A Qualitative Study of Five Adult African Immigrants’ Perspectives on the Learning of Swedish as a Second Language

(Master’s Thesis in Adult Learning and Global Change)

By

Livinus Torty

Supervisor: Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgren

June 2009
Abstract

This aim of this study was to highlight the major learning perspectives discernible from five adult African immigrants’ experience of learning Swedish as a second language. The focus was on the analysis of the challenges that these immigrants encountered in the learning process and the factors that supported their learning. This study revealed two dominant perspectives in adult African immigrants’ experience of learning Swedish as a second language. These perspectives which hinge on social participation and individual responsibility complement each other and are geared toward the same goals: the acquisition of the Swedish language and integration into the Swedish society.
# Table of Contents

**Abstract** ......................................................................................................................... 2  
**Table of Contents** ................................................................................................................. 3  
**Acknowledgements** ............................................................................................................. 5  

**Chapter One: Introduction** .............................................................................................. 6  
1.1. Background ....................................................................................................................... 6  
1.2. Theoretical Framework ..................................................................................................... 8  
1.3. Second Language Acquisition ........................................................................................ 9  
1.4. Swedish as a Second Language ..................................................................................... 11  
1.5. Outline ........................................................................................................................... 12  

**Chapter Two: Literature Review** ...................................................................................... 13  
2.1. Objectives ....................................................................................................................... 13  
2.2. Major Themes .................................................................................................................. 13  
   2.2.1. The Socio-Political Learning Context ....................................................................... 13  
   2.2.2. Limited Second Language Use ............................................................................... 14  
   2.2.3. Culture Shock ........................................................................................................... 16  
2.3. The Relevance of the Literature Review ....................................................................... 17  

**Chapter Three: Methodology** .......................................................................................... 19  
3.1. Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 19  
3.2. Research Design ............................................................................................................. 19  
3.3. Data Collection ............................................................................................................... 20  
3.4. Data Analysis .................................................................................................................. 21  
3.5. Ethical Considerations .................................................................................................... 22  

**Chapter Four: Research Findings** ..................................................................................... 23  
4.1. Presentation of the Interviewees .................................................................................... 23  
4.2. The Challenges of Learning Swedish ........................................................................... 24  
   4.2.1. Limited Second Language Use ............................................................................... 24  
   4.2.2. Pedagogy and Organization ................................................................................... 26  
   4.2.3. Lack of Self-confidence ......................................................................................... 28
4.3. Factors Supportive of Language Learning ..........................................................29
  4.3.1. Motivation for Integration.................................................................29
  4.3.2. Social Interaction.............................................................................31
  4.3.3. The Family.......................................................................................32

Chapter Five: Discussion ..................................................................................34
  5.1. Overview..............................................................................................34
  5.2. Perspectives on Language Acquisition................................................36
    5.2.1. Social Participation.................................................................36
    5.3.1. Individual Responsibility .......................................................37

Chapter Six: Conclusion..................................................................................40

References........................................................................................................42
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to everyone who in one way or the other has contributed to the realization of this work. I thank in a special way, my supervisor, Prof. Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgren, for her support, encouragement and insightful suggestions to me in the course of this work. I wish to acknowledge the contributions of all the tutors from the four participating Universities. I would also like to thank all the members of the 2007 cohort with whom I began and completed the International Master’s Programme in Adult Learning and Global Change. Thanks a lot for all the wonderful discussions, on-line collaboration and the learning experiences. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the five people who took part in this study. Thanks a lot, for without you this study would not have been realized.

I wish to express my gratitude to my confreres in the Missionary Society of St Paul here in Sweden, Chikezie Onuoha MSP (PhD) and Damian Eze MSP (PhD). I thank in a special way Sr. Maureen Nwajiobi DMMM for her encouragement and prayers. I also remember Srs Lilian Chibiko and Veronica Osuji. Finally, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my dear mother, Mrs Victoria Torty, my brother, Dr Chima Torty and my sisters, Sr. Regis Torty DMMM, Mrs Ngozi Nji and Mrs Nkehi Owoh. God bless you all.

Livinus Torty
Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background

The aim of this study is to highlight the dominant learning perspectives among five adult African immigrants learning Swedish as a second language. This study is based on the assumption that through an analysis of the challenges adult African immigrants encounter in the learning of Swedish, and the factors that support their learning, an insight could be gained into their learning perspectives. This implies that adult African immigrants’ perception of these challenges and the factors supportive of their learning is seen as indicative of their perspectives on language learning.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of African immigrants in Sweden. These immigrants have settled in Sweden as a result of work, family reunion or as refugees. African immigrants like other immigrants are required to take part in adult education programmes in Sweden. The learning of Swedish as a second language by immigrants is central to adult education programmes organised for immigrants by various municipal authorities. For immigrants in Sweden, the learning of Swedish is an important part of adult education and an indispensable aspect of their lives. Their ability or inability to learn Swedish has enormous consequences for their integration into the Swedish society as well as their success or failure in the job market.

This study will highlight the experiences and perspectives of African immigrants as they engage in the process of learning Swedish as second language. I would seek to generate an account of African immigrants’ experiences of learning Swedish as a second language. I have chosen to carry out an academic research on this topic because I have realized in my work with African immigrants and in other interactions with them that questions and issues relating to the learning of Swedish as a second language feature prominently in their daily narratives. This is partly because of the importance of language acquisition in their future lives and
integration in the host country. Although these adults come from different African countries, they perceived themselves as Africans who shared a similar cultural heritage and experience. There exist “commonalities in cultural values and world-view that are representative of Africans throughout the continent” (Young, 2003: 166). According to Young, these fundamental values and beliefs permeate the lives of Africans irrespective of the diversity and unique characteristics occasioned by region, religion, language or ethnic affiliation. This explains the collective sense of an African identity that exists among these adult immigrants.

Adult African immigrants for the most part are multilingual and have behind them valuable experiences of language acquisition. It is therefore necessary to understand their perspectives on language acquisition. Such an understanding of adult African immigrants’ principal perspectives of language learning and by extension their learning perspective in general would provide a valuable insight into their language learning experience and integration into the Swedish society. On the other hand, it would have implications for policy makers.

