

# The Perspectives And Experiences of Somali Immigrants to Sweden in Relation to Integration

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# **The Perspectives And Experiences of Somali Immigrants to Sweden in Relation to Integration**

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## Abstract

It is to be recalled that successful social integration between the immigrants and the host community could have a positive impact on improving the development and resilience of society. It contributes to the advancement of sustainable development by creating better socio-economic interconnectedness, mutual trust & cultural tolerance. Sweden has been one of the most prominent examples with regard to refugee integration programs mostly because of its welfare traditions and generosity to the immigrants. Despite the massive effort from the government, however, nowadays, it seems that the integration strategy is facing many challenges at the implementation level.

The objective of this study was to explore the experience and perception of Somali immigrants in Sweden with regard to the integration process. A qualitative research design was employed in this thesis and qualitative data were collected using semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions. The study finds that the Somali immigrant's perception of integration is influenced by many factors including to employment, education, social bonds, social bridges, social links and language etc.

The main conclusion of this study indicates that many of the research respondents perceive the government integration program as assimilation rather than multiculturalism despite the official government policy approach, which is a multicultural-based integration. As a result, there was a general feeling of losing identity, culture, and religion among the respondents. The lack of social networks and friendliness among the host community, which could have been a prerequisite for better integration, appear to have a negative impact on the integration of Somalis into the mainstream society. Widespread unemployment, perceived discrimination, lack of educational background as well as social separation between the Somalis and the host, seems to challenge creating valuable social networks, which consequently resulted in difficulties in the path towards integration.

**Key words –** Somali immigrants, integration, social bonds, social bridges, social links, immigration.

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## **1. Introduction**

The concept social integration can be used as a way to improve the development and resilience of a society (UNRISD 1994). One of the overriding objectives of sustainable development, as discussed at the World summit for social development held in Copenhagen in 1994, was to ensure the active participation of all individuals within the social, political, and economic spheres of society regardless of race, gender, geography or ethnic origin and that they have equal rights and responsibilities (M.Sharif, 2013:1). The reason behind this is to prevent social conflicts and contribute to the advancement of sustainable development by creating better socio-economic interconnectedness, mutual trust, cultural tolerance, and facilitation of the individual's self-fulfillment. Furthermore, the European Union and the International Labor Organization have also indorsed that integration is an essential prerequisite for sustainable development (EU 2011; ILO 2004).

In Sweden, integration is a government priority area both in policy and strategy-wise. The Swedish sustainable development strategic document puts the idea of integration within the social pillars of sustainable development. In other words, integration enlisted one of the three integral components of the sustainable development concept that are a fundamental precondition for long term development. Hence, one could argue that social cohesion and integration within society is prerequisite for achieving the objectives of the sustainable development concept in Sweden. Notably, this is important due to the fact there was an increasing influx of immigrants into Sweden, which consequently created a prevalent cultural diversity within the country (Regeringskansliet, 2003/4:14).

For instance, in 2015 alone, the government of Sweden received 163,000 refugees mainly from Syria (Larsson, 2018:). However, Syrians were not only the immigrants who made it to Sweden. Pulled by the prospect of high living standards and generous welfare benefits, immigrants and asylum seekers most often come to Sweden. Somali immigrant communities are also among those who made their way to Sweden, mostly as refugees starting from 1991 after the civil war has erupted in Somalia republic.

Hence, arguably, the implementation of the inclusive integration process is inevitable to ensure and foster social cohesion and equal participation within the community. The notion of integration is multidimensional, which requires actual participation in all aspects of societal life, including culture, socio-economic, linguistic, political, and others. However, in Sweden, it seems that past studies have emphasized the economic aspects of integration. For instance, both in the academic debates and public discussions, labor market integration has dominated the previous studies within the field of integration (Mikkonen, 2011:13). But, this is not to deny the significance of the labor market in the integration process. However, focusing only on the labor market integration might undermine the potential values of other domains or indicators within the integration framework.

This study intended to undertake an ethnic-based approach towards further understanding the integration process. After careful observation and reading the literature, I decided to focus on the Somali immigrant community in Sweden. The study is going to cover some of the indicators mentioned by Agar & Strang in their conceptual integration framework, specifically employment, education, social connection (social bonds, social bridges & social links), and language. These indicators will be studied through the themes and concepts that emerged from the respondents. The researcher will adopt and operationalize a limited version of the Agar & Strang integration framework as an analytical framework.

### 1.1 Problem statement

In general, the practice and implementation of integration policy in Sweden continue to receive some criticism. One of its weaknesses is the fact that most of the adaptation activities are expected to come from the minority groups instead of dealing with it as a two-way process (Arora-Jonsson, 2017:4). Konle-Seidl also calls for more nuanced empirical studies that focus on the repercussion of integration policy implementation on different immigrant communities (Konle-Seidl, 2018: 35). Even though different groups of immigrants face similar problems with the integration in Sweden, there is a widespread

perception that some groups of immigrants encounter more challenges than others. Somali immigrants included those groups facing many challenges concerning integration in Sweden (M.Sharif, 2017:2). Immigration to Sweden has been easy for the Somalis. However, the challenging part has been their path to integration into mainstream society, which is, in many aspects, very different from theirs, ethically, socially, economically, politically, culturally, and religiously (Salat, 2003:3).

Unfortunately, so far, there is a limited number of research studies undertaken on this subject from a perspective angle. Hence, such stories remain unheard of not only in public debate and policy discussions but also in the existing research. Therefore, bringing in an ethnic-based approach into the integration studies would be an added value to both academic and policy debates. Such studies wouldn't only highlight the different challenges within the integration practices in general. However, they also provide some understanding and explanations as to why some groups of immigrants face more challenges than others. As a result, I believe this thesis can fill important gaps in our understanding of how different groups of immigrant experience moving to Sweden, and specifically how they struggle to make new lives for themselves in Sweden.

Generally, the study target group faces common integration challenges since they have a lot in common regarding culture, traditions, social structures, languages, history, and geography. This doesn't mean to ignore the fact that even within the Somali immigrants, there are heterogeneous groups with a diverse socio-economic and educational background. However, I believe that addressing the shared challenges regarding the integration process will help them and facilitate their path to mainstream society.

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

The study's purpose is to explore integration process experiences and perceptions of Somali immigrants in Sweden. Given that multiple factors could influence the opinion of immigrants, I believe that bringing forward their feelings and experiences could help us to understand the integration barriers they are facing. The fact is that Somali immigrants'

Integration challenges can't be understood without considering their perceptions. Moreover, the fact that I am Somali and my familiarity with the cultural context of the study group provided me an opportunity to access and generate the necessary information in detail.

### 1.3 Research questions

1. What factors have influenced the integration process for the Somali immigrants into the mainstream society in Sweden?
  - a) What challenges do they face in the employment sector?
  - b) What challenges do they face in order to participate in the education sector?
  - c) How are their social connections including, social bonds, social bridges and social links into mainstream society?
  - d) What is their Swedish language proficiency?

### 1.4 Definitions

For the sake of clarity, it is crucial to define some fundamental and regularly used terms. *Integration* as a concept is used according to the definition put forth by Toumas Martikainen (2005:13).

*The process by which individuals or groups of immigrants are incorporated into the various social arenas and segments of the new host society. It is a two-way process whereby both the immigrants and the host society adopt new features as a result of their interaction.*

*Somali immigrants* are the first generation of Somalis in Sweden as an adult. Adults and children usually undergo different paths towards integration and, to some extent, face different challenges.

## 1.5 Study Scope and limitations

The notion of integration is a two-way process, and it can be fully understood if both prospectives are included in the integration studies. In other words, a complete result could be delivered only when the perspective of others i.e., government authorities, host communities, and other immigrants groups, are considered in relation to the target immigrant groups. Unfortunately, due to time and space constraints, this study emphasizes only the perception of Somali immigrants concerning integration.

Similarly, this study didn't cover all the integration domains that Agar & Strang mentioned in their integration framework. As the analytical framework shows, the grey colored indicators of figure 1 don't include in this study. Instead, selected integration indicators were studied from the perspective of Somali immigrants.

## **2. Theory, Concepts & Background information**

### **2.1 An overview of immigrant's relevant legal and economic support framework in Sweden**

According to the literature, the Swedish government started its welfare policies following the end of the Second World War in an attempt to assist integration between different social strata (Valenta & Bunar, 2010:5). During this time, the emphasis focused on the general action of the welfare system intended to cover all citizens. However, labor migration during the 1960s and more recent refugee and family reunifications have gradually diversified the existing Swedish ethnically homogeneous populations. As a result, the immigrant population was included in the general welfare policies, which attracted them into the general integration process. Moreover, the government authorities also realized that there are special needs for minority groups. Then finally, integration policies targeting the immigrants were formulated and implemented in the 1970s to meet the particular needs of the immigrant population (Valenta & Bunar, 2010:5).

In 1975, the new immigration policy was approved based on three Hallmark principles: equity, freedom of choice of the individuals, and cooperation (Valenta & Bunar, 2010:5). This turn was not only as a result of increasing immigrants and their demands but also the initiatives of the government to openly describe Swedish society as politically inclusive, contrary to the system of exclusion that implemented by many EU countries at the time. This change was significant since Sweden's integration policy moved from assimilation to multiculturalism. It is because the multiculturalism approach recognizes the importance of the cultural contribution of different groups while acknowledging their socio-cultural differences. While on the other hand, the assimilationist approach requires that immigrants integrate into the mainstream society by accepting the host society's culture and way of life (M.Sharif, 2013:10-11).

Starting from the 1970s until 1997, '*immigrants policy*' (invandrarpolitik) was the field of politics that was responsible for integration-related activities. Even though it was a

separate entity from the migration policy, integration was under the same authority with the migration ‘Immigrant Board’ (Invandraverket) (Suter & Qvist, 2011:1-3). However, the two policy fields were separated after a significant reform implemented in 1997, which established two separate authorities, the Migration Board (Migrationsverket) and the Integration Board (Integrationsverket), each responsible for its policy and strategies. At the same time, immigrants policy was renamed integration policy to avoid a division among the immigrants and the host community. Instead of considering it only as an immigrants’ issue, the integration was realized to be a general concern to the whole society. The two significant changes made by the new integration policy at that time were shifting the policy focus from groups to individuals and shifting from measures targeting the immigrants to measures targeting the general population (Suter & Qvist, 2011:1-3).

In recent years the Swedish integration politics has experienced massive reforms and changes. One of the reforms implemented in the year 2010 could be an example. According to Brännström et al., 2017, the improvement involved four main areas, namely; centralization, activation, marketization, and freedom of choice (Brännström et al. 2017:3). Similarly the authority and the responsibility regarding the introduction of new immigrants into the society were transferred from the municipality to the public employment service (PES). As Brännström et al., 2017 believed, this move has not changed only the administration issues of the integration activities but also lowered the policy focus. The reform also provided a place where private organizations could participate and become responsible for implementing integration policies.

