

*“Language was my strength. As I continued schooling and learning the language, I built self-confidence”.*

Many of the immigrant African women had migrated for a better life due to the opportunities they could get from their host country. Informant 4 said

*“We already had two children then, saw the opportunity and decided to come. It was planned. I would not say it was easy, I mean we faced challenges such as relocation or moving but with time it got better”.*

It can be seen that the African immigrant women took control of their circumstances as an incumbent who are willing to start life afresh in Sweden and also exercised power by agreeing to relocate with the family even though it is discomforting relocating especially with children. Providing all these observations, one can perceive and understand how the four interviewees have been able to take control over their circumstances, exhibit power and skillfully accomplishing their goals in order to maximize the quality of their lives upon arrival to Sweden as present citizens. It is categorically evidenced that migration brings with it many complex changes.

It is important to note that one of the aspects of industrialization is the movement of labour across the Atlantic, even though these current African women immigrants have

left their country of origin, one should not forget the benefits migrants bring when they cross boundaries. They gain the Western European labour market to produce goods and services which the industrialized countries mainly supply to other parts of the world; they open up economic opportunities for the present country (Sweden). This attribute contradicts the common view that African immigrant women are petty traders and peasant farmers fleeing overpopulation pressure. This is quite different as some African immigrant women migrate voluntarily.

According to Katherine & Donna (2016), a growing population from developing countries moved to developed countries either due to war, terrorist attack or voluntarily but the large number moved due to industrialization and urbanization which caused an increased flow of migrates into Sweden.

Despite facing some challenges, it is clearly seen in the four participants' narratives that they have achieved better language skills in Swedish and an effort to integrate into the labour market. However, some of the efforts emanate from self-effort through the idea of initiating a personal business that they have created for themselves to get into the market. Informant 3 had incorporated herself into the integration process by becoming an entrepreneur. She had said,

*“I have integrated into the labour market but it is the one I created for myself. How would it have been if I did not have the business? Running the business is not what I had in mind. What I wanted to do is to work with kids/children, this, therefore, contributed to my interest in studying further in the area. But what I asked myself is that when I am done with that will I be able to penetrate into the labour market?”*

This session however one of the strategies the immigrant African women is have hastened the integration process into the labour market.

## **5.22 Public institutions**

In this session, the author will discuss public institutions (Arbetsförmedlingen and Svenska för invandrare known as (SFI) whether these organizations had played an impact role or influence the integration of the immigrant African women. These organizations highlight the perceived role played by public institutions in enabling the informants to enter the labour market. The Swedish Public institutions (Arbetsförmedlingen) is a Swedish governmental agency organized under the Ministry

of Employment mainly responsible for the public employment services in Sweden and the implementation of labour market policies. According to Arbetförmedlingen, the organization established a support programme in the form of activities and education for certain newly arrived immigrants and the aim is to learn Swedish, find a job and become self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

The persons eligible to take part are immigrants who are 20 but under 65 years of age and have protection status or family member (Arbetförmedlingen). The activities carried out in this program is that the immigrant and the employment officer together plan what activities suit one best to be able to learn the language and find a job as quickly as possible. Any immigrant can come in contact with this organization. As stated by Arbetförmedlingen, some of the activities include language training if you do not have basic skills in Swedish language.

Nevertheless, Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) is an introductory course in the Swedish language and Swedish society. The programme is designed for non-native speakers who are registered as nationals, the course is divided into three category and its cost is free; in each course one will learn to communicate in Swedish, get individual study plan, get advice for study and work possibilities, learn about Swedish society and immediate surrounding and lastly compare Swedish culture with other countries (Luleå Kommun, 2020). The courses are at different level if one needs to develop or build one's skills, work experience placement, support when you are looking for work, help and guidance if you are considering starting your own business. Having a knowledge of what the organization does, it is left unknown whether or not these organizations have truly been a successful impact integrating these African immigrant women as we look deeply into the responses of the participants.