This research is however limited in its scope and context and would not seek to make generalizations about the experiences of all adult African immigrants in Sweden. It is situated in a given context, in this case, among a few adult African immigrants resident in Gävle, Sweden and it must be understood contextually. Although it would provide useful insights into the adult African immigrants’ experience of learning of Swedish as a second language, a more comprehensive and further study would be required for any generalized conclusion to be made on this subject.

In this study, I will take a more sociocultural perspective and approach. This is not to imply that other perspectives will not be discernible in this study, language acquisition of course is an interdisciplinary field of study. But my approach is indicative of the social turn in second language acquisition research (Block, 2003; Lindberg and Sandwall, 2007). The social
turn involves a shift from a more psycholinguistic model to a social model especially the neo-Vygotskian theory of second language learning (Baynham, 2006). This perspective incorporates not only the sociocultural but also the affective nature of second language learning (Lindberg, 2003).

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The sociocultural perspective on learning would be the theoretical framework guiding this study. Vygotsky and his associates developed the sociocultural theory in the 1920s and 1930s, and it later became popular in the West in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The theory was developed and applied by Vygotsky mainly in the context of child development especially language learning. The theory has however has been further developed resulting in different variations of interpretations (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996) and has been applied in different contexts and fields. For Vygotsky,

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (1978: 57)

This is a principal theme in Vygotsky’s perspectives and underscores the role of interaction and interdependence between social and individual processes in the development of the child. According to Vygotsky’s sociocultural approaches, cultural contexts are central to human activities and the later are best understood when investigated in their specific context (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996). Sociocultural theory locates human actions within a specified
context. Thus there is an emphasis on the social engagements and interactions in which learning occurs rather than on cognitive processes.

For Wenger (1998), the socio-cultural perspective is founded on the assumption that humans are social beings and participate in social communities. According to this perspective, knowledge is viewed as a matter of competence to valued activities, and knowing is seen as an active engagement in these activities (Wenger, 1998). The learning experience that takes place is situated within a defined social context, for an example, the community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Learning contexts are not only schools or other formal institutions of learning but the communities of practice and the context of learning is therefore situated in the lived experience of participation in the world (Wenger, 1998). Context within the socio-cultural perspective is the real and everyday life and not an abstract and meaningless setting. Within the socio-cultural perspective, meaning is socially produced and generated through interaction and is continually being negotiated (Wenger, 1998). Meaning cannot be separated from experience and experience is shared in social communities in which people learn from one another through active participation.

1.3. Second Language Acquisition

Second language is a term “generally used to refer to any language other than the first language” (Ellis, 1994: 11). It is thus a language that is learned or acquired after the learning of the primary or native language. The term second language presupposes the existence of a first language or mother tongue that is often used alongside the second language. A second language plays major institutional and social roles in any given community and often serving as a medium of communication among those members of the community alongside their mother tongue (Ellis, 1994). This implies that although people may be multilingual, their second language is regarded as that (other than the primary language) which has the most
social significance or influence in their lives in a particular context and at a specific point in time.

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex and multi-disciplinary field encompassing various domains such as linguistics, socio-linguistics, psycholinguistics, psychology, sociology and education (Ellis, 1994; Gass and Selinker, 2008). The main objective of SLA research is to characterise learners’ knowledge of a second language in order to provide a description and explanation of learners’ linguistic and communicative competence. Most researches in the field of second language acquisition focus generally on two major aspects, namely the learner language (including learning processes) and the language learner (Ellis, 1994). The methods used in studying second language acquisition include the collection and analysis of learners’ oral and written production, introspection or retrospection.

Krashen (1981) makes a distinction between language acquisition and language learning and conceptualizes them in terms of two independent systems. For him language acquisition is a subconscious process gained through sustained exposure and interaction in the target language. Language learning on the other hand involves the conscious process of studying a language. Krashen likens language acquisition to the “process children use in acquiring first and second languages” (1981: 1), and perceives language learning as the formal knowledge of language. However as a result of the complexities associated with second language learning and acquisition, it becomes rather difficult to classify them in such a black and white manner. The use of the acronym SLA (second language acquisition) however points to the wide acceptance the concept has gained among researchers in the field (Gass and Selinker, 2008). But like Ellis (1994), I will use the terms, second language acquisition and second language learning interchangeably as they both express the conceptual reality which forms the object of this study.
1.4. Swedish as a Second Language

The history of Swedish as a second language is linked to the arrival of immigrants and guest workers to the country in the 1950s and 1960s. Free Swedish language lessons were organised in the 1960s for immigrants and this was aimed at helping them adapt both to the Swedish labour market and to life in the country. Funds were provided by the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag, to local authorities for the education of adult immigrants. Over the years, the teaching and learning of Swedish became a central feature of the Swedish government’s integration policy. Today, Swedish language courses for adult immigrants are organized and run principally by the local authorities through Municipal adult education (Komvux). It comprises of Swedish for immigrants (SFI) and Swedish as a second language (SAS). One of the purposes of these municipally run adult education programmes is to assist adult immigrants in the acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed in the Swedish society and in their future working life (Ministry of Education, 2007). Adult immigrants are expected to participate in these programmes especially in the Swedish for immigrants.

Like in most countries in the West, researches on second language learning are connected to immigrants. Since the 1970’s there has been a growing body of literature in the area of Swedish as a second language. These earlier studies coincided with the increase in immigration to Sweden and focused mainly on the writing abilities of adult immigrants (Hammarberg and Viberg, 1976). Other studies on Swedish as a second language have focused on language learning, teaching of Swedish for immigrants, language and social contact, code switching (Tingbjöm, 1977) and language use among immigrants (Hyltestam, 1979; Kotsinas 2005). Some researchers (Axelsson et. al., 1996) apply a pedagogical and psycholinguistic approach. In all, one can rightly say that a preoccupation with linguistic, pedagogical and psycholinguistic perspectives dominated earlier studies. In recent times, more attention has been paid to the socio-linguistic perspectives of second language
acquisition and such researches include those conducted at the Rinkeby Institute of Multilingual Research in Stockholm, which among others take up issues and themes relating to social bilingualism.