## 2.2 Somali immigrants in Sweden

The first Somali immigrant came to Sweden in the 1950s as a labor immigrant, joined by some international students after Somalia gained its independence in 1960 (Kleist, 2018:18-20). However, their numbers were minimal up until the 1990s when the civil war erupted and forced the central government of Somalia to fail. Since then, the Somali refugees have been steadily increasing through asylum and family reunification in Sweden. Notably, the influx of Somali immigration to Sweden has increased between the

years of 2007 and 2015. Currently, the Somali immigrants living in Sweden are estimated to reach 63,853, of which 41,335 have been naturalised so far and now hold Swedish passports. It is by far the largest group of Somali descendant living in the Scandinavian countries (Kleist, 2018:18-20).

Somali immigrants in Sweden are a heterogeneous group concerning their educational background, ranging from highly educated professionals to low level educated persons who depend on social welfare programs. The majority of Somali immigrants who work as professionals are those who arrived before the 1990s in Sweden, while those who came after, have no or little schooling background . 70% of Somali immigrants in Sweden have only completed primary education or have unknown levels of education, while only 10% have a tertiary educational background. In 2010 the employment rate of Somali immigrants between the age of 20 and 46 was 28% for men and 18% for women. One more sentence here to point out that Somali immigrants remain some of the least able to access good education and employment opportunities among all recent migrant groups to Sweden (Kleist, 2018:18-20).

### 2.3 Theory of social integration

In sociology, the concept of social integration is “*to a situation where minority groups come together or are incorporated to the mainstream society*” in a voluntary way (Durkheim, 1893). Meaning there is an agreement from both sides to live together, at least to an extent, to be part of a large community. Increased social integration helps to reduce conflict in society, and it helps us to be more connected to each other and our community at large. But what if we don’t achieve this social integration, In Durkheim’s view, this leads us to a problem known as an enemy or a sense of feeling very disconnected from others and our community at large (Durkheim, 1893).

Similarly, Agar & Strang argued that immigrants feel convertible in their resettlement area if the host community perceived them as peace-loving people. While on the other hand, the concern of the host community is that new immigrants might create problems in

their community (Ager & Strang, 2008: 179). In this regard, the perception of the host community about the immigrants could play a very important role in their path to integration. Negative perception from the host community would make the immigrants feel isolated and disconnected from the larger community. Positive perception from the host community would increase the confidence of the immigrants to be part of the larger community. Likewise, if the immigrants respect the norms, values and the rule of law the host community's feelings or concern that immigrants might create problem would disappear. Émile Durkheim, considered society as the "*collective consciousness of people*" (Durkheim, 1893). In other words, the way we think, feel, and behave is mostly influenced by the society in a significant way.

Durkheim proposed two types of social integration mechanism in order society to remain in a cohesive way to avoid too much conflict, mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity is what binds more primitive, or smaller societies together. It is like kinship and shared beliefs that holds us together, and we integrate because of our similarity. On the other hands, there is an emergence of organic solidarity in more advanced societies. In other words, in a more complex society, a complex division of labor requires us to rely on each other more, and this kind of interdependence increases social integration (Durkheim, 1893).

Mechanical solidarity looks similar what Ager & Strang (2008), called as *social bonds* which explains the connections between members of a specific group of people. Usually, immigrants give high priority to family and like-ethnic groups proximity in their settlement area. This would enable them to share their cultural practices and their familiar patterns of relationships (Ager & Strang, 2008:178). The social integration between Somali immigrants in Sweden seems to follow their primitive way of living. the mechanical solidarity or the social bonds between them is highly important in their social life in Sweden. they are more connected because of their kinships and shared beliefs as Somali society instead of integrating other host communities.

For instance, the perception of Somalis about the importance of family is characteristically wide-ranging. It includes a large number of people from siblings, to cousins, to distance family members, and it goes up all the way up to the clan level. One study regarded this as the epicenter of the Somali society (Little, 2013). All these extensive members of the family share a strong bond between them, which provides all the members with inclusive insurance toward unforeseen situations (M.Sharif, 2013:19).

Concerning family decision-making, traditionally Somalis have a clear structure and hierarchy within the members of the household. Everybody in the household has a distinctly clear role within this social structure (Lewis, 2003). For instance, the wife is usually in charge of domestic household activities. Girls usually help their mothers, and some times sit at the bottom of the household decision making chains compared to boys who sit third place in the chain. However, one study indicated that the Somali traditional family structure is contested by their migration to Sweden (Sharif, 2013:19). This could be as a result of moving from their primitive way of living (mechanical solidarity) to a more complex way of life like in the case of Swedish society, which requires us to rely on each other more (organic solidarity).

The formation of linkage with ‘like ethnic groups’ is perceived to have countless benefits contributing towards effective integration (Hale 2000). There are also health benefits associated with the relationships between like-ethnic groups. Beiser (1993) indicated that ‘*immigrants who do not have a like ethnic community available to them might suffer a risk of depression three to four times as high as others who have access to these resources*’ (Beiser, 1993).

Griffiths et al. also argued the importance of refugee community organizations by summarizing this. “Refugee organizations offer a voice for the immigrants. They are the contact point for the excluded ones. They expertise in dealing with sensitive refugee issues and provide the responses they need. They also offer social and cultural activities in order immigrants maintain their customs and religions, speak their language, practice their traditions and discuss news from their home country (Griffiths et al., 2006).

*Organic solidarity* in the case Durkheim or *social bridges* in the case of Agar & Strang, is the relationship or the connection between the immigrants and the host community to create social harmony and refugee participation in mainstream society. In this regard, the friendliness of the host community is one of the crucial factors making the immigrants to feel that they are at home and increase their integration (Ager & Strang, 2008:179). However, as Hultengren (2010) revealed, immigrants face difficulties in communicating with the host community because of their lack of interaction and communication with the immigrants. This practice could be an obstacle for the government efforts to over come the integration challenges in the country. Many immigrants believe that the lack of interaction and communication from the host community side has a significant impact on their path to integration (Hultengren, 2010:42).

Similarly, *social links* or the connection between the individual refugees and state structures (the government) can help to facilitate the integration process of the immigrants. The government structures can play an important role in providing basic services to immigrants, which can lead to successful integration into mainstream society. The assumption is that immigrant's particular circumstances, such as lack of familiarity with their surrounding environment and not speaking the host language could lead to barriers that needed additional efforts from the government structures and broader community if genuine equality of access to basic services was to be implemented (Agar & Strang, 2008:181).

For example, education is an essential element that provides the competence and skills human being needs in support of subsequent employment opportunities. It enables immigrants to become more constructive and active members within the society. More importantly, schools and colleges are significant places were immigrants get sharing experience, contact members of the host community, and play an important role in establishing a relationship within the local community, which also, on the other hand, supports their integration (Ager & Strang, 2008:172). Employment status could be an important indicator for integration of the immigrants because it influences many

important issues like creating economic sustainability, interacting members of the host society, which can also provide an opportunity for language learning for the immigrants (Ager & Strang, 2008:170).

One research indicated that the government of Sweden has put forward many policy initiatives on integration particularly, the immigrant labor market. Including targeting measures to serve refugee recruitment needs, giving high priority for assessment of skills and recognition of immigrant qualifications, developing innovative online tools to provide early support, and new ways to involve employers (Konle-Seidl, 2018: 37 - 42).

Integration is a key policy objective in many areas like refugees, resettlement, social bridges, and community cohesion implemented by the government to enable the smooth transition of immigrants into mainstream society. Integration, in the Swedish context, implies a higher degree of tolerance and respect for other cultures in the society. This shows that the government of Sweden follows a multiculturalism approach of integration unlike the assimilationist approach in the 1970s. As a result, Integration within the Swedish multicultural context allows that ethnic minorities maintain their cultural practices and religious traditions while they are fully participating in the socio-economic and political spheres (Salat, 2010 : 31).

Nevertheless, as some researchers indicated, there is caution for this. For instance, Salat (2010) argues, “*the freedom to maintain cultural and religious uniqueness doesn't envisage a situation where ethnic minorities insulate themselves from the wider Swedish society.*” *On the contrary, ethnic minorities are expected to pledge their loyalty (though not stated explicitly) to their new society and to share fundamental values with all citizens in the country* (Salat, 2010 : 18). In other words, the government policy strategy highlights the objective of the integration as a two-way process. However, most of the adaptation activities in the process are expected to come from the minority groups. Arora Jonsson (2017) also indicated that regardless of rhetorical multiculturalism, the practice and implementation of integration policy in Sweden continues to follow the path of the assimilationist model (Arora-Jonsson, 2017: 4).

## 2.4 Integration through assimilation or Multiculturalism

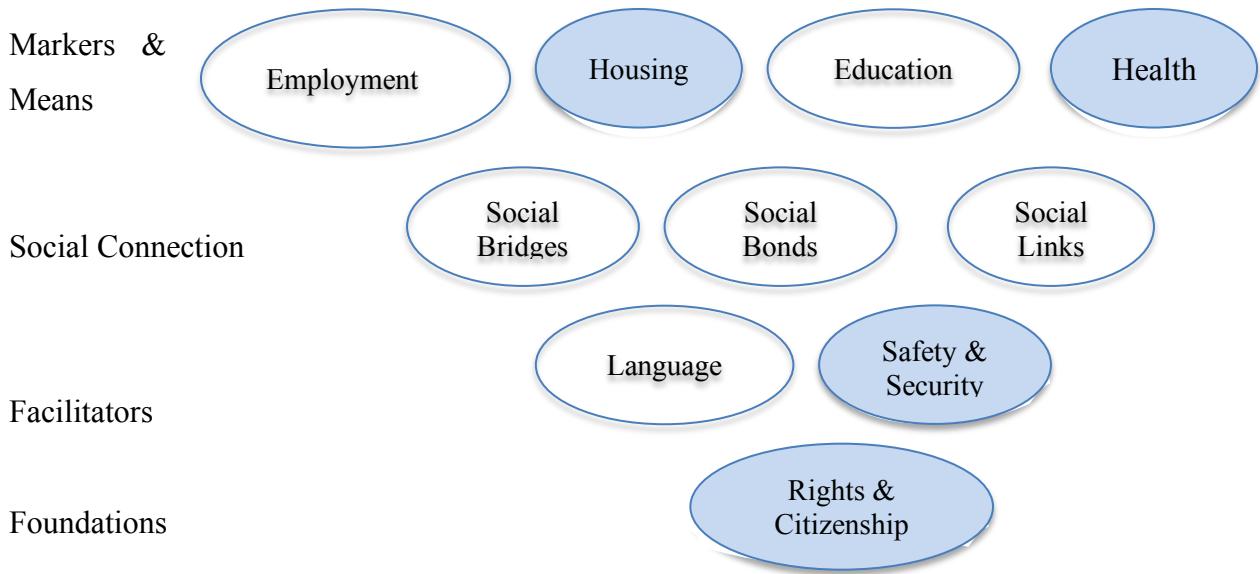
The two models of integration explored here, assimilation and multiculturalism significantly differ in terms of their approach and excusion. The assimilationist approach considers the acceptance of the majority's culture by minorities, while the multiculturalism approach provides the chance for minorities to maintain their original believes and values.