It is generally known that adult immigrants bring individual human capital in the form of education and experiences from their host country to a new country's labour market participation. Through SFI, some of the immigrant African women were able to acquire language skills that later helped them to get jobs. It is noted that without SFI, it would have been difficult to get employment. Seeking to fulfil one of the research questions, the strategies the successful African immigrant women used in integrating into the Swedish labour market, Informants 1 had said

*“I will advise that when one gets here (Sweden) the first point of call should be SFI in order to get the basics at least to attain a course C or D in order to be able to find your way around the society”.*

In many ways, the backgrounds of the immigrants interviewed for this study laid emphasis on the Swedish Public Employment Service also known as Arbetförmedlingen. Informants 1 had also said about this institution.

*“Unlike Arbetförmedlingen, I wouldn't say it has been so helpful but at least taught me the basics that if one is in search of a job, one has to apply to it and it does not have to be on their platform”*

Looking from the response of the informant, one can attest that Arbetförmedlingen played the role of serving as a support to the newly arrived African Immigrant woman by helping her understand the basics of what it entails in searching and securing a job in Sweden. On the other hand, informant 2 had also said.

*“How helpful they are to you depends on how committed you are to them”*

She claimed that the reason they assigned an employment officer to one is only when they know one is actively involved with them. On the contrary, why would the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetförmedlingen) not partake in the process of integration of an immigrant since its obligation is for all immigrants and even the natives? As against one of the informant's opinion about Arbetförmedlingen,

Informant 2 had noted that

*“I have never asked help from Arbetförmedlingen so I don't personally know how it works”.*

This is a fallout from the organization's proposal to establish a support program in the form of activities for certain newly arrived immigrants. It is worth noting.

However, informant 3 had also said,

*“While for Arbetförmedlingen, I know a lot of immigrants like myself that got jobs through the organization although this wasn't entirely my case. I think it is a good organization but most people I have come in contact with have had bad experiences. I acquired an education in Information Technology from them last year which can enable me to get a job in such a role”*

Some positive impacts such as getting a certification in education with the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen) and also that the organization is reputable but this does not bind the fact that there is an understanding of what is viewed as exclusive or inclusive according to other people's notion of their bad experience encountered with the organization which might be the case of a different informant which is her reason for never asking of help because other people's recommendation of the service which have a direct positive or negative impact of our experiences with them (Bontis et al, 2007).

On one hand, it is mentioned also that an immigrant can receive introduction benefit from försäkringskassan (the Swedish Social Insurance Agency) when they partake in the program (Arbetsförmedlingen) informant 1 had said

*"As a credit, arbetsförmedlingen has some benefits which include fixing an unemployed person into the labour market for 2 years"*

The claim, however, is inconsistent because there is a claim that the natives benefit more from this as compared to immigrants. Although in Sweden, the national union and employer organization have played a key role in developing institutions for the labour market and also has the central union body (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO) and its employer counterpart (the Swedish Employers' Confederation, SAF) negotiated pay, working conditions and solution to many labour market problems (Arbetsförmedlingen) yet, is almost impossible to find a place of placement and a job, this has been a say from informant 2 who had difficulties with the organization.

*"Arbetsförmedlingen played no role with getting me a job. I got a job through a friend. I have an African friend working in a restaurant who was close to the chef and the chef agreed for a practical placement"*.

While looking at the Swedish Public Employment Service and not entirely focusing on just one aspect of the organization in achieving labour market integration outcome, We will look into other aspects such as giving out language training if you do not have basic skills in Swedish, Swedish For Immigrants (SFI), help and guidance if you consider being an entrepreneur. In defining labour market entry for the African immigrant women, adult education plays a crucial role in the host country in order to bridge and build up new human capital-education and work exposure, different from their country of origin. Hence language learning, education, and work exposure represent a key component to smooth the integration process in the host country



(Sweet-land, 1996). As skills are necessary for effective functioning in the society and the workforce, Paying attention to the informants 1 responses,  
*“SFI has been of enormous help till now, I would not have been able to go on without it”.*

Informants 4 had also confirmed in her testimony how this organization helped her integrate fully into the society at large.