1.5. Outline

The first chapter provides a background to the study. It discusses the aims of the study, its theoretical orientation and situates it within a given context. Issues such as second language acquisition and Swedish as a second language that are central to the study are also taken up in this chapter. Chapter two focuses on the literature review. Some relevant studies highlighting the socio-cultural and political context of immigrants’ second language acquisition and the challenges the later encounter in the process are reviewed and discussed. This chapter further underscores the relevance of the reviewed literature to the present study. In Chapter three, issues of methodology are addressed. It introduces the research questions and research design. Furthermore, it provides a description of the procedures employed in the data collection and analysis, and also touches on ethical considerations pertaining to the present study. Chapter four forms the backbone of this study. In this chapter, the interviewees who took part in the study are introduced and the research findings presented. The research findings are grouped under two main headings: the challenges of learning Swedish, and factors supportive of language learning. An overview of the research findings is given in chapter five and followed by a discussion of the research findings in the light of the socio-cultural theory. Chapter six is the last chapter in which the entire study is summed up and its possible implications pointed out.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Objectives

The main objective of the literature review would be to review some selected literature on immigrants’ second language acquisition. It would seek to shed light on those principal issues in the literature which would be invaluable in the shaping of this study (Bryman, 2008). My aim would not be to carry out a comprehensive review of all aspects of second language acquisition. The focus of this literature review will be on some studies that have been carried out in Sweden, the United Kingdom and Canada. These countries have a substantial immigrant population and a history of academic research on immigrants’ second language acquisition.

2.2. Major Themes

2.2.1. The Socio-Political Learning Context

The socio-political context in which learning takes place has structural and institutional constraining effects on immigrants’ second language learning abilities and integration into the wider society and these powerful institutional gate keeping processes have the capacity to hinder and render useless immigrants with valuable cultural and symbolic capital (Cooke, 2006). According to Cooke the declared aims of language programmes for immigrants in the United Kingdom is “to ensure that speakers of languages other than English acquire the English oral and literary skills to function as independent citizens and potential members of the workplace” (2006:58). Such objectives are identical to the goals of Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) programme which seeks to help adult learners “develop their abilities to communicate in spoken and written Swedish in everyday situations, different social settings and in their working lives” (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2007: 83). Baynham (2006) points out however that discrepancy could exist between the official objectives and the actual contents of
the language programmes. This he argues does not help immigrants to deal with situations that they encounter outside of the classroom, where being identified as a migrant, a refugee or an asylum-seeker could be vulnerable. Fairclough (1992) observes that the curricula often risk promoting the interests and needs of the market rather than that of the learners. In this situation, the possibilities that exist for immigrants could be limited by the very curricula that are supposed to guarantee them, thus reinforcing existing inequalities in the society.

In the United Kingdom, immigrants from the non-English world are accused of being reluctant to learn English and in doing so failing in their duties as responsible citizens (Cooke, 2006). Such attitude towards immigrants is seen also in Sweden, where those immigrants who do not speak good Swedish may be regarded as unwilling to learn the language (Lindberg and Sandwall, 2007). In other cases, immigrants who do not speak ‘good Swedish’ are seen by some as foolish, lazy and nonchalant, and their inability to master the Swedish language is regarded as their individual responsibility (Kotsinas, 2005). Cooke (2006) notes that in contrast to current accusations in public discourses in the United Kingdom, adult immigrants are highly motivated to learn English because of its importance to their well being and success. Heaping the responsibility for language acquisition solely on immigrants leads to the non-recognition of the sociocultural and political factors that influence the process of language acquisition. Power relations and inequalities operate both at the macro and micro levels of society and pose enormous obstacles to immigrants in their efforts to learn a second language and to be integrated into the mainstream society (Norton, 2000).

2.2.2. Limited Second Language Use

Exposure to a target language is an indispensable aspect of language learning (Spolsky, 1989). Such an exposure offers enormous advantages for learners of any target language. Many immigrants however have “few opportunities to use the second language in natural
communication outside the classroom” (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2007: 87). This it is argued is due to the social distance that exists in many countries between immigrants and speakers of the majority language. Limited contact with native speakers implies a corresponding limited opportunity for immigrants to practise the language (Kotsinas, 2005). This means that many immigrants learn a second language such as Swedish in the classroom but never have enough opportunity to speak with native speakers. The absence of such contact according to Hyltenstam (1979) is an indication of the relationship between the native population and the immigrant community and it further reflects the social, economic and political realities and relations in the society.

According to Lindberg, “for many adult immigrants, bureaucratic encounters in institutionalised settings constitute the only opportunity for communication with majority language speakers” (2003: 160). She observes however that most of such interactions that occur in official settings involve social distances between the interlocutors. The absence of sufficient contact between immigrants and speakers of the majority language is a fact noted by Norton (2000) in her study of five immigrant women in Canada. She states that the women in the study find it difficult to encounter Canadians outside of the work place. She notes further that immigrants’ awareness of the limited opportunity they have to practise the language coupled with the lack of good job prospects affect their perceptions of their place and role in the society. This creates a situation where immigrants begin to perceive themselves as being ‘on the outside looking in’ and this limited opportunity which immigrants have to speak with native speakers is an extremely frustrating experience for them (Cooke, 2006: 61). In a project carried out in the Southern Swedish city of Malmö, an opportunity was created for immigrants to talk with mainly young and elderly female native speakers (Lindberg, 2003). Some of the difficulties encountered in the project included the fact that the native speakers who participated in the project were untrained for the project and in most
cases, the native speakers appeared to dominate and control the discussions, and often taking the role of a teacher.

2.2.3. Culture Shock

Studies that have focused on the socio-cultural and affective dimensions of second language learning point to the trauma involved in the encounter by immigrants of another language and culture (Norton 2000; Granberg 2001; Lindberg, 2003). According to Granberg, “Language shock is the fear resulting from using the second weaker language and cultural shock is described as a disorientation resulting from the meeting of another culture and the anxieties resulting from this” (2001, 20). The symptoms of culture shock could be both emotional and physical and culture shock is rooted in the immigrant’s fears of being subsumed or lost in the host culture (Oxford & Ehrman, 1993).