The assimilationist approach requires that immigrants integrate in to the mainstream society by accepting the host society's culture and way of life. In other words, it is one dimentional integration process in which immigrants are expected to substitute their original cultural traditions to that of host community. As the Martikainen (2005) argued, '*the objective is that differences between ethnic groups would eventually wear out and be absorbed in to the host community*' (Martikainen, 2005). Social scientists often used to study the evolution of language assimilation, intermarriage and other socio-economic status of immigrants in order to measure the progress of assimilation in certain groups or individuals (Waters & Jimenez 2005). Assimilation as a model for integration has been criticized due to the fact that it explicitly assumes that there is a such homogenous host community which immigrants could assimilate to and this is diffecult especially in tody's complex and globilised world (Martikainen, 2005).

On the other hand, the multiculturalist approach indicates that immigrants could integrate into the mainstream society and participate in all domains of life (social, economic, political, cultural) without leaving their perivious culture (Salat, 2010: 31). This approach recognizes the importance of cultural contribution between different groups while acknowledging their socio-culturual differences. The popular shift from assimilation to multiculturalism has started since 1960s in most of the western countries mainly due to the increased ethnic diversity in these societies (Martikainen, 2005). The current multicultural integration approach in Sweden has been found based on similar princeples as the constitutional amendment of 2010 highlights (M.Sharif, 2013: 11).

The critics of multiculturalism argue that it focuses too much on the differences between communities instead of similarities. And hence it might creates segregation instead of social cohesion. As Macey (2012) said by encouraging the minority groups to maintain their language and traditional ways of life might have some consequences on their potential future integration process and result a self-isolation (Macey, 2012).

## 2.5 Analytical framework



*Figure 1. Analytical Framework adopted from Agar & Strang (2008).*

Just to reflect the framework above, the study's analytical framework of the analysis was based on three inter-related domains of integration, namely, markers and means, social connection, and facilitators. It is important to mention that only some indicators within these domains of integration were studied from the perspective of Somali immigrants. For instance, in the domains of markers and means, two relevant indicators were analysed (employment and education of Somali immigrants). Somali immigrant's employment status and its challenges, as well as their participation in the education sector, were studied with the help of the themes and concepts that emerged from the data.

In terms of the social connection domains, the analytical framework that will guide the analysis was focused on the social bonds, social bridges, and social links. Social bonds are the connections or relationships between Somali immigrants themselves; social bridges are the connections or interactions between the Somali immigrants and the host community, and the social links are the relationships or connections between the Somali immigrants and the state structures (government offices). These social connection indicators were studied through the themes and concepts that emerged from the respondents. Furthermore, Somali immigrant's Swedish language proficiency and the challenges were studied in order to assess if it has some implications on their path to integration.

Finally, it is necessary to make it clear that not all the integration indicators mentioned in the Agar & Srtang conceptual framework would be used to study. Hence, all the grey colored indicators of figure 1 are not utilized in this paper. That is not to undermine the significance of the remaining indicators in the integration process. However, the study analytical framework was chosen and delimited to fit within this particular case. As a result, it was focused on indicators that were inline with the primary data collected during fieldwork. It is also mentioned in the limitation of this study.

### **3. Methods and Methodology**

#### 3.1 Research design

This study is based on a constructivist philosophical worldview as most often, qualitative researches adhere to this paradigm (Creswell, 2014), and as a result, I have adopted a qualitative research design for this study. I have three reasons why I chose a qualitative research design. First, the topic under investigation is related to some aspect of human experiences that cannot be counted or expressed in numbers. It related to subjective experience, cultural characteristics, and personal perspectives of the Somali immigrant about the integration process. Second, I can only find out the data by immersing myself into the phenomenon as I want to study the integration practices by observing and talking about the Somali immigrant within that phenomenon. Third, I was interested in interpreting, generating meaning, and gaining a holistic view of the perception of Somalis about the integration rather than comparing and measuring or quantifying the phenomenon.

According to Silverman, qualitative research usually focuses on real-world situations, and as a researcher, I wanted to be open to whatever emerged from the study respondents (Silverman, 2014). From this, we can understand the fact that in qualitative research, there is a lack of pre-determined constraints in the findings. Due to this, I tried to be in a natural setting and allow findings to emerge only from the study respondents. By doing so, first, I conducted a more inductive approach so that the theoretical background could have very little influence on the process of data collection (Bryman, 2012).

Specifically, this research was conducted in the form of a case study. The nature and the type of research questions formulated have made it suitable to do a case study research design. Usually how and why research questions are more explanatory and most often fit with case study according to Yin (Yin, 2003)

### 3.2 Data Collection

Primary data was collected in Gävle from March 2019 to April 2019. Field data were collected based on two techniques; first through semi-structured individual interviews and then through focus group discussion because qualitative data are most often obtained from sources such as interviews, focus groups, observations (Silverman, 2014).

Before starting the data collection, I thoroughly explained the purpose and other important aspects of the study to the respondents, including the confidentiality, anonymity, and reciprocity. Respondents chose venues for the interviews and focus group discussion to make them feel as comfortable as possible. Most of the interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted in the public venue (Somaliska Föreningen i Gävle local office) except some individual respondents who chose their own homes instead. Data was collected from the Somali immigrants who moved or relocated into Gävle city of Sweden from the surrounding rural villages.

### 3.3 Sampling

The appropriate method of sampling for this study was purposive sampling. Due to the limited number of primary data sources that can contribute to the research, I followed basic standards of purposive sampling, ensuring variety (Silverman, 2014). On the other hand, my familiarity with the cultural context of the study group, since I am Somali, possibly helped me to incorporate some relevant social characteristics that were necessary to understand the respondents. Notably, five variables were taken into consideration during the selection; age, educational level, gender, years of residence, and marital status of the respondents.

Since the focus of this research was the first generation of Somali immigrants, age was an important variable. Because different generations of immigrants might follow a different path to the integration process, and both pre-education and education obtained in Sweden was also an important variable during selection.

I consider gender because both the perspective of both men and women were incorporated into the study. More importantly, all household domestic activities are considered to be women's role in Somali culture. So the transformation of gender roles that happened within the married couples after immigration to Sweden is a good indicator of their integration.

Years of residence in Sweden was an important variable because integration is a long process that can take more time and even generations in society. I purposefully sampled Somali immigrants who arrived in Sweden as an adult (+18 years) after the collapse of Somalia central government in 1990. Before this date, the number of Somali immigrants was limited in Sweden.

Table 1 Selection Variables

<b>IR code &amp; No.</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Years of residence</b>
IR - 1	41	High school	M	Married	7
IR - 2	40	High school	M	Married	8
IR - 3	32	Intermid. school	F	Married	11
IR - 4	48	High school	M	Married	7
IR - 5	50	High school	M	Married	12
IR - 6	45	Bachelor	F	Married	27
IR - 7	39	High school	M	Divorced	12
IR - 8	29	College student	F	Divorced	7
IR - 9	34	Assistant Nurse	F	Divorced	12
IR- 10	39	Bachelor	M	Married	10
IR -11	34	None	F	Divorced	8
IR- 12	45	Diploma	M	Divorced	25

*Source: Data from the field*

### 3.4 Interviews

Interviews were undertaken in a semi-structured form. The process started with some explanatory interviews with no transcripts. The purpose of this was to check and get some insight on how to set-up the interview guide. This process was useful practice for me as I learned some vital information and experience I could have overlooked otherwise. Then I proceeded to conduct twelve face to face interviews ( seven men and

five women). The entire respondents were Somali immigrants, and they all had social characteristics mentioned in the sampling techniques. I asked for recording the audio before each interview. The time of the interview ranged from 39 to 75 minutes and was primarily determined by respondents' willingness to participate and express themselves.

According to Kvale (2007), Semi-structured interviews have 'flexibility to changes and modification of sequences and the structure of questions to follow up the gathered data.' As a result, I conducted interviews in such a way that I listen to the respondents without interrupting and imposing opinions on them. Every time I held a meeting, new themes and patterns were emerging, then I usually incorporate into the next interview in detail. The discussions were stopped after the data collection process reached a point of saturation, and clear themes and patterns came out, which could provide answers to the research questions (Guest et al., .2006). All the interviews were conducted in the Somali language. And checked for the clarity of the sound before starting each recording.

According to the Creswell (2014), indepth interview explore individual experiences and perceptions in rich details (Creswell, 2014: 234). In this particular study, indepth interview was used to explore the respondent's individual experiences and perceptions regarding integration. Particularly, the employment, education, social connections and the host languages.

### 3.5 Focus group discussion

One focus group discussion with purposive sampling techniques as for the interviews was also conducted during data collection. Similarly, I thoroughly explained the purpose of the study as well as aspects of consent, confidentiality, and reciprocity to the respondents before the discussion. Introduction and general discussion about Somali traditional poetry and songs were started in the session to make it easy and increase the respondent's comfort.

Four males and four females participated in the focus group discussion, which lasted two and a half hours. Before starting the discussion, I asked permission to record the audio. The advantage of the focus group discussion was that it shed some light on group norms and interactions, which provided some additional insights into the interviews. During the discussion, respondents challenged each other's viewpoints, which facilitated additional information to emerge (Bryman, 2012:29).

The focus group discussion helped the respondents to get deeper into the topic and discuss the issue in detail, which consequently enhanced the individual interview's outcome. The respondents easily shared their feeling and experiences. However, sometimes, it was challenging to manage group dynamics. Some of the respondents would go out of the themes that were in discussion. Some were more vocal than others and dominate the conversation. I usually played the role of facilitator by bringing back to the topic and by giving a chance to speak for those who are not actively participating in the discussion. After I finished all the data collection, I summarized my notes and presented to the respondents for their validation.

According to the course literature, focus group is important because interaction and group dynamics are essential. It widens a range of responses, activates forgotten details and releases inhibitions. It also creates unique insights into the shared experience and social norms (Creswell, 2014: 240).

### 3.6 Data Analysis

According to Silverman (2014), in qualitative research, the data analysis process is flexible and designed to meet each study's needs but also follows an established protocol and relies on rigorous methodological approaches (Silverman, 2014: 45).

During data analysis, first, I prepared and organized the data from the field. This included transcribing interview audio record, organizing field notes and making sure that all the documents to be included in the analysis were present and available. Second, I tried to

reduce the data by identifying themes, coding data elements, and creating categories. This process was undertaken first by general review of the raw data from each interview and focus group discussion in multiple times. Then the refined data were compared and contrasted with the research questions at hand in order to check patterns and extract themes. Finally, once I identified patterns and themes, I started to produce conceptual categories that could be analysed through the study analytical framework.

## **4. Key Findings**

In this chapter, I categorically arranged the study's key findings from the fieldwork into sub-themes. As I mentioned above, the findings of this study were based on the analytical framework adopted from Agar & Strang integration conceptual framework.