*“SFI has been very helpful not only to integrate me into the job market alone but into the society as a whole because it has given me the basics that I needed to know”*

It is a basic Swedish language for those who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue. The concept of attainment and job expectation can differ in both genders. Male immigrants tend to underestimate the employment chances and income found in the host country as compared to their home countries while female immigrants have accurate and reasonable expectations of job attainment by learning the language first especially in this institution SFI so as to integrate into the society despite it being time-consuming. Informants 1 had said

*“Although I worked with an English-speaking company, SFI has been very helpful not only to integrate me into the job market alone but into the society as a whole because it has given me the basics that I need to know”, “Starting with SFI, it has been helpful. It is an adult education school that helps you learn the language. Personally, it has been positive and helpful” and lastly “SFI helps with how to be able to speak good Swedish and I personally think it’s helpful because if you are able to learn Swedish then it’s easier to enter the labour market and also get a social life”.*

While the aforementioned might have had similar traits and experience with the organization reverse seems to be the case for informant 2 who noted that both the employment agency and SFI had no impact on her integration story

*“SFI and Arbetsförmedlingen played no role with me getting a job” and also “When I started SFI we were told we will be given places to do our practical placement but it*

*was taking long so I searched for a place myself. It was through self-effort and contact I got the job”.*

The description of SFI in the integration process of the four interviewees varies differently and this included references to aspects that are both positive and negative but viewed from a subjective perspective, the emphasis is played on communication which highlights language skill as the focus of the education.

This means that for the African immigrant women to be employed in the Swedish labour market, they need a knowledge of the Swedish language which the Swedish Public Employment Service offered as an affliction to SFI but attaining and learning the language is not a guarantee to being employed or getting a place for placement because the available jobs are limited while the immigrant in search of the jobs is unlimited. However, this contradicts Rydgren (2004) saying that the language problems are often singled out as the reason why the employment of migrants is avoided. Nonetheless, the importance that Sweden places on the teaching of Swedish as a foreign language is under a system of compulsory education for immigrants as a means to include African immigrant women in public adult education (Rydgren, 2004).

But it cannot be justified saying either Arbetförmedlingen or SFI have not successfully played a significant role in integrating the African immigrant women even though some of the informant attainment and integration process was carried out by themselves without any help from the organizations.

More so, because people have had a bad experience after being in contact with the organization. Lindbergy & Sandwall (2007) had stated that the elementary Swedish language program for adult immigrants (SFI) has been running for more than 40 years. However, its history is not one of great success in the ways the story has been told or presented in official debates. However, this ongoing study will be able to explore the experiences the African immigrant women have had and are faced with when in contact with these organizations.

A report from a nationwide evaluation of the program, undertaken by the Swedish National Agency for Education Skolverket in (1997) was ironically given the title *Vem älskar SFI?* (Who loves SFI?) This was an evaluation carried out about the program and this draws attention to conflicting views on the role and status of the program (Lindbergy & Sandwall, 2007). Judging by the live condition or experience

and unemployment from the informants, it should be considered that the program (Arbetsförmedlingen and SFI) should meet changing labour market demands. One can clearly see that going through SFI has a positive effect both on immigrant chances of finding a job and of reaching a certain minimum income (Rydgren, 2004). African immigrant women with higher education are less important than skills in the Swedish language for improving their situation in the Swedish labour market this as mentioned by informant 2,

*“One thing I have observed here is that even when you have the qualification and you are the best candidate for the job, they will give it to the Swedes who do not even have a qualification”*

Denoting that language is a prerequisite over educational attainment from an immigrant country of origin. knowing that education, income, and employment is an ingredient of social inclusion, the newly arrived African immigrant women are faced with the struggle to gain employment, earn an income and stay updated in education in order to get a matching certificate that enables them to penetrate the labour market and as we all know, the certificate does depreciate over a long period. In order to meet up both the demands in the labour market and technology, the African immigrant women participation becomes high during this transition process (Adam, 2008). In order to achieve their goals and maximize their quality of life to overcome the societal norms of being allocated to the informal sector, (Andall, 2018) education plays an important role in determining the nature of job opportunities these women will hold in the labour market.

Informant 1 had said

*“I will advise that when you get here (Sweden) the first point of call should be SFI in order to get the basics at least to attain a Course C or D in order to be able to find your way around the society”,*

This certainly fulfills one of the research questions: the strategies used by the successful African immigrant women in integrating into the Swedish labour market.