In the studies carried out in Sweden (Granberg, 2001; Carlson 2003), adult immigrants express their frustrations, feeling of anger, confusion and of beginning life from the scratch like children in the process of learning a second language. The stress and trauma experienced by immigrants can in some cases lead to the development of negative attitudes towards the host country and the target language and consequently resulting in a lack of interest or a remarkable decrease in the immigrants’ motivation to learn the target language (Hyltenstam, 1979).

Immigrants who are learning the language of the host country often live in an unsettled and unsure situation, a situation that can be described as ‘chaotic’ (Cooke, 2006). Hyltenstam (1979) observes that to understand the difficulties an individual encounters in the learning of a new language, it is important to have some knowledge of the learner’s living conditions because of its possible influence on the learning process. The difficult situations faced by immigrants include their struggles to find work, to have their qualifications from their home
countries assessed and their interactions with bureaucratic officials. Using case studies of adult refugees and asylum-seekers taking part in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), Baynham (2006) notes that the outside often presses in on classroom interactions in classes involving refugees and asylum seekers.

2.3. The Relevance of the Literature Review

Having stated the objectives of the literature review and having enumerated the major themes in the reviewed literature, I would like to point out its relevance to the present study. The Literature review sets the scene for an understanding of the socio-cultural and political contexts of second language acquisition among immigrants. It also highlights the prevalent discourses, practices, characteristics and similarities that exist in different societies. This in turn has guided me especially in the revision of the aims of this study and has been equally instrumental in the formulation of the research and interview questions. Besides, through the literature review I have gained greater knowledge of the research design and theoretical perspectives employed by researchers in the field. A majority of the literature reviewed in this study is based on data directly collected in semi-formal interviews with immigrants or on a secondary analysis of such data. This present study following earlier studies is also grounded on data collected through semi-formal interviews with immigrants and on a socio-cultural theoretical framework as most of the reviewed literature. In this way, the literature review has influenced the design of this study.

The literature review sheds light on the life of immigrants and on the context in which they learn a second language likewise the challenges that the process presents. However, unlike the reviewed literature, this study would not be limited to the contexts and challenges associated with immigrants’ learning of a second language. It would examine the learning perspectives of African immigrants, which to a large extent influence their conception, and interpretation of the learning contexts, challenges and factors supportive of their learning of
Swedish as a second language. The literature review provides therefore the fundamental conceptual repertoire and basis on which such an exploration and analysis of African immigrants’ perspectives on language learning is predicated and made possible. Thus this study builds on the reviewed literature.
Chapter Three: Method and Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The following three research questions would guide this research.

- What challenges do adult African immigrants encounter in the process of learning Swedish as a second language?
- What factors are supportive of their learning of Swedish?
- What major learning perspectives are discernible from their perception of these challenges and supportive factors?

The above questions are of relevance to the aim of this study. These questions are necessary as a means of delimiting the scope of this study. Furthermore, these questions would form the underlying framework through which the realization of the aims of the study could be assessed or judged.

3.2. Research Design

I have adopted a qualitative research design in this study because it is best suited to the realization of its aim, which involves an exploration and a detailed analysis of the experiences of adult African immigrants in the learning of Swedish as a second language. A quantitative research will not provide the relevant answers to the research questions of this study as such learning experiences are not easily quantifiable. Thus the ontological orientation of this study would consider the experiences and perspectives of the participants as been socially constructed. As a consequence, the epistemological orientation of this study will be interpretivist as it will seek to understand social reality by studying the participants’ own interpretation of the subject matter (Bryman, 2008). The relationship between theory and research will be inductive and the result of the study will be derived “from the data that are collected” (Bryman, 2008: 390).
3.3. Data Collection

Five interviewees took part in this study. They include three women and two men of diverse social and educational background from four countries namely, Burundi, Cameroon, Nigeria and Rwanda. The data for this research has been collected through semi-structured and open-ended individual interviews. The interviews were conducted in French with two women and a man and in English with a woman and a man. I decided to conduct the interviews in English and French because the interviewees are proficient in these languages respectively. I wanted to create a conducive interview atmosphere in which the interviewees feel comfortable and are able to express themselves freely and uninhibited. The interviews were conducted in my home because of its close proximity to the municipal language school where the interviewees were enrolled. The interviews were held at the time suggested by the participants and the average interview duration was about twenty-five minutes. I recorded the interviews with an MP3 recorder and later downloaded them on the computer and this made the transcription process much easier. During the interviews, I noted down certain non-verbal expressions of the interviewees as well as my impressions of them. The transcripts of the interviews form the primary data of this research. After each interview session, I reflected on the experience and evaluated the interview process itself in order to ascertain what was helpful and what was not. This proved helpful in enhancing the quality of subsequent interviews.

I made use of purposive sampling in this research in order to have participants who are relevant to the study (Bryman, 2008). I adopted several criteria in the sampling process. The participants are adult immigrants from sub-Saharan African who are currently learning Swedish as a second language in the municipally run adult education programme in Gävle. All the immigrants have lived in Sweden for about two years and have been learning Swedish for at least a year and six months. I have chosen this group of adult immigrants for this study because they are currently learning Swedish as a second language and their actual perceptions
and conceptions of the challenges they face in learning Swedish and the factors supportive of their leaning could be easier to access. As they are engaged in the process of learning Swedish as second language, their perspectives on language acquisition would flow from their mundane and everyday experiences of language acquisition. By focusing on those immigrants still learning Swedish rather than on those who have completed the language programme, I hope to unveil their learning experiences which have not been reconstructed in the course of time.