### **4.1 Employment**

During the data collection, I tried to assess the perception of the respondents about the employment situation in Sweden. The majority of the respondents have indicated that they face many challenges to get a permanent job in Sweden. As indicated in the table below, almost half of the respondents did not have a job at least during the study. Others work on temporary jobs rather than permanent ones.

Table 2. Respondents Educational Level & Job Details

<b>Interviewee code &amp; No.</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Employment status</b>
IR – 1	M	High school	Bus driver
IR – 2	M	High school	No work
IR – 3	F	Intermidiate school	Studing SFI
IR – 4	M	High school	No work
IR – 5	M	High school	Taxi driver
IR – 6	F	Bachelor	No work
IR – 7	M	High school	Taxi driver
IR-8	F	Collage student	Day care
IR-9	F	Assistant Nurse	No work
IR-10	M	Bachelor	No work
IR-11	F	None	No work
IR-12	M	Diploma	Social worker

*Source: data from the field*

Lack of education, lack of evaluation of prior qualification (for those who had), the slowness and high formal skill requirements in the Swedish job market, and perceived discrimination were among the challenges mentioned during the interviews and focus group discussion. With regard to lack of educational background, one of the respondents said:

*in this country, every job vacancy required a prior qualification and experience to fulfill. And the majority of the Somali immigrants don't have that prior qualification. As a result, many of us don't fulfill the job requirements that most of the employers' need and these are some of the reason why many Somali immigrants work low jobs like cleaning and others. (IR - 10, Gävle, 07/04/2019)*

Similarly, the lack of evaluation of the prior qualification obtained in Somalia after 1991 was another challenge mentioned by the respondents. During the interview, I learned from the respondents that even those who had a prior qualification obtained after the downfall of Somalia's central government are unlikely to get a recognition for their certificates. According to the respondents, the certificates issued by the Somalian government after 1991 are not eligible for evaluation in Sweden. One of the respondents revealed the following.

*The Swedish government and employers recognize only those certificates and qualifications issued before the downfall of the Somalia central government in 1991. All other qualifications issued or obtained after 1991 in Somalia are not eligible for evaluation in Sweden. (IR - 4, Gävle, 25/03/2019).*

The other challenge related to prior qualifications mentioned during the interview was that the majority of the Somali immigrants misrepresented their identity information when they were seeking asylum in Sweden, including their prior qualifications. The reason why they did so was fear if they testify their correct information, they might not get the residence permit. As a result, even those who had a prior qualification and experience couldn't currently claim it for evaluation.

For instance, Somalia was a federal republic government consisting of five states and eighteen administrative regions. The civil war that erupted in 1991 and afterwards had not impacted across these different states and regions equally. Some states were more affected by the civil war crises compared to others. For example, the state of Somaliland (northern Somalia) has been stable and peaceful in many years compared to the south of the country.

As I learned from the respondents, the Swedish migration agency has its own assessment and eligibility criteria with regard to the Somali immigrants asylum applications. Immigrants who came from some states of Somalia are not eligible for asylum application according to the safety and security assessment conducted by the migration agency. This is the reason behind why many asylum seekers who came from the northern part of Somalia use wrong identity information during asylum application process to secure their case. However, the problem is once they have secured their permanent residence permit, they can't use their real identities in Sweden any more. Which means if they had a prior education qualification, they can't claim it here in Sweden.

Similarly, there was a general perception among the respondents concerning equal employment opportunities in Sweden. The majority of the respondents indicated that there is perceived discrimination in the employment sector in Sweden.

*I believe that there is always favoritism and nepotism in the employment sector in Sweden. Most of the employers prefer Swedish people over immigrants (IR - 12, Gävle, 09/04/2019).*

The slowness and high formal skill requirements in the Swedish job market, were among the challenges mentioned by the respondents during interview. To overcome this challenge, the Somali immigrants usually use two strategies. First, they contact the employers directly by themselves. Second, they send their applications through Arbetsförmedlingen (a national government agency who assist job applications).

For instance, if they choose the first strategy, which is contacting companies directly by themselves, they usually do this in two ways. Either they have to contact directly to the company managers to submit their applications, or they have to follow the company websites and check the available jobs advertised by the company to apply. However, in either way, the respondents complained about the lack of response from the companies.

*I applied for many jobs in different companies many times. However, I never received any responses from any of the companies. I think it is better if they say we don't have a job vacancy for you instead of keeping silent. I waste my time while waiting for a response* (IR - 1, Gävle, 15/03/2019).

Some respondents indicated that networking is the best strategy to get a job in Sweden. They believe that if they know someone from the company they want to join, the chance of getting a job in that company will be very high. Many respondents said this was the best approach so far in their experience. Their experiment was based on a number of people they knew who got a job this way.

During the interviews, I have learned that there is also a perceived discrimination among the respondents concerning the employment procedures. One of the respondents indicated during the interview that they feel some discriminatory actions in the employment procedures in Sweden. *I know some of my friends who applied for jobs many times in different companies but never got a response. Then one of my friends changed his last name to a Swedish name, and he immediately received a response from one of the companies. This is a clear example of why I believe that there is discrimination in employment procedures. Contrary to this, the Swedish media always blames the immigrant as if they don't want to work* (IR - 7, Gävle, 29/03/2019)

The second strategy Somali immigrants use to find a job is to submit their applications through Arbetsförmedlingen. Many respondents indicated that the Arbetsförmedlingen office provides some on job training programs for the immigrants to improve the skills and experiences they need before they join the employment market. This is done in a

manner in which each immigrant is assigned to work with a company for 6 or even 12 months. During the training, the immigrants wouldn't have a salary from the company they are attached to or the company they are working in. Instead, they would receive some amount of money from the Arbetsförmedlingen office.

As I understood from the respondents, this is a kind of on-job training program provided by the Arbetsförmedlingen together with the office of social service. The eligibility criteria are that immigrants are expected to be registered or be a member of the Arbetsförmedlingen office. This process might take more than two years for some of the immigrants to finish. I have met many Somali immigrants at Gävle city who are still doing their practical training for more than two years. Similarly, many Somali immigrants who finished their on-job training couldn't manage to get a permanent job yet.

*In Sweden, if you want to get a job, first you have to go through a long process. It might take you 2 to 3 years of on job training to get a secure job which everybody could have done without any training. During training, we don't receive any salary except the small amount. I think this process is designed to discourage people from finding a job. I know many friends and families who moved to Canada and the UK, and they immediately started their jobs after they reach there (IR - 1, Gävle, 15/03/2019).*

In my opinion bureaucracy means the long process and time they should have to spent to get the required skills even for lower level jobs in Sweden. My understanding is based on the reflections that I received from the respondents during the interviews. For instance, they complain about the fact that all the jobs in the Swedish labor market require a certificate. If they want to work as a cleaner, first they have to take a course and get a certificate for it. They assumed that lower-level jobs like cleaning and other similar jobs don't need a certificate because they believe anybody can do it without taking any course. In general, bureaucracy here refers to the slowness and high formal skills requirements in the Swedish job market.

## 4.2 Education

As education enables people to become more competent and active members within the society, it can be considered as one of the leading indicators that could facilitate successful integration. As a result, education was one of the areas that this study was focused during data collection in the field. During the interview, respondents indicated that the majority of Somali immigrants who came to Sweden as adults do not have a higher level education background.

When I asked what challenges or barriers they might face continuing their education here in Sweden, the responses from the respondents include; lack of prior education background (illiteracy), economic burden (preference of working instead of learning), and lack of knowledge about the language of instruction (Swedish or English) and others.

Concerning the lack of prior education background or illiteracy, one of the respondents shared his views.

*The majority of the Somali immigrants who came to Sweden, as an adult didn't have a prior education background. Somalis didn't get a quality public education due to the civil war in Somalia from 1991. So they don't have a base to continue their education here in Sweden (IR - 10, Gävle, 07/04/2019).*

During the interview, I attempted to know the possibility that they could continue their high school education here in Sweden and then to higher education like practical high school degrees. This could have provided them employment opportunities within few years. But the main obstacles they mentioned here was the lack of educational background including the language of instruction (Swedish). Similarly, the economic burden among Somali immigrants was mentioned as one of the challenges they face to continue their education here in Sweden.

*The majority of Somali immigrants came to Sweden to get better jobs and help their families back home. As a result, everyone is running to get a job instead of starting education from scratch, which might take a long time to finish. So, I believe the economic burden is challenging even for those who could continue their education in Sweden (IR - 4, Gävle , 25/03/2019).*

The majority of Somali immigrants, if not all of them, support their family back home. Culturally and traditionally, this is like a compulsory responsibility for any Somali immigrants who can do so. It is very unusual that Somali immigrants do not send money to families back home at the end of each month. Even for those who don't have jobs and receive the social security allowance provide financial support to their families back home. For instance, the majority of my respondents had a double economic burden because they have to take care of their own families here in Sweden at the same time, supporting their families back home. Arguably, this is one of the main reasons why many first-generation Somali immigrants are not able to continue their education even in their high school degrees, which could take less time for them to finish.

However, the case is different concerning the second generation of Somali immigrants. The second generation means those who are either born in Sweden or came as a child. Many respondents indicated that this generation has a better chance to continue their education here in Sweden because of two main reasons. First, they are familiar with the language of instruction since most of them took their high school education in Sweden. Second, they don't have that much responsibility when it comes to supporting their family back home. In other words, they have a less economic burden compared to the first generation of Somali immigrants.

The other challenge mentioned during the interview was about the language of instruction. Some of the respondents said even if they want to continue their education here in Sweden, first they have to clear the Swedish language, which might take even more time.

*I think the language of instruction (Swedish) is one of the contributing factors for Somali immigrants not to continue their education here in Sweden. There are many Somalis who had a high school level certificate before they came to Sweden. However, if they want to continue their education, first, they have to clear and learn the Swedish language since it is the language of instruction in the colleges. And this needs even more time, patience, and energy (IR - 12, Gävle, 09/04/2019).*

On the other hand, the lack of educational background among the majority of Somalis has some consequence on their children's educational performance. Many respondents, especially parents, indicated that their children struggle in their school education due to a lack of support at home. One respondent who was a parent revealed the following during the interview. *Our children are facing many challenges in their school education. They don't have a basic knowledge about the language of instruction due to lack of enough support and follow up from their parents because most of their parents don't have prior education. They might not get enough economic support from their parents because most of the parents don't have a good job. All these factors are forcing our children to drop out of schools and join drug-dealing businesses (IR - 5, Gävle, 27/03/2019).*

When I asked if the integration program implemented by the government has a particular plan to support the Somali immigrant's educational performance, the respondents indicated that there is no such support except some language courses (Swedish For Immigrants, SFI) provided by the municipality. Even in the language courses (SFI), many of the respondents complained that they don't have a choice but to join classes with other immigrant students who had a prior educational background, which made it very difficult for them to compete.