### **5.23 Networking and connections**

Relationships possess potential benefits which facilitate the work-related activities of an individual (Wolf & Moser, 2009). Relationships with a classmate, friends,

relatives, ethnic groups, religion and so can become extremely valuable creating connections as you mature into the professional world, informant 2 said that *“I kept searching and never gave up. My strength was the encouragement I got from others who had been in the same situation. They also had the same story to tell and encouraged me till I got my first job through a connection from a friend”*.

Growing and creating relationship networks do not start when one is almost graduating. It starts immediately as you arrive at the society. To this end, establishing a relationship with fellow relatives, ethnic groups and other immigrants outside the society provides great support and opportunities as it navigates through the labour market. It is argued by Selvi in Mesfin and Mamuye (2020) that these networks and structures are determinants for economic integration.

Networking is a form of social cooperation and collaboration among different individuals. The above informant also has referenced that comparing owning a business to being unemployed pushed and kept her going because the unemployment rate is high. This, as a result, has influenced her and at the same time enhances her connections with different individuals. The informant2 had said *“My motivation has been my business and the contacts I have made over the years with people”*.

The network is being established in different fields as a business because similar experience, interest, and background have coined their accumulated knowledge to enhance their understanding of works of life and this stimulates mutual support among individuals.

## **5.3 Theme 2: Mismatch in the new settings**

This theme has three sub-themes; language skills, racial and discrimination barriers, and time consumption in the Swedish policy. These themes are, however, some of the challenges the African immigrant women faced before getting into the labour market.

### **5.31 Language Skills**

The language is one of the heads to look upon when considering integrating into the Swedish labour market. Although, considering who it favors, immigrant women from an English speaking countries are more favorable in the labour market compare to

those with no English language skills. This is due to the fact that younger or majority of the Swedish population speaks and understood English language. Nevertheless, in spite of the privileged of speaking the English language, the city of abode stand as a problem for securing a place in the labour market in Sweden and also to those having an educational background from their countries of origin. This is as a result of having the faith of working in the field of specialization which was a dream of reality to them but never happens. Informant 4 had said

*“The language is a big challenge especially if one lives in a small town like Gävle. It is more challenging for those that already have education in their countries of origin because one has the intention to commence work in the area of their interest such as working in an office. The language is a big constraint compared to living in bigger cities such as Stockholm or Uppsala where one can find an English-speaking job by working with international companies”.*

Language is a key role in the integration process. It is hard to say what kind of information the African Immigrant women are in need of when starting a new life in Sweden. Although, it largely depends on the kind of individual the person is and the country of origin where the person is migrating from; this is due to everyone holding different perspective and knowledge about life. SFI is considered important regarding these questions as school is the first regular contact immigrants have with the Swedish society. This has caused challenges to the newly arrived immigrant women especially finding themselves in smaller cities where the possibilities of working in an intended field are challenging to those who are already used to their primary job from their countries of origin.

The language stands pertinent for easy networking and enables active participation in the labour market. It has become even more realizable as important to getting integrated even though it was time-consuming and challenging. It was a challenging one for the immigrant African women because most of them were used to working in their country of origin. Most of them had realized the importance of the language and had to start from the basics level even though it was time-consuming though realizing the future which is more important to them.

It has been a challenging one but it has been a positive one that helped them integrate. All four participants had spoken about the importance of the language skill as a prerequisite to getting integrated into the labour market, however, one of the

informants had argued that being inside of the labour market without the language is also one of the easiest ways to learn the language and a way which spread easily social networking in the workplace through practical placement in an organization. Nevertheless, the Swedish language is one of the important factors the African immigrant women established themselves before integrating into the market in order to effectively communicate in their places of work. The Swedish language can therefore be said to be an impediment to getting into the labour market, most especially residing in a smaller city.

### **5.32 Racial and discrimination barrier**

The view of discrimination is seen although, differently by the African immigrant women. Among these women have agreed about the ill-treatment but yet acted open-minded like nothing is there. Informant 3 had said.

*“The barriers and discrimination are there although we pretend like we don’t see it, such as racial/racism barrier. I felt lucky later on finding myself in a company that is all-embracing and open-minded”*

Discrimination within the nature of employment in Swedish societies is different in the view of the society even though every job is seen as normal in the society.