3.4. Data Analysis

I generated a considerable amount of empirical data in the course of the interviews. This had both advantages and disadvantages. The empirical data constituted ‘unstructured data’ and ‘open-ended verbal descriptions’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Such data provided rich material to choose from, but also presented a great deal of challenge from an analytical standpoint. Through a comprehensive, detailed and careful reading of the transcripts, I acquired a deeper knowledge and understanding of the empirical data. This set the stage for the process of coding. Coding is the point of departure in most forms of qualitative data analysis and involves the breaking down of collected data into different labeled categories (Bryman, 2008). According to Hammersley and Atkinson, “the process of analysis involves, simultaneously, the development of a set of analytic categories that capture relevant aspects of these data, and the assignment of particular items of data to those categories” (2007:161). The research questions were instrumental in shedding light on relevant empirical data and on those to be excluded. I developed several subcategories and major categories from the data by identifying key themes and emergent concepts and assigning them to appropriate categories. By searching for and establishing interconnections and links between the various coded categories, I merged some of the subcategories with the major categories and this resulted in
fewer and more pertinent categories. This provided the basis for organizing the data, the illumination of the relationships and internal structures of the categories as well as the generation of more abstract concepts which helped to make sense of the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The analysis of the concepts generated in the various categories or results were conducted with reference to the focus of this study and its socio-cultural theoretical orientation. By analyzing the results from a sociocultural theory viewpoint it became evident that the social and individual perspectives of learning were present in most of the categories resulting from the data. This provided the guiding principles for the discussion and elaboration of the research results.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Social research like other aspects of human activity involves ethical issues (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Some of these ethical issues include questions of informed consent and privacy in respect to the participants, the researcher and the research process itself. These and other ethical issues have been carefully considered in this study. The purpose of this research and the procedures involved were adequately explained to all the interviewees and their consent was sought. Their participation in the research was strictly on a voluntary basis. Assurances were made to the interviewees of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the research process. To this effect, I entered into a signed agreement with each of the five interviewees. In order to protect the identity and integrity of the interviewees, I have made use of fictive names in this study.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.1. Presentation of the Interviewees

Hannah is thirty years old and comes from Cameroon. She was formerly married to a Swedish man and has one child. She has lived in Sweden for about six years and of which two has been in Gävle. She speaks English, French, Pidgin and Ewondo fluently and speaks some Swedish. Hannah had studied for about fourteen years from primary school to secondary school and spent one year in the University before coming to Sweden. Her experience of language learning had been mainly through social interaction but she studied French at school in her native country. Hannah had the opportunity of working in a retirement home for two years before enrolling to learn the Swedish language in the municipal school. According to her, her work in the retirement home helped her to learn Swedish faster. She has studied Swedish for about two years and is currently enrolled in Swedish as a second language.

Goodluck is thirty-three years old and a native of Burundi. He is married and has five children. He fled his country for political reasons and has been living in Sweden for three years. He studied law in the university for four years and worked for a few years in his home country and wanted to enrol for a doctorate programme in law when he was forced to flee his country. Goodluck speaks French, Kirundi and Kinyarwanda fluently and speaks some English and Swedish. He learned the three languages that he speaks fluently through social interaction at an early age, and learned English at school. Goodluck has been studying Swedish for about two years and is set to complete the Swedish as a second language course in a few months.

Sylvie is thirty-two years old and married. She comes from Rwanda and has been living in Sweden for about four years. After her secondary school education, Sylvie taught in a kindergarten for six months and later studied hotel management in France for about eighteen months before coming to Sweden to join her husband who is working there. Sylvie speaks
Kirundi, Kinyarwanda and French fluently, and is not very fluent in English and Swedish. She learned Kirundi, Kinyarwanda and French while growing up as a child. Sylvie has been studying Swedish for the past four years and is currently taking courses in Swedish as a second language.

**Barnabas** hails from Nigeria and is thirty-six years old. He is married to a Swedish woman and has one child. He has lived in Sweden for five years. Barnabas holds a bachelor’s degree in economics and a diploma in accounting. Barnabas speaks English, Igbo, Ikwere and Pidgin fluently. He speaks Swedish though not fluently and has some knowledge of German, Yoruba, Efik and Hausa languages. He learned most of these languages principally through social interaction; a method which he believed is the best way to learn a language. Barnabas has studied Swedish for about three years and is currently rounding up the language course Swedish as a second language.

**Isabella** is a twenty-six years old and comes from Burundi. She is married and has a daughter, and has been living in Sweden for about three years. She studied mathematics for nearly three years in the University but did not complete her university studies before coming to Sweden. She speaks Kirundi, Swahili and French fluently and speaks some English and Swedish. She learned Kirundi and Swahili naturally through speaking with people in her home country. She learned French in the school and had a lot of opportunities to speak it unlike English. Isabella has studied Swedish since she arrived in Sweden and is taking courses in Swedish as a second language.

### 4.2. The Challenges of Learning Swedish

#### 4.2.1. Limited Second Language Use

The limited opportunity for language use was identified by all the interviewees as a major difficulty in the process of learning Swedish as a second language. They recounted that they
do not have enough contact with native Swedish speakers. From the interviews, it emerged that the participants have limited opportunities and contexts for expressing themselves in Swedish outside of the classroom or school environment. Isabella spoke of not having Swedish friends and acquaintances, a situation that has retarded her learning of Swedish. Goodluck expressed his experience of this problem as follows:

Outside of the class, there exists very little opportunity to speak Swedish. Every day one goes from home to school and from school back home without enough opportunity to speak Swedish…There is very little opportunity to speak with the Swedish.

The above pattern resonated with the experiences of the other interviewees. As a result of the lack of opportunities for speaking Swedish, the interviewees pointed out that they speak their maternal languages as well as their lingua franca such as English and French all the time at home. Barnabas reported speaking English all the time at home with the Swedish wife because the later does not understand him when he speaks Swedish. He does not find the daily use of English at home helpful and explains that it represents a significant obstacle for him in the learning of the Swedish language. He said,

For me it is a big problem when someone with whom you have more contact prefers to communicate with you in English rather than in Swedish. It slows down the learning process. I do not feel happy about it, because when you go out in the larger society you must speak Swedish and when you want to express yourself in Swedish, you find yourself wanting.

All the other interviewees shared the view that the lack of opportunities for language use slowed down their mastery of the Swedish language. The contexts where the participants spoke Swedish were mainly at school, shopping malls, and the hospital, with other
immigrants or in their dealings with various local authorities. Discussions in encounters with the local authorities according to Goodluck were often short and uninteresting because of their official nature.

When asked why they do not have sufficient contacts with native speakers, the interviewees linked the lack of opportunities for language use to the difficulties of finding jobs and which for them was an indication of a rather paradoxical situation. They expressed the conviction that their language skills in Swedish would improve dramatically in an active environment such as a work place as a result of the constant use of the language. They explained however that they do not have enough access to work opportunities because their knowledge of and fluency in Swedish was often considered insufficient. Hannah who had the opportunity of working with some native speakers said that the experience enhanced her oral proficiency in Swedish.