#### 4.3 Social bonds

Social bonds explain the connections that link members of a specific group of people (in this case, Somalis). The Somali community shares a strong social bond between them traditionally and culturally, which provides all the members with inclusive insurance

toward unforeseen situations. The situation of the social bonds between the Somali immigrants in Sweden was one of the areas I focused on during my study in this study.

Even though their immigration to Sweden had some impact on the family structures and decision-making process, however, I have learned that social bonds have still strongly existed between the Somalis community even after their immigration to Sweden. During the interview, the entire set of respondents gave high value to the proximity of their family and like-ethnic groups for their settlement. They argued that this would enable them to share traditions and their cultural practices to maintain their familiar pattern of relationships. For instance, they want to share their social and cultural activities in order to maintain their customs and religions, speak their language, practice their traditions and discuss news from their home country. They also prefer a place where they could get support from each other. Many respondents revealed that they feel like at home if they are living with other Somalis side by side.

One of the respondents said.

*Traditionally the Somali community had a culture of sharing and supporting each other. I can say this tradition has still existed in the Somali community even after immigration to Sweden. For instance, when there is a marriage we support each other. Similarly, when there is a funeral, we support each other. So, the social bond is the best insurance we have in every circumstance, and that is why we prefer to be together in our settlement areas* (IR - 11, Gävle, 09/04/2019).

Traditionally Somalis help each other either by relative, clan, or even by like-ethnic groups. For instance, when new Somali immigrants arrive in Sweden, usually, it is the responsibility of their relatives, clan, or even other Somalis living in that area to provide the support they need. During the interview, some of the respondents explained how the social bonds between the Somalis community supported them to settle when they first arrived in Sweden.

*When I come to Sweden, I was assigned to settle in a village located in the north of the country. Then I moved to Gävle city because some of my relatives were living here. After*

*I settled here in Gävle, I also supported 4 other households to come and settle here with us. So every new Somali immigrant finds someone he/she might know either by relative or clan or even like-ethnic groups when they arrive in Sweden. And they prefer to settle together* (IR - 7, Gävle, 29/03/2019).

However, the majority of the respondents indicated that it is not easy for them to relocate from rural villages to urban areas because of the government dispersal policy. The government resettlement policy has indicated that if immigrants want to move from one village to another, or from one municipality to another, it is their responsibility to find a new address by themselves. In line with this, the majority of the respondents from both the focus group discussion and individual interview explained their concern about health-related problems for the Somali immigrants who were assigned to settle alone in the rural villages without other Somalis. During the data collection, I have met many Somali families who moved to Gävle city from the surrounding rural villages. The main reason for their relocation was that they felt alone and isolated in rural villages. One respondent shared the following during the interview.

*In my first year in Sweden, I lived in a village where no other Somalis were living. Everything was new to me the culture, the language, the environment. I couldn't get any support and information I needed. If I want to buy something, I had to call my friends who used to live in other cities. I feel depression. For me, it was like a jail* (IR - 8, Gävle, 05/04/2019).

Another respondent shared a similar feeling.

*My family and I were moved from a rural village into Gävle city because no other Somalis were living in that village. It was difficult for us to stay in that village. Because we needed to settle with other Somalis so that we could get the support and the information we needed. Usually, Somali immigrants prefer to stay together so that they could speak their local language, maintain their cultural identity and their religious traditions. Otherwise, they might feel alone in rural villages* (IR - 2, Gävle, 17/03/2019).

Another respondent indicated similar feelings and shared her experiences and the challenges she faced in one of the rural villages they assigned. Particularly, when the immigrants are new to the country, they might face many challenges before they could adapt to the new environment, the new culture and the new language unless they get support.

*When we first came to Sweden, we were assigned to settle a small village near to Gävle. No one of us could speak either Swedish or English at that time. One night, one of our children got sick. Then we tried to call the ambulance, but we couldn't explain our problem to the operator. The operator understood that we had a problem but didn't exactly figure out what kind of support we needed. Finally, she sent us the ambulance, firefighters, and police together. So if there were other Somalis living in that village, I believe this wouldn't have happened to us because they would have supported us (IR - 6, Gävle, 28/03/2019).*

During the interview, the respondents also indicated that the lack of job opportunities in rural villages could also be one of the reasons why many Somalis moved from rural areas to urban cities. *Job opportunities are very limited in the rural village. Somalis usually move from rural areas to urban cities to find job opportunities. And mostly they try to go where other Somali immigrants are living so that they could get information and support from them (IR - 9, Gävle, 06/04/2019).*

On the other hand, I also learned that many Somalis were currently skeptical about settling in the metropolitan cities of the country, including Stockholm, Gothenburg Malmo. The reason is that many Somali families had lost their children due to illegal drug dealing business in these urban cities. One of the respondents said the following during FGD.

*now, it seems that many Somalis understood the difficulties they face living in urban cities. Many Somali families who were living in the metropolitan cities lost their children due to illegal drug dealing business. And currently, Somalis prefer to settle in cities like Gävle (FGD, Gävle, 10/04/2019).*

Even though the majority of the respondents indicated that Somali immigrants in Sweden had maintained their cultural practices and their familiar pattern of relationships in Sweden, some of the respondents, mainly male participants, indicated their concern about how their migration to Sweden contests the Somali traditional family structure or household decision making process.

*We never had any disagreement with my wife and my children before we come to Sweden. I used to work as a local fisherman; my wife was responsible for the domestic household activities, and our children used to go to school. When we arrived in Sweden, I always quarrel with my wife and my children. They started to disobey my advice as the head of the family. There are more divorces in the Somali families in Sweden. The family problem is increasing. That is why you can see many Somali single mothers in Sweden. This was not part of our culture. I believe that immigration has caused a significant impact on traditional family structures* (IR - 7, Gävle, 29/03/2019).

In this section, together with the respondents, we discussed the social bonds between the Somali immigrants. Social bonds mean the connection or the link or the relationship between the Somali immigrants. As I discussed above in this section, traditionally, Somalis share a strong social bond which provides all the members with inclusive insurance toward unforeseen situations. This bond is based in the form of family, clan, or even like-ethnic groups. As the above revelations from the respondents showed, social bonds have still strongly existed between the Somali community in Sweden, even after their immigration to Sweden. The entire respondents indicated that they give high value to the proximity of their family and like-ethnic groups for their settlement. And that is one of the reasons why many Somalis in Sweden move from rural areas to urban cities.

However, according to some of the respondents, immigration has caused a significant impact on traditional family structures or household decision making. Male respondents indicated their concern about the loss of their social position as ahead of the family. While on the other hand, most of the female respondents see this as an opportunity they miss while they were in Somalia. Many families are broken as a result of this power

struggle, as the table below indicates. More than half of the respondents divorced their spouses.

Table 3. Respondent's Marital Status

<b>Interviewee code &amp; No.</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Marital status</b>
IR - 1	M	Married, with 4 children
IR - 2	M	Married, with 4 children
IR - 3	F	Married, with 4 children
IR - 4	M	Married, with 5 children
IR - 5	M	Married with 6 children
IR - 6	F	Divorced with 4 children
IR - 7	M	Divorced with 4 children
IR - 8	F	Divorced with no children
IR - 9	F	Divorced with 3 children
IR -10	M	Divorced with 3 children
IR -11	F	Divorced with 5 children
IR -12	M	Divorced with 1 child

*Source: data from the field.*

#### 4.4 Social bridges

Social bridges are the connections between different groups (in this case, Somalis & Swedes). The interaction, communication and relationships between the host community and immigrants is an essential indicator to measure the integration process. In this section, I assessed the perception of Somali immigrants about the integration program in general and the extent of their interaction with the host community in particular.

Below is the response from one of the respondents with regard to the objective of the integration program.

*the objective of the integration program is to abandon our culture, values, and beliefs, including our religion. The Sweden government wants us to live like the way the Swedish people life. Our culture and religion are at risk. We are losing our culture. Our children*

*are learning things that are not in line with our religion, culture, and traditions without our consent* (IR – 11, Gävle, 09/04/2019).

On the other hand, some respondents clearly understood the objective of the integration programs to be multiculturalism and not assimilation. However, their perception was that the host community is not open for the immigrants to integrate with mainstream society. They claim that the host community behaves as if the integration is expected only from the immigrant's side and not doing enough in their side. One of the respondents indicated the following during the interview:

*I think the challenge of the integration program in this country is not only from the immigrant side. Yes, I agree that we are not doing well, but there are also problems related to the host community side. It seems that the host community believes as if the integration was expected to come only from the immigrant side. That is not enough. The Swedish people are very silent, and usually, they don't easily interact with the other immigrant communities. I think this is not in bad faith, but it is something related to their culture. However, it creates us not to integrate well* (IR - 5, Gävle, 27/03/2019).

Another respondent revealed similar feeling during the interview by saying;

*Culturally, the Swedish people are very quiet and silent, and their interaction with the other immigrant is minimal. I have been living in this country for almost 11 years. And up to now, I don't think I can mention one Swedish person that I can say we are close friends. We have been living the Swedish family side by side for almost 5 years. But we didn't have any interaction except we only used to say hi to each other* (IR -3, Gävle, 25/03/2019).

During the data collection, I interviewed one of my respondents, who was a taxi driver, and he shared similar experiences regarding the challenges they face interacting with the host community. He indicated that it might take time to integrate with the host community.

*I believe that Integrating with Swedish people needs more time than expected. They are very quiet people. For instance, I am a taxi driver; I usually give services to different*

*people. It is easy for me to differentiate my passengers. A foreigner passenger usually might choose the front seat, and they might start a conversation with me. However, the majority of Swedish passengers usually choose at the back seat, and it is most unlikely that they start a conversation with me unless I do so (IR - 7, Gävle, 29/03/2019).*

Another respondent revealed similar feelings and raised the following points during the interview.

*Quote: I believe that if we need the integration to be successful, there should be a good reception and tolerance from the host side. Usually, Swedish people relocate from the suburbs where immigrants settle. Our interaction and our integration depend on the actions of the host community. If they welcome us, there is no way we don't want to integrate and be part of the community. But if they feel as if we are not part of the community, there is nothing we can do about the integration. The perception and the reception of the host community will be a good indicator for either successful or failed integration (IR – 5, Gävle, 27/03/2019).*

On the other hand, some respondents concerned about how it is difficult for Somalis to fully integrate into mainstream society despite the perceived lack of interaction among the host community. The culture, values, and norms of the Somali community are primarily derived from their religion (Islam). Their way of life is entirely in line with the religious traditions they grow up for centuries, which makes it difficult for them to integrate with other cultures easily.

*I agree that Swedish people don't interact with immigrants easily. However, Somali have also a rigorous culture. Somali culture is mainly based on religious traditions. For example, I have some Swedish friends. We usually invite each other during weddings, ceremonies, and parties. When I invite them, they came & eat whatever food I prepared for them. There is no problem. But when they invite me, I can't enjoy it as they do. Because I need halal food, I don't drink alcohol, and I can't go to the nightclub. Besides, some of my friends have dogs. So when they are coming to me, they have to take their*

*dogs to somewhere else because it is not our culture to have dogs in the house. So there are problems on both sides* (IR - 8, Gävle, 05/04/2019).