However, most term jobs seen as dirty or low paid jobs can be seen done by the immigrants but for the case of the African immigrant women and most African immigrants starting up a new life, it is a starting point for most of them in integrating into the society. Informant 1 had said

*Accepting what comes first by accepting those small or menacing jobs, is a step forward to integrating and not necessarily waiting until you get your dream job which may never come as you have not taken the risk of starting afresh in the new country. One good thing I admire about the Swedish economy is that there is no discrimination on the nature of jobs, to them all jobs are equal as compared to my country of origin where some jobs are termed dirty or low class compared to others.*

The nature of accepting any nature of jobs is a result of the discrimination the African immigrant women faced in securing a good job due to their race as African women and their educational background from their home countries. However, most of these immigrant women lack experience in a specific job and also their inability to secure a

job that suits their previous experience, education, and career due to the language barrier. Most of the Women have been discriminated against due to the language. As a newly arrived immigrant woman in the Swedish society wanting to explore the market, the chances of getting a job even with the experience and skills will be narrow without the language. Bevelander & Pendakur (2012) in their study also agree that the language stands as a barrier and challenges the immigrants face integrating into the labour market. This is a normal situation in every work sector when it comes to easy working and easy communication among the workers.

Informants 2 quotes that

*“You might have the skills and experience but if you are not able to communicate, everything goes bad and confusing. Also, cultural differences cause a lot of disagreement and misunderstanding”*

Discrimination can be carried out directly or indirectly in various sectors; private or public which occurs in relation to access to work, level of payment, promotion possibilities, and working conditions (Wiesbrock, 2011). The chances of being employed by Swedish employers are often reluctant, especially within the immigrant background as the natives are largely preferred. The Swedish policy nevertheless emphasizes the values of diversity and multiculturalism although, at an individual level, employers favor employees who comply with the norms and values of the mainstream society (Wiesbrock, 2011). Under the mantra of the Swedish integration policy of equal rights, obligations, and opportunities for all regardless of the cultural and ethnic background, it is even harder for African women to get integrated into the market due to their culture and racial barriers. Most times, it is believed that African women are not capable of a particular job until they have to prove their employer wrong of the thoughts which normally non-African women or natives have to prove.

Informants 2 said

*“It is not easy integrating oneself into the labour market especially with the language, cultural and racial barrier. It is much more difficult for an African immigrant like us to integrate into the market because we usually have to do more and prove ourselves more in order to secure a job that a non-African or native Swedish wouldn't have to show much to get the job”*

This act of discrimination is acted upon by various employers and as an immigrant from an African background in the society is more difficult for most. The ability to

learn and speak the Swedish language is believed to be a key aspect of integration. Informant 1 had agreed on this and she had said, *“I think as long as you speak the Swedish language, finding a job will be easier”* nevertheless, this cannot be concluded for all the cases for most of the African women. Some of them believe even with the ability to speak the language, it is not guaranteed to be integrated into the labour market except through connections.

Informant 3 had said.

*“The first discrimination is the language. The other discrimination is because we came from an African background, we are being looked down on our capability in the labour market so, jobs are usually given to the natives, this they are aware of too. Getting a job is through contact then it will be generally difficult to immigrate to get such contact as a new incumbent in the society. I have had friends who are able to speak the language but it is still impossible to secure a job especially if one is aiming at jobs that are not tagged as immigrant jobs”*

### **5.33 Time consumption in The Swedish policy**

The Swedish welfare system was open mainly for those who lived in the country which carries the responsibility of providing public services. This service is also applied to the registered and accepted immigrants who immigrated to work in Sweden and have same rights and regulation as everyone. However, there had been an introduction of restrictions in the 1960s for the labour immigrant into Sweden where immigrants need to obtain a labour permit before their arrival into the country.

