The Role of Languages in the Integration of Working Age Migrants into the Finnish Labour Market: The Case of Migrants Working in NGOs in Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a qualitative case study investigating the role of languages in the Finnish labour market integration of working age migrants. Specifically, the study focuses on first generation migrants working in non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The empirical data used in the study consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with the part-time (N=5) and full-time (N=5) migrant employees working in the SONDIP – the Union of Multicultural Associations in South-West Finland and the TOGETHER Association in Turku, Finland. In addition, the self-assessment of migrants’ Finnish language proficiency was also included in the study. The interviews as well as self-assessment were analysed by means of qualitative content analysis.

The present study covers two main themes. The first theme of the study refers to the Finnish labour market integration of migrants through languages. The findings of the current theme show that Finnish and the native language were mostly significant for the part-time migrant employees to integrate into the Finnish labour market, whereas Finnish was mainly vital for the full-time migrant employees in the same process. Meanwhile, multilingualism was also to some extent beneficial for both groups of migrant employees to become involved in Finnish working life. Overall, the study confirms that languages, particularly Finnish, as an important form of human capital have a major role in the Finnish labour market integration of migrants.

The second theme of the study concerns the Finnish language acquisition of migrants through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The findings of this theme indicate that the migrants acquired Finnish through formal education and/or training as well as through planned and daily activities. In other words, the migrants learnt Finnish as a second language (L2) through formal, non-formal and informal learning. To be more specific, formal learning helped most of the migrants develop written skills in Finnish more compared to oral skills. On the contrary, non-formal and informal learning supported the majority of migrants in improving Finnish oral skills more than written skills. Thus, the study confirms that the L2 is acquired not only through formal learning but also through non-formal and informal learning.

According to the self-assessment, the migrants who worked as advisers had advanced proficiency levels in general Finnish, but the migrants who had intermediate proficiency levels in general Finnish worked either as an instructor of activities or as an instructor of personnel. In brief, the study illustrates that migrants working in the NGO sector have intermediate or advanced proficiency levels in general Finnish, which closely match the type of occupation. On the other hand, the self-assessment reveals that the migrants had lower proficiency levels in written skills compared to oral skills as well as had higher proficiency levels in receptive skills in contrast to productive skills. However, migrants’ writing skills were at the lowest level amongst their four skills in Finnish. Therefore, the study suggests that Finnish writing courses should be arranged for adult migrants in Finland.

Keywords: Migration, integration, language, language education policy, SLA, formal, non-formal and informal learning, human capital, labour market, NGO