During the interview, another respondent stated that Somali culture needs some flexibility for the integration to be successful.

*Some Somalis have a negative perception of integration. For example, if they saw me hanging out or going with some Swedish friends, they perceive that I lost my culture and religion by doing whatever my friends did (drinking, going night clubs). I believe I can have Swedish friends without doing anything against my religion and my culture or anything, which is not allowed in my religion. I can learn about other cultures without losing mine. Somalis need to change their perception regarding integration* (IR - 7, Gävle, 29/03/2019).

In this section, the social bridges or the connection between Somali immigrants and the host community were discussed. The objective of the integration program was also discussed. Social bridges refer to the link or the relationship between the immigrants (Somalis) and the host community (Swedes). This reflection is based only on the Somali immigrant side and hence not included from the perspective of the host community. Three different perceptions came out from the discussion regarding the social bridges and objective of the integration program.

First, the majority of the respondent perceived the objective of the integration policy as assimilation rather than multiculturalism. Assimilation and multiculturalism have a similar meaning in the Somali language “Isdhex-gal,” and hence, there is no difference in their perspective. As a result, there was a fear of losing identity, culture, and religion in the future. Particularly, the majority of Somali immigrants worry about the future of their children. They believe that children are very susceptible to losing their culture and identity compared to adults. For instance, this is why many Somali families in Sweden often send back their children to Somalia to learn the culture. This process is known as “Dhaqan-Celin” in the Somali language, which means culture repairing. Usually, children

would stay 2-3 years in Somalia to learn the Quran (Islamic teaching), the Somali language, and other cultural activities and then come back to Sweden.

Second, some respondents clearly understood the objective of the integration programs to be multiculturalism and not assimilation. However, their perception was that the host community is not open for the immigrants to integrate with mainstream society. Third, some of the respondents also believed that Somali immigrants needed attitude change and flexibility with regard to integrating with communities despite the lack of friendliness among the host community.

#### 4.5 Social links

Social links mean the connection between the individual refugees and state structures (the government). In this study, social links meant the connection between Somali immigrants and state structures (the government offices). During the fieldwork, I tried to understand the connection between the government structures and Somali immigrants, and if there is anything that can challenge or facilitate their path to integration.

Somali immigrants settle in six different suburbs at Gävle city namely; Anderberg, Nurhus, Sätra, Öster, Bomhus, and Brynäs. During the field, I learned that Gävle municipality (kommun) was one of the government offices that work most frequently with the Somali immigrants. Different government offices under the municipality provides most of the basic services that immigrants need, including education, water, health, social security. Inf act, there are many other government offices that directly or indirectly deal with the immigrant issues including migration (Migrationverket), tax office (Skatteverket), police and others. There are also local Swedish community organizations that work with the local Somali community organizations also.

Responding if there are any challenges they might face concerning the service of these offices, one of the interviewees said.

*There are no problems with the service provisions. People are equal regarding government services. Government employees are always cooperative. A translator is ready in every sector if you don't understand the language. There is no problem (IR -2, Gävle, 17/03/2019).*

Similarly, there were more than 20 local Somali community organizations in Gävle city. These local organizations work in different areas or sectors like integration programs, women issues, children, and other social sectors. However, there were many challenges these local community organizations face because of their lack of coordination. Each local community organization works separately instead of working together. It would have been better if they had one active local Somali community organization instead of twenty because they could have a better voice dealing with the problems faced by the Somali immigrants. And this could have helped them on their path to integration. Among the 20 local Somali community organizations at Gävle, only six of them were functional during this study.

Somaliska Föreningen i Gävle is one of the active local Somali community organizations in Gävle that I visited during my fieldwork. The management committee of this local organization told me that they have a good work relationship with government offices such as Gävle Kommun (municipality), police, and other local Swedish community organizations. The respondents believed that positive relationships with the government offices and other local Swedish community organization might help their path integration.

*We do have good work relationships with both government and other local Swedish community organizations. For instance, we work together with the police to keep peace and security in our suburbs (it is called Nattvandring in Swedish). There are also other community projects we implement together with other local Swedish community organizations here in Gävle. This can be one indicator of our integration (FGD, Gävle, 10/04/2019).*

On the other hand, some respondents were feeling concern about how the office of social services deals with the relationship between Somali parents and their children. One of the issues discussed during the interview and FGD was the office of social services policy that separates immigrants from their parents. Many respondents believed that the office of social services has a negative prior perception regarding how the Somalis handle their children. For instance, they ask the children if they have any problems at home. They always try to find out any faults the parents do to their children so that they make a justification for taking away from them. Respondents indicated that they knew many Somali children separated from their parents after they complained that they are not feeling happy at home. It means if parents quarrel with their children by telling them to do the right thing, the children might not obey their advice and leave home. This created a situation in which many Somali parents couldn't control for their own children's disciplines due to the fear of the social office interferences.

*Controlling our children's discipline in Sweden becomes very difficult. Our children are not obeying our advice anymore. Parents fears that the social office might intervene if they say something to their children. We can do nothing about the wrongdoing of our children because of the interference of the social office* (FGD, Gävle, 10/04/2019).

#### 4.6 Language

The host language is one of the critical integration indicators that immigrants need to learn in order to integrate into mainstream society successfully. Learning the host language enables the immigrant to interact with the host community easily, get the necessary information they might need, and understand the surrounding environment by communicating with others.

During the data collection in the field, the entire respondents agreed that speaking the host language was perhaps the first and the most critical indicator for a successful integration between the immigrant and the host community. The entire respondents understood the significance of learning the host language in their path to successful integration.

However, according to the respondents, majority of them were not good enough with the Swedish language proficiency. Despite other factors, this could be one of the main reasons why many Somali immigrants lack behind in their path to integration.

*The majority of Somali immigrants who come to this country as an adult don't read and write the Swedish language correctly. You could see many Somali immigrants stayed a long time in Sweden but can't speak the language correctly. I can speak, but still, I am not good enough to communicate well. Many factors could be a reason for this; however, mostly, it is our fault as Somalis because it shows that we are not serious for learning the language. And if we don't learn the language, the integration would be difficult* (IR – 1, Gävle, 15/03/2019).

I tried to understand the reason why many Somali immigrants, as they said, are not able to learn the host language. Illiteracy (lack of educational background), lack of awareness of the importance of learning the host language, limited interaction, and conversation with the host community were among the main factors raised during the interview.

Concerning the illiteracy, one respondent said

*Illiteracy has a significant impact on many Somali immigrant's abilities to learn the Swedish language. Because if you are an adult and you didn't have prior education, it is a challenging to learn a new language, or at least it would take time* (IR – 10, Gävle, 07/04/2019).

Regarding the awareness, some respondents indicated that many Somali immigrants didn't aware of the importance of learning the host language when they first came to Sweden. However, they realized after they understood that everything is connected to the language. One respondent revealed the following during the interview.

*when I first come to Sweden, I thought I didn't need to spend much time to learn the language; instead, I tried to get a job. But after some years, I understood that I couldn't even get a job without learning the language. I realized that language is the key to*

*everything that I want to do in this country. Then I started learning the language seriously. Now I finished the SFI, but I have to continue. It is not enough yet (IR – 7, Gävle, 29/03/2019).*

Similarly, another respondent elaborated the importance of learning the host language as follows;

*Somali immigrants need to know that if they didn't learn the language, it would be challenging for them to understand how the system of this country works. The integration wouldn't be easy for them; it would be tough to find a job, and this could have a considerable impact on their life now and in the future. As a result, they need awareness creation activities from their respective municipalities so that they could understand the reality (IR – 4, Gävle, 25/03/2019).*

Traditional and culturally Somalis are people connected very strongly in their social life. But this social connection has a significant influence on each other's lifestyle. For instance, when new Somali immigrants come to Sweden, first, they try to find those who came before them so that they could get the information they need. And most likely, they follow their footsteps as a role model. When the new immigrants do not observe their role model immigrants either working or studying but merely sitting and socializing in the cafeteria, they took this as a normal way of life. Then it would take time for them to understand the importance of learning the language and other educations.

On the other hand, some of the respondents revealed that lack of interaction and communication with the host community is one of the reasons why many Somali immigrants didn't learn the host language so fast. They believe that even if they finish the SFI, they still need people, they could communicate and practice with their new language. However, they said the majority of the Swedish people are not open to communication. One of them explained his experience:

*when I finished my language courses from the SFI, I desperately needed someone whom I made a conversation so that I can practice my new language. However, I couldn't find it. People seem so quiet here in Sweden, and they don't interact that much with the people they don't know. Then I decided to speak my Somali friends with the Swedish language. I started watching TV programs broadcasted in the Swedish language. I also started reading journals, books (IR – 10, Gävle, 09/04/2019).*

During the interview, I also realized that family size was one of the challenges for learning the language, particularly among Somali women. Traditionally Somalis prefer to have a large number of children. The majority of Somali women spent most of their time looking after children and domestic activities, and they don't have time to learn the language. One of the respondents revealed the following during the interview.

*The Somali women who are married don't have time to learn the language. For example, traditionally, we prefer to have many children, and this is the reason why many married women don't finish the language. Some times it happens that Somali married women have got a child every other year. They don't have time to go to the language classes and finish their courses (IR – 9, Gävle, 06/04/2019).*

## **5. Discussion and analysis**

### 5.1 Employment

Somali immigrant's employment status can be seen as an indicator of their successful integration. Employment is one of the critical factors influencing many other important issues like creating economic sustainability, interacting members of the host community, which can also help provide an opportunity for language learning for the immigrants (Ager & Strang, 2008: 170). The government of Sweden has indicated that they put many policy initiatives in the integration program concerning the immigrant labor market integration. These policy initiatives include; targeting measures to serve refugee recruitment needs, giving high priority for assessment of immigrant skills, recognition of previous qualifications, and others (Konle-Seidl, 2018: 37 – 42). However, it seems that practically these policy initiatives are not active as they should be at the implementation level.

For instance, the study findings indicated that there are still many challenges Somali immigrants face to secure a permanent job in Sweden. Illiteracy, lack of evaluation of prior qualification, the slowness and high formal skill requirements in the Swedish job market, and perceived discrimination are among the challenges mentioned during the interviews (IR - 10, IR - 4, IR - 12, & IR - 1). These findings contradict the integration policy documents, which indicated that the government of Sweden give high priority for the assessment of immigrants skills and recognition of their previous qualification. Instead, the entire respondents said all the qualifications issued in Somalia after the civil war in 1991 are not eligible for evaluation in the Sweden labor market. That means for those Somali immigrants who studied after the civil war wouldn't get the chance to use their certificates in Sweden.