In addition to the difficulties associated with getting job opportunities, Goodluck blamed the lack of opportunities for language use on what he described as the refusal on the part of the native speakers to speak with or interact with immigrants. This view was not however shared by the other three interviewees. Hannah and Barnabas indicated that native speakers are always apt to help immigrants and stressed however that the immigrant must take the initiative to get in contact with native speakers.

4.2.2. Pedagogy and Organization

In the accounts provided by the different interviewees, a mention was made of certain aspects of the teaching and organization of the language programmes, which in their views constituted obstacles to the learning of Swedish. The prominent issues referred to by a majority of the interviewees included the pedagogical methods and the make-up of the language classes. Generally, the interviewees hailed the Swedish school system and
applauded the efforts of the teachers who according to them represented a great source of support and encouragement for them as they learned Swedish. Some of the interviewees however pointed out that certain pedagogical methods employed by some teachers were deficient. Some of the interviewees complained about not been given sufficient time to speak Swedish in the classroom and spoke of having to write assignments all the time. According to Sylvie,

> The teachers use bad methods. If you are teaching someone, you must also give the person a chance to speak. For example it is the teacher who speaks most of the time and gives us many assignments to write and you do not even have enough opportunity to speak in class and practise Swedish.

Hannah remarked that the accent of some teachers often made it hard to understand what was being said in class and one needed to struggle very hard in order to understand some teachers in the classroom. They reported that they work or struggle extra hard in order to compensate for what they perceive as the ineffectiveness of the teaching methods of some teachers.

The practice in which immigrants of diverse ages, interests and academic backgrounds were made to learn Swedish together in the same class was regarded to be a setback for the language learning process. This practice was said to be especially true of the initial stages of the language programmes. The designation of such a practice as unhelpful was strong among those interviewees who had university education in their home countries before coming to Sweden. Goodluck would want a system whereby individuals could be given the opportunity from the early stages of the language programmes to advance at their own rhythm and pace. He expressed sadness over the situation and said that,

> Instead of bringing together doctors, engineers, lawyers and people who have barely completed basic primary education in the same class,
a separate system should be created for them. When I sit down in the class to learn Swedish with people who are learning A, B, C, D., I waste my time. This is very discouraging and a source of sadness.

The assembling of these various groups of people in the same class was viewed as slowing down the learning of Swedish among the educated adults. One could also note that the question brought to the surface issues relating to class-consciousness and social differentiation among the participants.

4.2.3. Lack of Self-confidence

The interviewees’ responses revealed that a serious challenge facing them in relation to the learning of Swedish was the lack of self-confidence to speak the language. This perspective was shared by most of the participants and they described this phenomenon in terms of inferiority complex, low self esteem, doubts about one’s capacity, lack of courage and shyness emanating from the fear of committing grammatical errors in speech. Hannah expressed her experiences as follows:

The major difficult I have in learning Swedish is that at times I am afraid to speak it in class or where there are other Swedish people because I am afraid of making mistakes. I am afraid of what they may think and say…I think at times that they may wonder why I speak in the way that I do. In fact at times I feel inferior to speak…even to say things that I already know.

Isabella and Sylvie shared similar experiences as Hannah. The interviewees mentioned their fear of even using Swedish words and expressions that they have already mastered. Unlike the other challenges that they encounter in the process of learning Swedish the interviewees perceived the lack of self-confidence as their own problem and responsibility. For Goodluck,
Barnabas and Isabella, the lack of self-confidence to speak Swedish was indicative of the differences that existed between children and adults language learners.

There was an agreement among the five interviewees that this lack of self-confidence was an obstacle to the learning of Swedish, leading to hesitation to speak and procrastination concerning efforts at speaking Swedish. Goodluck observed that such an attitude of hesitation and procrastination associated with the lack of self-confidence was most prevalent among educated adults unlike among less educated adults. According to him, less educated immigrants spoke Swedish without being unduly worried about the usage of the right register or verb forms whereas educated adults are too meticulous which resulted in the hesitation to speak Swedish. But for the other interviewees, the lack of self-confidence to speak Swedish was a general problem affecting most adult immigrants irrespective of the educational background.

4.3. Factors Supportive of Language Learning

4.3.1. Motivation for Integration

A factor supportive of the learning of Swedish that ranked high among all the participants was the motivation to be integrated into the wider Swedish society in order to have a secure future in the country. Barnabas stated that this motivation for integration arose from the need for survival, which necessitated that one learned the Swedish language. Isabella noted that she did not think that she would survive in Sweden if she did not learn the Swedish language, thus, she was motivated to learn Swedish, as doing otherwise would be ill-advised.

Most participants acknowledged that they are motivated to learn Swedish because of the array of opportunities that the knowledge of the language bestowed. Such benefits included access to work, education and a better future. Sylvie pointed out that it would be very difficult
to get work if one did not speak good Swedish. For Hannah an immigrant risked social exclusion if the immigrant did not learn the language. According to her,

I want to learn Swedish properly in order to adapt and be integrated into this country. I do not want to be an outsider. If I do not make effort to learn the language, I will become isolated and alone, without any future. Even the Swedish people expect you to make effort to speak the language especially if you have been here for more than two years.

There is a realization among the interviewees of the sense of fulfilment and independence that comes from learning the Swedish language. Barnabas argued that one became happier if one could speak Swedish and Sylvie recounted her happiness and greater sense of independence,

My spoken Swedish has improved and I can go alone to buy things from the shop or go to the hospital and talk with a doctor without needing the assistance of an interpreter. I feel happy that I can speak for myself.

Isabella shared in the views expressed by Sylvie and noted that one would be incapable of doing much if one did not speak the language. In the case of Goodluck, the motivation to learn Swedish extended far beyond the benefits that the knowledge of the language bequeathed. According to him, his motivation to learn Swedish was based on what he conceived in terms of a new relationship or social contract between him and the host country. He would like to work and give something in return to Sweden for the political asylum granted him by the Swedish government.