Although, the market was open to the Nordic immigrants (Alden, L. & Hammarstedt M. 2014), however, opportunities in the labour market gained increased especially for Africans and middle eastern since the mid-1990s. Scierup et al., reported in Alireza, B. (2004) that many of the immigrants who arrived before the mid-1970s in Sweden got jobs in the labour market in low qualifications segment such as the industrial sectors and was further said even when they had almost the same educational level as the natives. African Immigrant 1 had said,

*“Integrating into the labour market is draining; irrespective of your qualification one is still limited to a particular type of job; immigrant jobs such as cleaning as compared to my home country where one has access to the job market. The process and time of having to wait till you learn the language, gather experience from odd*



*jobs, etc...is time-consuming with the intention to find your dream/interest job someday”*

In the context of the Swedish welfare towards the immigrants in the country, it is noted that the African immigrant women all agree on the basis that the policy supports the integration of immigrants (women) on the Swedish labour market. However, there have been concerns to improve the policy towards getting integrated as it is really time-consuming. The language which stands as a prime before getting fully integrated into the labour market for example spending few years to learning the language is time consuming for some of them with educational background from their own country. Informants 4 had said

*“I had gone to school for immigrants (SFI) for almost two years just to learn the language and it is really time-consuming for me”*

This is due to the circumstances that immigrants have to learn the language so as to find themselves in their interest jobs. Nevertheless, before getting integrated and being able to speak the language, it really takes a lot of time. Measuring the Swedish integration policies in an overall ranking by the Migration policy group in 2006, Sweden was at a top mark of 88 out of 100 points, scaling from the unfavorable policies to the best policies (Cited in Wiesbrock, 2011). The indicators which scored Sweden best practices in respect of the labour market integration includes labour market access, security of employment, labour market integration measures, and the rights associated with employment scoring more points than other countries included in the ranking making her the most favorable policies for promoting integration by the Migration Policy Group (Wiesbrock, 2011).

According to the Swedish Integration Policy, it recognizes an overall strategy that identifies several areas and is seen as a faster introduction for new arrivals, more in work, more entrepreneurs, better language skills, adult education opportunities, and effective anti-discrimination measures. The policy goals are to be achieved for the introduction of newly arrived immigrants. Nevertheless, the process according to the African immigrant women, which they established themselves before getting integrated into the Swedish labour market, is a long process and is said to be taken into consideration.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

### **6.1 Brief summary of the result**

This research studied the experiences of African immigrant women in the Swedish labour market. The result of the study is drawn from many factors before the African immigrant women integration, for example, Motivation, Networking, connections, Language, Discrimination, and other factors like the public institutions which play a vital role in the integration process in integrating the immigrants to their best abilities. However, it will be important to note that both the institutions and the migrants have had a greater role in the integration process. Furthermore, from the research questions, it will be wrong to admit that most immigrants had face a lot of challenges in their host country even when most of the them have the aspiration of traveling for a better life. They face a lot of discrimination which can be discouraging in the process of involvement.

The result of this study was explored and was from the point of view of the informants, different factors, however, had enabled and challenged the integration of the African immigrants before their integration into the labour market. There are no general differences among the informants, however, the result supports the claim of Corley and Bushra (2020) of how African immigrant women demonstrate strength and residence through motivation.

Motivation in this study is a facilitator factor that had helped keep the African immigrant active in their integration. Migration to a different country can be challenging. However, the African immigrant women have chosen to motivate themselves and challenge their fear by drawing on religious beliefs, that God is always with them and will keep them progressing in the new phase of life even though it was not an easy task. The beliefs of the opportunities compared to their countries were worth moving on for a better life. The decision to migrate to a different country also stands as an expectation for many immigrants. A study carried out among immigrants from Cameroon shows that some immigrants migrate with the expectation of their host countries with a mix of economic motivation, having the opportunities of having a job, and as well improving the income situation (Fleischer, 2007).

Networking and Connection are seen as a form of social cooperation and collaboration among individuals and have been established within experiences,

interests, and background of knowledge and understanding of works of life to stimulate mutual support among immigrant women. Networking and connection are some of the facilitator factors which has provided opportunities to the African immigrant women into the Swedish labour market. Even when discrimination was put into account for the less favorable employment outcomes for the immigrants, it was claimed in research by George Lemaitre, (2007) that employment is not found through formal means but also through networking or contacts from friends and relatives. These contacts which he also argued that the path can be more extensive even for natives of a country than it would be for immigrants in the early years. Network of local connections and contacts develop over time, though not always to the extent of a native-born. This feature of labour market can reinforce the adverse effect of employments uncertainty and reticence existing regarding the hiring of immigrants (Lemaitre, 2007).

