

Abstract

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Is integration training worthwhile? A study of integration training programmes for immigrants.

This study evaluates integration training programmes for immigrants from the point of view of their operation, outcomes, and influence on society. The focus of the study is immigrant training programmes supporting Finland's labour policy, organised for immigrants who are covered by the integration law, and voluntary integration training provided alongside labour training, as well as training that prepares immigrants for basic vocational training.

The stated needs of immigrants provided a starting point for the study. The study attempted to investigate the level of the integration training, fulfilment of teaching plans, and effects of the training relative to the goals set for integration training; placement of students in postgraduate training, in-service training, or vocational training, or in working life; as well as other outcomes.

The qualitative data for the study consisted of written documentation and directed interviews as well as materials from seminars, which were analysed using the techniques of content analysis. The quantitative data consisted of an electronic survey and the results for it as well as OPAL training feedback data.

During the study, focus groups on integration training for immigrants were held in three areas (Turku, Helsinki and Tampere). The goal of the focus groups was to chart the opinions of government authorities, organisers of the training, and participants in the training about the current situation and challenges for the future. Helsinki, Turku and Tampere were chosen as the focus group sites because the vast majority of immigrants in Finland are concentrated in those areas. Efforts were made to take other localities in Finland into account as well, however. The local focus groups provided a forum for discussing the observations and challenges in immigrant education that were brought up in the evaluation. Participants in the focus groups were asked to come up with recommendations for improvement to address the challenges that had been identified in the earlier stages of the study.

On the whole the picture of the integration training given by the study is quite positive. Training participants, instructors and government authorities all consider integration training an important means of improving immigrants' language skills and readiness for work, and integrating them into Finnish society.

The main recommendations for development have to do with clarifying the integration training system and streamlining administration as well as connecting the training more closely with general education. In addition, resources for integration programmes should be stabilised and instructors should be better acquainted with the integration plans made for students. It is suggested that more resources should be allocated for support instruction for immigrants who cannot read and write or have little schooling. It is also recommended that training groups be made smaller. Finally the report emphatically recommends strengthening both the training and the connections to working life.