The motivation for integration and survival was also seen in the individual efforts made by each of the participants to learn Swedish. Sylvie talked about making efforts on her own to learn Swedish and not depending only on the teachers. Goodluck reported encouraging and
forcing himself to learn Swedish, even staying awake late at night for that purpose. All the interviewees spoke of the role the television and radio played in their learning of Swedish and the efforts they made to read, to write, to listen and to communicate in Swedish.

### 4.3.2. Social Interaction

The interviewees considered social interaction a vital resource, which supported their learning of Swedish. The interviews revealed that all the participants shared the opinion that interaction with native speakers though limited in most cases proved helpful in language acquisition. Hannah said that her interactions with her few Swedish friends helped her tremendously to improve on her spoken Swedish, especially the Swedish accent. She narrated that she learned Swedish first through social interaction,

> I began to understand Swedish before I started to study Swedish. I had the opportunity of working in a retirement home and this experience of work helped me to learn fast because I was able to speak with people.

Isabella underscored the supportive role of social interaction in the language learning process. She narrated that when she was on maternity leave, she had the opportunity of meeting Swedish women at the hospital and interacted with them. This according to her helped her to improve on her spoken Swedish. Barnabas recounted that his interactions with a few native Swedes offered him an important but informal perspective into the native speakers’ language use, the type of insight that might not be gained in the classroom. According to him, he discovered that some of the native speakers occasionally did not bother so much about their use of the tenses in their speech. He reported that this helped him to improve on his spoken Swedish and to lessen his undue anxiety concerning the different verb forms.
Also regarded as an important factor supportive of the learning of Swedish by the interviewees were the diverse forms of social interactions that existed between and among immigrants taking part in Swedish language learning programmes. In most of these social exchanges, the Swedish language served as the medium of communication. According to Goodluck, Isabella and Barnabas, such interactions which took place both within and outside the school environment provided an avenue for them to practise speaking Swedish among their equals and this they claimed boosted their confidence level in the language.

4.3.3. The Family

The family is considered by most of the participants as supportive of language learning. The family according to one participant is the best place to learn Swedish. Most of the interviewees said that the support they received from their respective families was important and helpful in the learning of Swedish. Those interviewees who had children shared strong views about the supportive role of the family in language learning. Their children attended pre-nursery and primary schools and interacted with Swedish children. These interviewees acknowledged learning certain Swedish words and expressions from their children, which the later learned from school. According to Hannah, her five-year old daughter goes to school and later speaks with her at home in Swedish. In this way, Hannah learns Swedish from her daughter. Learning Swedish from children was regarded as being much more than a passive process. Citing personal experience as a point of reference, Goodluck reported that his children often corrected him whenever he made grammatical errors in spoken Swedish and argued that such interventions from children are instrumental in his learning of the Swedish language. Asked if taking care of children at home was an obstacle to learning Swedish, he stated,
I cannot say that the family or family life is an obstacle to the learning of Swedish. On the contrary, it is complimentary and favourable to language learning.

Helping children to do their homework for example was seen as helpful as one had to discuss with the children in Swedish and in doing so one often learned some basic Swedish expressions.
Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1. Overview

This study has revealed some challenges experienced by adult African immigrants and the factors, which in their views are supportive of the learning of Swedish as a second language. These immigrants consider the limited opportunity for second language use, as a serious setback to the acquisition of the target language (see also Hyltenstam, 1979; Spolsky, 1989; Norton, 2000; Kotsinas, 2005; Lindberg and Sandwall, 2007). It becomes extremely challenging for them, as their previous experiences of language learning had been principally through social interaction in a natural environment. The few experiences of the immigrants’ social interaction with native speakers had been of enormous help in the language acquisition process.

Certain aspects of the pedagogy employed by the teachers and the organization of the Swedish as a second language course is seen as making the acquisition of the language even more difficult. The interviewees asserted that the pedagogical methods employed by teachers did not allow for sufficient time for oral exercises and interactions in the classroom but rather emphasized writing proficiency. Furthermore, the practice whereby immigrants of diverse ages, needs and academic backgrounds were made to learn Swedish together was seen as an organizational challenge to the learning of the language.

The last major challenge that featured in the accounts of the interviewees is their perceived lack of self-confidence in relation to speaking Swedish, a challenge faced by most adult immigrants irrespective of their educational background. This lack of self-confidence or self-esteem often elicited by fear or shyness of making grammatical errors robs them of the opportunity of improving their spoken Swedish. Unlike all the aforementioned challenges affecting the immigrants’ ability to learn Swedish, the immigrants themselves do take personal responsibility for this hesitation to speak Swedish.
The interviewees highlighted some factors they perceive as supportive of the learning of the Swedish language. The aspiration among the immigrants to be integrated into the Swedish society, to acquire education, to have jobs and a better future was a major source of motivation to learn Swedish. There was the recognition that social exclusion was a consequence of not learning Swedish. For the most part, these immigrants are motivated to learn the host language (Cooke, 2006). Thus the desire to succeed and to avoid social exclusion further strengthened their motivation to learn the language. Social interaction with native speakers was considered an instrumental aspect and an indispensable factor in language learning. This prevalent view among the interviewees was based on their lived experiences. All the interviewees who had children underscored the supportive role that the family offered in language acquisition through interactions in the target language with their children.

An overview of the results of the interviews would be incomplete without a mention of non-verbal dimensions of the interviews and what they revealed. It is striking to note the eagerness and willingness on the part of the interviewees to talk and share their experience of learning Swedish as a second language. Such an avid disposition on their part points to the centrality of the role and place of second language acquisition in their lives. Moreover, certain non-verbal aspects of the interviews such as facial expressions, gestures and other paralinguistic modes of communication like voice tones and emphasis, which the participants exhibited, provided deeper insight of their experiences. The participants’ facial expressions, gestures, voice tone and points of emphasis as they narrated their experiences of learning Swedish illustrated in clear terms their feelings and concerns as well as their appreciation of the challenges that they encountered likewise the factors encouraging their learning of Swedish. I was struck by the emotion laden voice tone and the emphasis that the interviewees showed when talking about the challenges they encounter in the learning of Swedish. This was in stark contrast to their discourses on the factors that encourage their learning. In
speaking about these supportive factors, their facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures were markedly lighter and relaxed.