Language and discrimination are seen as challenging factors but importantly, the brighter side of the future lies within the language skills even when learning is time-consuming. Although, Discrimination has always been a setback among immigrants in their host countries. It can be confirmed and noticed that most of the African immigrant women were discriminated against before and after getting integrated. A study carried out by Mesfin and Mamuye, (2020), shows that the low level of employment of immigrants is as a result of discrimination which the African women also acknowledged that it was one of the challenges immigrants face in Swedish society. The author of this study, however, attests to this claim as many of the African immigrant women have also agreed about the ill-treatment they faced before integrating. In the same study by Mesfin and Mamuye (2020), language proficiency is seen as an important factor in the Swedish labour market. This is a fact that the European Commission sees language inability as a barrier to the labour market in many countries, in Europe, and has been a barrier in Sweden as well. In this study, language is seen as a barrier to integration in Sweden. However, most of the African immigrant women from English-speaking countries are, although favorable in the Swedish labour market since most Swedes speak the English language and some employment accepts English language applicants. In spite of the privilege of speaking English, it can be problematic depending on the residence. This can also be confirmed in a study that the neighbourhood in Sweden hinders the labour market in integrating the immigrants. (Vogiazides & Mondani, 2019).

Discrimination in this study is one of the challenges the African immigrant women have encountered in the process of employment integration. Although, one cannot deny the issues which are in the form of discrimination, however, The immigrant's entering a labour market can be seen similar to that of the natives new to or when re-entering to a labour market. Studies have shown various conditions that can hinder the economic integration of immigrants in a country. In a study by Bevelander (2005), he noted that the skills and knowledge of a labour market are not perfectly transferable between countries and that immigrants are less productive, experiences high labour market turnovers, have lower employment rates and lower wages considering their education during their first period in a new country. The level of the country's skills, for example, the language skills, experiences or human capital can be disadvantages in immigrant economic integration (Bevelander, 2005). In this study, it is noted, some of the African immigrant women had gone through and experienced this claim. However, the immigrants get to adjust with time to the new labour market and society through the investment that modifies skills and acquiring new skills (Bevelander, 2005).

The Swedish policy is considered one of the nightmare experiences for the African immigrant women in their process of employment integration. Although, the implementation of various policies aimed to ease the adaptation of the immigrant in the Swedish labour market, the welfare system which influences the economic integration of the African immigrant women was considered time-wasting and to some extent cause difficulties seeking employment. It was argued that due to the relative increase of immigrant since the mid-1980s, there has been an increase in institutional discrimination, the integration policy and labour market policy measured towards immigrant have shown to be ineffective and to an extent have caused a prolonged time spent outside the labour market causing stigmatization (Bevelander, 2005).

## **6.2 Theoretical Discussion**

The author in this research chooses to explore how the African immigrant women integrated into the Swedish labour market using the empowerment theory as a framework in the study. Although, the concept of empowerment is seen as a multifaceted idea that is defined differently by different people. However, it is describe to mean "becoming powerful" (Adams, 2008). This concept has played a

great role in this study. It has played a role in the facilitator's factors for example, the public institutions functioned as an empowerment to the African immigrant women following the institutional agents such as the *arbetsförmången* and SFI in respect to work and language learning. Aslan, (2019) in her study had claimed that the principle of activation of immigrants in a welfare state context should be interpreted in a holistic sense and the living conditions and personal definition are considered.

The public institutions is an empowerment project in place in empowering newly immigrants in the society which has functioned in supporting the African immigrant women in entering the job market and as well empowered them in their language skills. Institutional support is said to be incorporated systematically in public administration to neutralized individual and structural disadvantages so public officials can provide social capital on a general basis rather than random basis (Aslan, P. 2019).

The Swedish labour market programs are empowered by controlling and discipline mechanism which involves higher eligibility requirement, low-level benefits, and more sanctions (Bengtsson & Berglund cited in Aslan, 2019). This, however, has transformed the Swedish welfare state by the introduction of the workfare reform and has played a vital role in determining how unemployed people are met and responded to. This social welfare reform has one way empowered and supported the African immigrant women to become better through the institutional program.