On the other hand, the findings support a recent report which indicated that the employment rate of Somali immigrants between the age of 20 and 46 was 28% for men and 18% for women (Kleist, 2018:18-20). It also supports Wiesbrock's (2011) findings on the employment gap between the natives and immigrants in Sweden (Wiesbrock,

2011). Even though female respondents had a better educational background compared to most of their male counterparts in this specific study, again, there was a general feeling regarding how refugee women face a persistent challenge in integrating labor market integration in Sweden.

In Swedish politics and public media, there is a perception that immigrants in the country, more specifically Somalis, don't want to work as long as they receive the social security funds for their livelihood. Many Somali immigrants indeed depend on social security funds. However, it is also important to acknowledge the efforts of those who tried their best to get a job but didn't succeed due to many factors. One of the main challenges is the slowness and high formal skill requirements in the Swedish job market and the perceived discrimination.

## 5.2 Education

Education is also another crucial indicator that provides the competence and skills that Somali immigrants need in support of subsequent employment opportunities. Education enables them to become more competent and active members of society. More importantly, schools and colleges are significant places where Somali immigrants might get sharing experience by contact members of the host community. This could have played an essential role in establishing their relationship within the local community, which also, on the other hand, could have supported them for their future integration (Agar & Strang, 2008: 172).

However, the study findings showed that the majority of the respondents had lower education levels. Starting from 1991, after the Somalia central government has collapsed, there had not been a functional quality public education system in Somalia. Arguably, the lack of the educational background resulted from the prolonged civil war has forced many Somali immigrants unable to continue their education here in Sweden, and this had a negative consequence in their path to integration (IR-10, IR-4 & IR-12). These findings support the results published by the Delmi report in 2018, which indicated that 70% of

Somali immigrants in Sweden have only completed primary education or have unknown levels of education, while only 10% have a tertiary educational background (Kleist, 2018:18-20).

The majority of the Somali immigrants have a responsibility with regard to helping their families back home. It is very normal that every one of the Somali immigrants expected to send remittance back home every month. As a result, their first priority is to find a job instead of study. Perhaps this aspect is a crucial reason why many first-generation Somalis in Sweden are not able to invest 2-3 years in even a high school degree since people in Somalia urgently need their support. The other reason could be their lack of educational background, including the host language, which makes it difficult to continue their education.

However, the case is different with regard to the second generation of Somali immigrants. The second generation I mean for those who either born in Sweden or came as a child. Many respondents indicated that this generation has a better chance to continue their education here in Sweden because of two main reasons. First, they are familiar with the language of instruction since most of them took their high school education in Sweden. Second, they don't have that much responsibility when it comes to helping their family back home. In other words, they have a less economic burden compared to the first generation.

On the other hand, Somali children's experience of education was impacted by insufficient support and follow up from their parents (IR-5). Even though, many schools provide local teachers for Somali children in seeking to meet their priority needs, however, that support is limited only to some particular subjects. Parent's lack of information about the school system, including the consequence of children's choice of subjects on subsequent employment chances, is a further constraint on the potential for schooling to support integration (IR-5).

### 5.3 Social bonds

Social bonds explain connections that link members of a specific group of communities (in this case, Somalis). Traditionally Somalis share a strong social bond that provides all the members with inclusive insurance toward unforeseen situations (M.Sharif, 2013:19). This is based on in the form of a family, clan, or even like-ethnic groups. Hence, the findings of the study showed that social bonds have still strongly existed between the Somali community in Sweden, even after their immigration to Sweden. The study findings indicated that Somali immigrants give high value to the proximity of their family or like-ethnic groups for their settlement. It would enable them to share traditions and their cultural practices to maintain their familiar pattern of relationships. Such bonds played a notable role for the Somalis in Sweden to feel like at home (IR-11, IR-7).

The study finding supports conclusions made by Little (2013), who found the importance of family linkages as the epicenter of Somali society (Little, 2013). Somali Family linkage includes a large number of people from siblings, to cousins, to distance family members, and it goes all up to the clan level. The finding is also in line with M.Sharif's conclusion, who said Somalis share a strong bond, which provides all the members with inclusive insurance toward unforeseen situations (M.Sharif, 2013:19).

Both Hale (2000) and Beiser (1993) indicated that the formation of linkage with 'like ethnic groups' is perceived to have countless benefits contributing towards effective integration. However, I doubt whether this traditional pattern of relationships or social bonds between the Somalis could boost their path to integration into mainstream society. During the study, I have met with many Somali communities in different parts of the country. Usually, Somali immigrants live or settle together in particular suburbs in each place I visited. Their contact with other host communities was very limited. They socialize not with the host community but with each other. Most they spent with their like ethnic groups, they speak their language. In general, it seems that they live like the way they used to live in Somalia. As a result, I believe that if there is no interaction with other

host communities, it will be very difficult for them to learn a new language and other cultures, which could have an impact on their path to integration in the future.

The social integration or the links that hold Somali immigrants in Sweden look like what Durkheim called mechanical solidarity. On the other hand, it seems that Somali immigrants in Sweden integrate because of their similarity (Durkheim, 1893). Mechanical solidarity is a type of social integration that links between more primitive or smaller societies together. It is like kinship and shared beliefs that holds people together (Durkheim, 1989).

The study findings also showed that immigration of Somalis to Sweden had caused a significant impact on their traditional family structures or household decision making. The transformation of the traditional family structures that occurred to the Somalis in Sweden has some impact on the very basis of the family structure, which is the household decision making. Nevertheless, there were different perceptions between the respondents about this transformation.

Male respondents indicated their concern about the loss of their social position and identity as ahead of the family. They believe that there is a new power struggle within the traditional family structures of the Somalis after their immigration to Sweden. They complain that they don't have respect at homes in Sweden compared as they used to in Somalia, which undermined their authority to lead their household decision making. According to the majority of the male respondents interviewed, the Swedish government institutions, particularly the office of the social service, was responsible for the transformation of their traditional family structure. They claim that the office of social service is deliberately implementing policies and strategies that isolate the role of the father in the household and empower the wife and children. On the contrary, most of the female respondents see this as an opportunity they miss while they were in Somalia.

## 5.4 Social bridges

Like the other European nations, the Swedish government has adopted a multiculturalism type of integration system. This approach recognizes the importance of cultural contribution between different groups while acknowledging their socio-cultural differences. The popular shift from assimilation to multiculturalism has started since the 1960s in most western countries, mainly due to the increased ethnic diversity in these societies (Martikainen, 2005). The objectives and the goals of the Sweden government towards the integration are mentioned in the integration policy document. However, the study result found out that there are different perceptions among the respondents concerning the objective integration process and their interactions with the host community.

Three different perceptions emerged among the respondents regarding the understanding of the integration process. The majority of the respondents perceived the government integration policy as assimilation rather than multiculturalism, and hence, there is a fear of losing identity, religion, and culture (FGD). There is no difference between these two words in their perspective as both assimilation and multiculturalism have a similar meaning in the Somali language "Isdhex-gal." Especially, the majority of Somali immigrants worry about the future of their children. They believe that children are very Susceptible for losing their culture, and identity compared to adults. For instance, this is why many Somali families in Sweden often send back their children to Somalia in order to learn the culture. This process is known as "Dhaqan-Celin" in the Somali language, which means culture repairing. Usually, children would stay 2-3 years in Somalia to learn the Quran (Islamic teaching), the Somali language, and other cultural activities and came back.

However, there are some respondents who understood the objective of the government integration policy to be multiculturalism, but they agreed that there is a lack of friendliness among the host community, which makes it difficult for the immigrants to easily interact with mainstream society (IR-5, IR-3, & IR-7). They believe that the host

community behaves as if the integration is expected only from the immigrant's side, and the host community is not doing enough on their side.

These findings support the notation that in any integration process, the friendliness of the host community is one of the crucial factors that make immigrants feel that they are at home and increase their integration (Ager & Strang, 2008: 179). Social bridges or the relationship between the immigrants and the host community is necessary to create social harmony and refugee participation in mainstream society. Unlike the mechanical solidarity that holds between primitive or smaller societies, Durkheim indicated the need for organic solidarity, like in the case of Sweden's more advanced societies. As a result, the host community needs to understand that in a more complex society, like in the case of Swedish society, the complex division of labor requires different groups of people to rely on each other more, and this kind of interdependence increases social integration (Durkheim 1989).

The study findings also showed that there are cultural and traditional incompatibilities between the Somalis and the host community, which created a significant dilemma in the integration process. The culture, values, and norms of the Somali community are mainly derived from their religion (Islam). The entire way of life of the Somali community is in line with the religious traditions they grow up with for centuries. This situation has a huge impact on their efforts to integrate into mainstream society (IR-7). These findings supports what Salat said, "*the lack of demarcation between Somali cultural practices (equated to sate) and religion (Islam) on the one hand, and the apparent relative deep degree of religiosity among Somalis in the backdrop of a highly secular Swedish environment, on the other, were endorsed as problematic concerning integration*" (Salat, 2010: 6).

## 5.5 Social links

Social links mean the connection between the individual refugees and state structures (the government). Government structures (offices) can play an important role in providing

basic services to the immigrants that can lead to successful integration into mainstream society. The assumption is that immigrant's particular circumstances, such as lack of familiarity with their surrounding environment and not speaking the host language, could lead to barriers that needed additional efforts from the government structures.

The study findings showed that one of the government offices that work most frequently with the Somali immigrants in Gävle was the municipality (Gävle Kommun). This office provides most of the basic services that immigrants need, including education, water, health, social security, etc. but there were other government offices that directly or indirectly deal with immigrant issues. The study findings indicated that the majority of the respondent's perception about the government offices and their service provision was positive except the office of the social service in which they raised some concern about the way they deal with the Somali family issues (FGD). There was a general feeling about how the office of social services deals with the relationship between Somali parents and their children.

One of the issues discussed during the interview and FGD was the office of social services policy that separates immigrants from their parents. Many respondents believed that the office of social services has a negative prior perception regarding how the Somalis handle their children. For instance, they ask the children if they have any problems at home. They always try to find out any faults the parents do to their children so that they make a justification for taking away from them. Respondents indicated that they knew many Somali children separated from their parents after they complained that they are not feeling happy at home. This means if parents quarrel with their children by telling them to do the right thing, the children might not obey their advice and leave home. This created a situation in which many Somali parents couldn't control for their own children's disciplines due to the fear of the social office interferences. The entire respondents believed that this could undermine the already fragile integration efforts made by the Somali immigrants to be part of the mainstream society by eroding their confidence to be part of the community.

On the other hand, Somali immigrants in Gävle have created a number of local community organizations. There were more than 20 local Somali organizations, and most of them were not properly functional. Only five of those local community organizations were active and working during the study. However, there was no coordination at all, even for those active local Somali community organizations. The majority of these local community organizations were established based on clans or relatives or based on the different regions or locations where those particular immigrants came. It seems that each sub-clan or sub-group of Somalis created their own local community organizations. This lack of unity undermined their ability to stand together and speak the common integration problems; Somali immigrants are facing.