5.2. Perspectives on Language Acquisition

5.2.1. Social Participation

The fact that we are social beings is central to learning and participation captures the deep social character of the experience of life (Wenger, 1998). According to Wenger, participation “is a complex process that combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling and belonging. It involves our whole person, including our bodies, minds, emotions and social relations (1998:57). The experiences of the adult African immigrants in this study are in agreement with the Wenger’s conception of participation. Such participation has social and personal dimensions and is embedded in an active engagement within a given community. Social participation is therefore rooted in situative learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Greeno, 1997) and involves participation in the immediate situation (Fenwick, 2001).

Learning as social participation is a significant learning perspective observable from the experiences of adult African immigrants engaged in the learning Swedish as a second language. The accounts of their learning experiences underscore the relevance of social participation in the language learning process. This fact is exemplified and made visible not only in the challenges that they encounter but also in their conceptualization of the factors supportive of language acquisition. Hence it is quite discernible that issues relating to social participation lie at the core of their perception of these challenges and factors that support learning of Swedish, and by extension their perspectives on learning. For these immigrants, the learning of Swedish as a second language is geared toward social participation as embodied in their desire to integrate into the larger society. Language acquisition becomes a means toward a ‘valued enterprise’, a greater social participation.
The reasons behind the emergence of social participation as one of the major perspectives of their learning could be linked to the sociocultural background of these adult African immigrants. All the interviewees are multilingual and their prior experience of language acquisition had been principally through social participation and interaction. Thus social interaction lies at the centre of their perception of language acquisition. This is a perception that influences the interpretations and meanings that they attached to their experiences of Swedish language acquisition. The challenges that inhibit the learning of the target language such as the limited opportunity for language use is considered a serious setback because of the social distance it creates and its capacity to limit social participation and interaction which promote the acquisition of the Swedish language. Learning is thus equated with participation and interaction within a given community and linked with doing or activity (Lave, 1988). An implication of conceiving learning as participation is an acceptance that it is a gradual process in which one starts often from the periphery (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This is a fact most of the interviewees seem to have come to terms with.

5.2.1. Individual Responsibility

The place of individual responsibility in language acquisition is highlighted in the narratives of the five interviewees who took part in this study. They all spoke of their individual efforts to learn Swedish and to improve their mastery of the language. Thus the two perspectives, learning as social participation and the individual responsibility in the learning process appear to coexist side by side. At a first observation, it would appear as if the two perspectives are antithetical, separate and pulling in different directions (Chappell, 2003). But this is not the case. The individual and social perspectives are not opposed to each other but rather complement one another as they have as their outcome and objective, the learning of the Swedish language and full participation in the society. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the role
of the individual’s interactions with the sociocultural context in the process of learning. There exists therefore a mutual interplay of the view of learning as social participation and the role of individual responsibility in learning.

This view of language acquisition stresses the centrality of the individual as an active agent in their conception of learning. The individual as an active agent makes deliberate choices and efforts to learn based on prior experiences and desired goals and objectives. This study shows that the interviewees are conscious of the merits and lapses in the system, but they do not depend solely on the provisions made by the educational system. They recognise that they have individual responsibilities towards their learning. Even the lack of self-confidence and hesitation in speaking Swedish is accepted as their own responsibility. Thus the individual is perceived as having a principal role and responsibility for language learning irrespective of the advantages or deficiencies inherent in the official body or organ charged with the adult education of immigrants. This perspective on individual responsibility has some constructivist significance as the individual is active in the language learning process and does not passively absorb what happens in its learning environment (Fenwick, 2001).

In some countries, there has been an emerging tendency towards the individualization of the responsibility of immigrants’ language learning. According to Cooke (2006), such a process of the individualization of responsibility involves the efforts of the government and the media to portray immigrants’ language acquisition as a matter of individual choice which immigrants do not often make good use of. This perspective on language acquisition blames immigrants for their inability to learn the host language. The interviewees in this study do not perceive the responsibility of language acquisition as been shifted to them by the larger society. On the contrary, it is evident from their narratives that the importance they attach to individual responsibility and choice in language acquisition is for the most part driven by the motivation to survive, to succeed and to integrate into the mainstream society. It is the
individual who gains or losses if the target language is acquired or not. They perceive themselves as members of the society who must make individual efforts to participate fully and not live at the periphery of the society. This explains the general tendency among them to make extra efforts to learn the Swedish language and to participate fully in the society, as well as their deep feelings concerning the process. Seen from the above frame of reference, social participation and individual responsibility, the two major perspectives discernible from the learning perspectives of adult African immigrant are complementary.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

This study has explored the challenges and factors supportive of the learning of adult African immigrants in the learning of Swedish as second language. An analysis of these challenges and supportive factors reveal two fundamental perspectives inherent in their experiences of learning Swedish: social participation and individual responsibility. As this study has shown, these dual perspectives are operative among all the immigrants interviewed and are geared toward the same goals, namely, the acquisition of the target language and integration in the Swedish society. These immigrants are not novices in the art of language learning rather they bring with them their prior experiences and perspectives on language learning which influence their perception of the challenges they encounter in the learning process and their conception of those factors that support their learning. This study has therefore provided an insight into the learning experiences and perspectives of these adult African immigrants.

This study has various implications for the language acquisition of adult Africans in Sweden and useful in understanding the learning experiences of immigrants who are multilingual. It would assist policy makers in the designing of adult education programmes that value the prior knowledge and perspectives of immigrants in language learning. There is a need for immigrants to have a voice in the design of language programmes that are meant to benefit them. Giving immigrants a voice in the Swedish as a second language programme would require a greater understanding of their perspectives on language learning. This would help to avoid creating a language learning system that treats immigrants as though they do not know what they want from the process. The motivation and the individual efforts of these immigrants to learn the Swedish language and to be integrated in the Swedish society is indicative of the fact that they have agency and are conscious of what they want to derive from the learning of the target language. This calls for a continued search for new ways of boosting the individual motivation of these immigrants in the learning of the Swedish
language. Finally, this study points to the role of social interaction in adult African immigrants’ experience and perception of language acquisition. By creating more natural contexts for second language learning such as greater opportunities for immigrants to practise Swedish and interact with native speakers their language proficiency could be enhanced.
References