### **6.3 Methodology**

The informants in this research worked in different sectors of work and were asked questions regarding their specializations although the same question for different people. We were able to interview four of the African immigrant women which can be regarded as a huge strength to support the study. However, one of the weaknesses of this study can be drawn from the time frames for the interviews. Due to the ongoing pandemic, before the interview, it was difficult to reach some of them. Most of the days fixed for the interviews were always procrastinated by the informants which took so much time before getting to interview them all making the informants rush the interview. Nevertheless, we were able to interview all of them and the interviews were face-to-face interviews and as well through Facebook. This strengthens the study as the whole informants were able to be interviewed and the

four interviews was seemed reliable. The author believes the strength gathering information from the informants will be enough for the study. Attentiveness was prioritized during the interview as notes was also taken down for future usage. This idea of taking notes helps strengthen the study when transcribing. Most of the answers from the participants met the expectations of the research.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

From the result of this study, it can be drawn that both organizations SFI and Arbetsförmedlingen have played different roles in the lives of each of the informants. All these aforementioned formed the perspectives of the immigrant women about the organization. Extracting the informants' experiences from the interview has been comprehensively exploratory. It shows the trend on the challenges faced and the strategy used in successfully integrating into the Swedish labour market. From the analysis of the result, both characters have played an important role in the integration of immigrant women into the labour market. Although, it still has its weaknesses. The analysis shows that most of the Immigrant African women experienced difficulties before integrating into the Swedish labour market. Education plays a key role as language is considered very pertinent in terms of obtaining employment. The analysis shows that job opportunities can easily come from relatives, members of an ethnic group in the form of networking. It can also be said that the ranking order by education, human capital backgrounds that appears in the result is a reflection of discrimination in the sense that the immigrant African women are treated differently for reasons other than their capability and productivity.

## **6.5 Suggestions for further research**

The findings that emerged from this study were generated by interviewing only four successfully integrated African immigrant women about their experience in the Swedish labour market. The author suggests that it would be interesting to see if this study can be reproduced, however from a different perspective that compares the different ethnicity groups making up the participants' populations, and examines the similarities and differences that could be found in the exploratory study.

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## **Appendices**

### ***Letter of consent***

Dear Ma,

We (Abdulmuminu and Olamide) are third year students in the bachelor's degree program, International social work at the University of Gävle. We are currently writing our thesis on African immigrant women's experiences of integration in the Swedish labour market. The purpose of this letter is to request you to take part in the interview with us about your personal experiences. The interview will take a maximum of 30 minutes; however, this interview is regarded as voluntary participation. Nevertheless, we will deeply appreciate your participation in the study. Regarding this, if there is any question you can kindly contact us through our phone numbers through 0760645008 or 0734862426. We would also like you to bear in mind that the information shared during the interview will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the study according to the ethics of social work.

Yours sincerely,

Abdulmuminu and Olamide.

### ***Interview questions***

1 We know that organizations such as SFI and Arbetförmedlingen are organizations assigned to help immigrants integrate into the society and as well into the labour market. How have these organizations worked for you to get integrated/have they been helpful or not?

2 What are the things that are required of you before integrating into the labour market?

3 What are the things that are required of you before integrating into the labour market?

4 What can you say are the challenges/barriers being integrated into the labour market?

5 How have these challenges affected your mood in life?

6 How did you find strength during this challenging period?

7. In the area of being integrated, you have had previous work experiences coupled with your current employment, are there any social benefits?

8. What strategies did you put in place at the initial stage of migration and after, that worked for you and helped your integration into the labour market.

9 How is it for you to be integrated into the Swedish labour market?

10 What are the challenges and barriers to getting into the labour market?

11. SFI and Arbetförmödligheten are organizations set up to help immigrants integrate into society, especially into the labour market. Have they been helpful to you?

12. What can you say is the pertinent aspect of getting integrated into the Swedish labour market?

13. How did you find yourself in the labour market? Did you get help from people?

14. According to previous research, integrating into the labour market can be hard for immigrants. How did you find strength?

15. Comparing your integration process in Sweden against your country of origin, is it the same?

16. Having gone through all these challenges, what other strategy did you employ aside from learning the language?