Basically, the importance of refugee community organizations is to offer a voice for the immigrants. They are supposed to work as a contact point for the excluded ones. Deal with the refugee issues and provide a necessary response they need. *They also offer social and cultural activities in order immigrants maintain their customs and religions, speak their languages, practice their traditions, and discuss their integration problems (Griffiths et al.). By doing so, refugee community organizations play a vital role in the integration of immigrants into mainstream society. However, this was not the case regarding the local Somali community organizations in Gävle, and they were very disorganized.*

On the other hand, none of the Somali immigrants I interviewed are involved or have been a member of local Swedish organizations in Gävle. Most of the Somali immigrants who wanted to work with the local integration projects had to establish their own ethnic or cultural associations because the local authorities regard this as the primary tool for immigrants' social and political integration.

## 5.6 Language

Learning the host language is one of the critical elements that any immigrant needs to know in order to integrate into mainstream society successfully. Language skills provide

immigrants to get information and understand the surrounding environment by communicating with others. According to Agar & Strang, understanding and speaking the host language is identified as central to the integration process (Ager & Strang, 2008: 182). Since integration is a two-way process, lack of the competence of the host language by the immigrants is always one of the challenges they face. According to the respondent's experience, speaking the host language was perhaps the first and the most important indicator for them to be able to integrate into the mainstream society successfully. The entire respondents acknowledged the significance of learning the host language in their path to successful integration.

However, the findings of this study showed that the majority of the respondents were not good enough for the host language, as they were supposed to (IR-1, IR-10, IR-4 & IR-9). Despite other factors, this could be one of the reasons why many Somali immigrants lack behind in their path to integration. Illiteracy, lack of awareness of the importance of learning the host language, limited interaction, and conversation with the host community were among the main factors raised during the interview and FGD. Oscar Larsson has found supporting findings in his book "the role of religion and power of civil society actors in integration governance in rural context (L.Larsson, 2018).

Majority of Somali immigrants who came to Sweden from Somalia, as an adult didn't have a prior education background. Starting from 1991, when the Somali civil war forced the central government to fail, the quality of the public education system has also deteriorated, and there had not been a functional government education system except some private schools. This situation has a significant impact on many Somali immigrant's abilities to learn the Swedish language (IR-10).

## **6. Conclusion**

The notion of integration and its definition is very complicated and always subjected to debates, as many scholars and researchers indicated because many cultural, political, and structural aspects are in play and need to be systematically studied (Martikainen, 2005). By referring to some of the social integration theoretical approaches and integration conceptual framework as a guiding principle, I tried to look at the Somali immigrants in Sweden as a way of understanding their perception regarding the integration process. Hence, investigating the perception of Somali immigrants in Sweden about the integration as well as identifying key challenges they face in their path to integration resulted in the emergence of themes and concepts that would facilitate our understanding of the issue.

Despite many policy initiatives from the government, Somali immigrants still struggle with labor market integration in Sweden. Illiteracy, lack of evaluation of prior qualification, the slowness and high formal skill requirements in the Swedish job market, and perceived discrimination are among many challenges Somali immigrants facing in the labor market integration. This has created a social separation among the Somalis and the host community to create valuable social networks in the labor market, which consequently challenged in their path to integration in general.

Somali immigrants need additional support from the government to improve their confidence in Sweden's labor market through monitoring schemes, equal opportunity, and the recognition of their previous qualifications and experience. The high skill requirement in the Swedish labor market and immigrant's educational background need to be balanced. Especially this support is important during the initial period of work as many of them get lost and become increasingly distant from the labor market integration following the end of their introductory courses.

Education is also another important indicator regarding immigrant integration into mainstream society. It provides the competence and skills Somali immigrants need to participate in the Swedish labor market. Furthermore, schools and colleges are significant

places were Somali immigrants might get experience by establishing a relationship within the local community, which eventually could support their future integration.

However, both the study findings and prior researches, as I discussed above, have shown us that Somali immigrants in Sweden lag behind in the education sector participation. The main challenges for their participation include; lack of prior education background (illiteracy), economic burden (preference of working instead of learning), and lack of knowledge about the language of instruction (Swedish or English) and others. These findings reflect the perception of the first generation of Somali immigrants who came to Sweden as an adult. The second generation of Somali immigrants (born in Sweden or came as a child), however, have a better chance to continue their education here in Sweden. As a result, the first generation of Somali immigrants needs special supports from the government, like adult education programs, to continue their education.

Traditionally Somalis share a strong social bond that provides all the members with inclusive insurance toward unforeseen situations. This pattern of relationship has still strongly existed between the Somali community in Sweden, even after their immigration to Sweden. This is one of the reasons why Somali immigrants give high value to the proximity of their family or like-ethnic groups for their settlement.

However, the immigration of Somalis to Sweden has created a transformation in the traditional household decision-making process. The transforming family structures that many Somalis faced after their immigration to Sweden seems to create deferring perceptions and experiences among the man and women regarding the head of the household decision making. There is a new power struggle within the traditional family decision making process as a result of their immigration to Sweden. Male respondents believed immigration to Sweden had undermined their authority to lead household decision making by empowering women's' role. This situation has increased family problems and broken relationships among many Somali immigrant households.

Social bridges or the link between Somali immigrants and the host community is one the area that needs more job to be done by the government integration officers. Many respondents of this study believed that the objective of the government integration program to be assimilation rather than multiculturalism despite the official government policy approach, which is a multicultural-based integration. There is a cultural and religious difference between Somalis and the host community, which could be one of the reasons behind as to how respondents perceive the integration policy in this way. As a result, there is a general feeling among the respondents regarding losing identity, culture, and religion in the future. Whether this feeling is related only from their perception or whether it is reality was difficult to differentiate. However, Somalis come from a country, which is ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically homogeneous. In other words, Somalis never experienced in a place were multiple cultures and religions co-exist together like Sweden compared to their previous social structures. That could be one of the reasons why many respondents possibly fear and perceive of being entirely absorbed by the host community.

On the other hand, some respondents understood the objective of the government integration policy to be multiculturalism. However, they believe that there is a lack of friendliness among the host community, which makes it difficult for them to integrate into mainstream society. The lack of social bridges and friendliness among the host community, which could have been a prerequisite for better integration, appear to have a negative impact on the integration of Somali immigrants into the mainstream society.

There is a need for public education and awareness creation for both sides (Somalis and Swedes) regarding the integration program. The concerned authority from the government needs to educate immigrants, particularly, Somalis that they can integrate into the mainstream society and participate in all domains of life (social, economic, political, cultural) without leaving their previous culture. Somali Immigrants need to understand that the Swedish integration approach recognizes the importance of the cultural contribution between different groups while acknowledging their socio-cultural

differences. That would help them to overcome the perceived fear of losing identity, culture, and religion and develop confidence in their path to integration.

Even though it is not included in the scope of this study, changing the perception of the host community toward immigrant integration is also important. As I learned from the Somali immigrant's side, more interaction and openness from the host community side would be very important for their integration process. There should be good reception and more tolerance from the host community side so that immigrants feel that they are part of the community.

Social links or the relationship between the refugees and state structures (the government) is important for the integration process. Arguably, government structures (offices) can play an important role in providing basic services to the immigrants that can lead to successful integration into mainstream society. In this study, the general perception of the Somali immigrants about the government offices and their service provision was positive.

However, the majority of respondents complained about the office of social service. There was a widespread perception that the office of social service is deliberately implementing policies and strategies intended to separate children from parents. As a result, many parents no longer control their own children's disciplines due to the fact that they fear interference from the social office. This has undermined the role of the parents to control and follow up on their children's wrongdoing.

As a consequence, this condition has motivated many immigrant children to drop out of their schools and join illegal drug dealing businesses. This has created many safety and security problems in the country, as many of the crimes that happen in Sweden are partly related to these issues. It would be wise if the office of social services works together with the Somali immigrant parents to solve the parent-children relationship problems instead of listening to the children's claims and taking actions.

Understanding and speaking the host language is perhaps the most important indicator in the integration process. The entire respondents acknowledged the significance of learning the host language in their path to successful integration. However, the majority of them were not good enough, as they were supposed to. Despite other factors, this could be one of the most important reasons why many Somali immigrants lack behind in their path to integration. Illiteracy, lack of awareness of the importance of learning the host language, limited interaction, and conversation with the host community were among the reasons mentioned.

However, in my opinion, the above-mentioned claims can't be a justification for their excuses. Somali immigrants need to be serious for learning the host language. It is almost impossible to expect integration from someone who couldn't even communicate with the other side. It would be very difficult for them to understand how the system of this country works. It would be tough to find a job, and this could have a considerable impact on their life now and in the future. As a result, the advice I want to give the government is that there should strict regulations against immigrants regarding learning of the language. Somali immigrants need awareness creation activities from their respective municipalities to face the reality. If awareness doesn't work, both permanent residence permit and naturalization status should have a strict language test requirement, like in the case of Denmark. If some immigrants need support or unable to learn the language because of their illiteracy, it the responsibility of the government to make sure that a suitable pedagogy mechanism is in place.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this research has focused only on one perspective of the integration process (the Somali side of the story). As integration is a two-way process that can only be understood when studied in both perspectives (Somalis & Swedes), it is my recommendation that the perspective of the host community should be studied in order to fully understand the gaps and difficulties the integration program is facing in this country.

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## Appendix

### Participants Profile

Interv No.	Gender & age	Marital status	Arrival Year in Sweden	Occupation in Somalia	Current occupation	Pre-migration education	Education acquired in Sweden	Date of interview
IR - 1	Male , 41 Years Old	Married, with 4 children	2012	Trader	No work	High school	SFI	15/03/2019
IR - 2	Male, 40 Years old	Married, with 4 children	2013	Trader	Bus driver	High school	SFI	17/03/2019
IR - 3	Female 32 Years	Married, with 4 children	2009	Student	Cleaner	Intermediate school	Learning SFI	25/03/2019
IR - 4,	Male, 48 Years	Married, with 5 children	2013	Trader	No work	High school	SFI	25/03/2019
IR - 5	Male 50 years	Married with 6 children	2008	Teacher	Tax driver	High school	SFI	27/03/2019
IR - 6	Female 45 years	Divorced with 4 children	1993	Student	Integration officer	High school	SFI & Bachelor	28/03/2019
IR - 7,	Male, 39 years	Divorced with 4 children	2008	Teacher	Tax driver	High school	SFI	29/03/2019
IR-8,	female, 29 Years	Divorced with no children	2013	Students	Day care	Collage student	SFI & collage students	05/04/2019
IR-9,	Female, 34 Years	Divorced with 3 children	2008	NGO employee	No work	Collage student	SFI & Assistance Nurse	06/04/2019
IR-10,	Male, 39 Years	Divorced with 3 children	2010	Government employee	Tax driver	Diploma nurse	SFI & Bachelor nurse	07/04/2019
IR-11	female, 34 Years	Divorced with 5 children	2012	Housewife	No work	None	None	09/04/2019
IR-12	Male, 45 yrs	Divorced with 1 child	1995		Social worker		Diploma	09/04/2019
FGD								10/04/2019