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The Impact of Language Barriers on Workplace Collaboration in Multinational Corporations

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ABSTRACT :

This growing internationalization of organizations has introduced more linguistic diversity into the workplace, and language has become a significant variable in determining how workers work together. In multinational companies, employees may be operating in various linguistic and cultural orientations, and this may present opportunities as well as challenges to the communication and teamwork. The Finnish context, where English is widely spoken as a working language in addition to Finnish and Swedish, it is necessary to comprehend the impact of language barriers on cooperation, especially when it comes to immigrant employees who might not speak the local language very well.

This research is aimed at investigating to how language barriers influence work cooperation within the multinational organizations in Finland. This paper is about immigrant employees, and the way in which language differences are encountered in their daily working experiences. Specifically, the particular focus is given on such aspects of communication practices, the establishment of trust, the performance of teams, and job satisfaction, along with how individuals and organizations react to challenges related to language.

Qualitative research methods have been implemented for this study. The empirical data are six semi-structured interviews with the workers in multinational teams in Finland. The analysis of the data has been conducted through a hermeneutic interpretive approach. The analysis has been considered by descriptions of the experiences of the participants, and it is possible to gain a more deeper insight into the process of what types of obstacles team members face in a multilingual workplace.

The results indicate that language barriers affect workplace collaboration in a subtle and context-specific manner. The English language is used in formal working environments since they facilitate communication and eliminate chances of being sidelined. It seems that language barriers do not create any serious challenges to the trust and general performance of the team. But openness, transparency, and favorable conditions within the teams are the primary determinants of trust. Some people feel temporarily excluded from the conversation when others use their local language during their break time.

KEYWORDS: Multinational Corporation, Language barriers, Workplace collaboration, Trust, Job satisfaction, Immigrant employees, Finland.

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Abbreviations

No Abbreviations

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Most of the multinational companies frequently rely extensively on team diversity initiatives to handle fierce competition and the resulting demand for ongoing, innovative advancement (Aggarwal & Woolley, 2019). Due to the interdependent contributions of teams, communication is essential to the performance of knowledge-intensive activities (Tenzer et al., 2021). Previous literature finds the pivotal role of language barriers as a significant and widespread communication barrier in multinational corporations (Suzuki et al., 2023). Additionally, language was found as a key barrier between corporate headquarters and subsidiaries, which delays business operations and increases the expenses (Harzing et al., 2011). Harzing & Pudelko (2014) also consider language barriers as a serious risk to the ability of multinational firms to effectively oversee their human resources. They also demonstrate that a lack of a shared language is connected with increased levels of miscommunication, dispute, and parallel information networks, which could negatively impact management connections between headquarters and subsidiaries.

The relationships between language barriers among employees and their innovative performance are also explored in the previous literature (Xia et al., 2024; Zhang, 2019). Xia et al. (2024) discovered that language anxiety leads to negative emotions and outcomes, and workers with language anxiety can also experience frustration when they encounter difficulties when trying to communicate effectively. This frustration leads to a loss of motivation and job satisfaction (Lou and Noels, 2020). Also, the language barrier leads to negative emotions that may impair the ability of an employee to perform their job effectively, which may cause miscommunications, errors, and low productivity (Teimouri et al., 2019).

Language diversity can hamper communication as well as team performance in multinational team environments. However, research also shows that language diversity can be

a significant contributor to group cohesion and team formation when properly managed (Goodall & Roberts, 2003). Additionally, Luring & Selmer (2012) finds that linguistic diversity has a positive association with group knowledge sharing.

The solutions are also suggested by prior studies for minimizing the language barriers at the workplace. Language instruction and the adoption of English as a business language are frequent formal solutions for handling language barriers, whereas machine translation, outside translators, interpreters, and the usage of a lingua franca are less common (Harzing et al., 2011). Moreover, proficiency in English is considered essential for job progression, and selective hiring based on language proficiency is emerging as an essential solution (Harzing et al., 2011). Along with these structural strategies, other forms of informal strategies to improve understanding are creating communication redundancy, changing communication channels, code-switching, and parallel information networks (Harzing et al., 2011). Moreover, Tran and Moni (2015) suggest that language anxiety can be reduced by helping employees to overcome it, by encouraging a positive, open work atmosphere, which results in better innovation outcomes. Flotman (2020) also recommends dealing with language-related problems positively and fostering an atmosphere that encourages creativity and satisfaction among employees for the best interests of the organization.

1.2 Context of the study

The dissertation uses the Finnish language and work environments to conduct the research, concluding the results. The rationales behind choosing Finland and the Finnish language lie in their highly relevant context for studying language use at work. Firstly, in recent years, immigration has tripled in Finland, where in 2023, 36.8% of all immigration came from Russia and Ukraine, which partially reflected a refugee surge (OECD, 2025). Figure 1 shows the detailed change in immigration trends from 2018 to 2023.

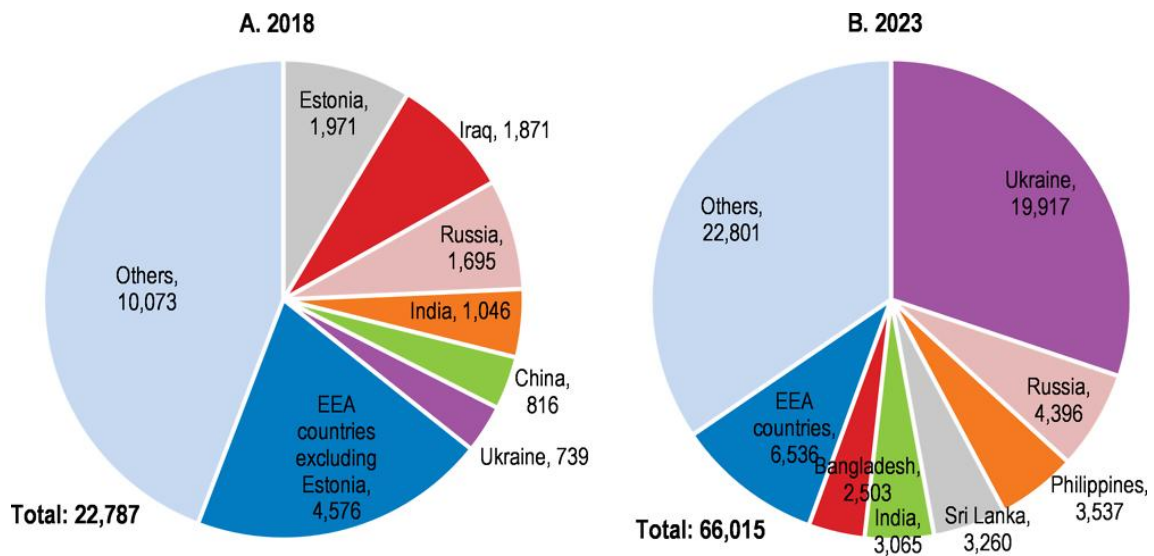


Figure 1: Immigration in 2018 and 2023 (Source: OECD, 2025)

Moreover, Figure 2 depicts the moderately high talent attractiveness for highly qualified employees, which can be because of the Talent Boost Programme in 2023-2027. Finland has simplified the residence permit procedures, offered early childhood education in English and Finnish, and improved accessibility to fundamental banking amenities for foreign workers and their families as part of this program (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland, 2025). The main objectives of the Talent Boost Programme in 2023-2027 have been to encourage the availability of professionals, make investments in country branding, expedite the application procedure for residency permits, and enhance Finland's capacity to retain international workers (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland, 2025).

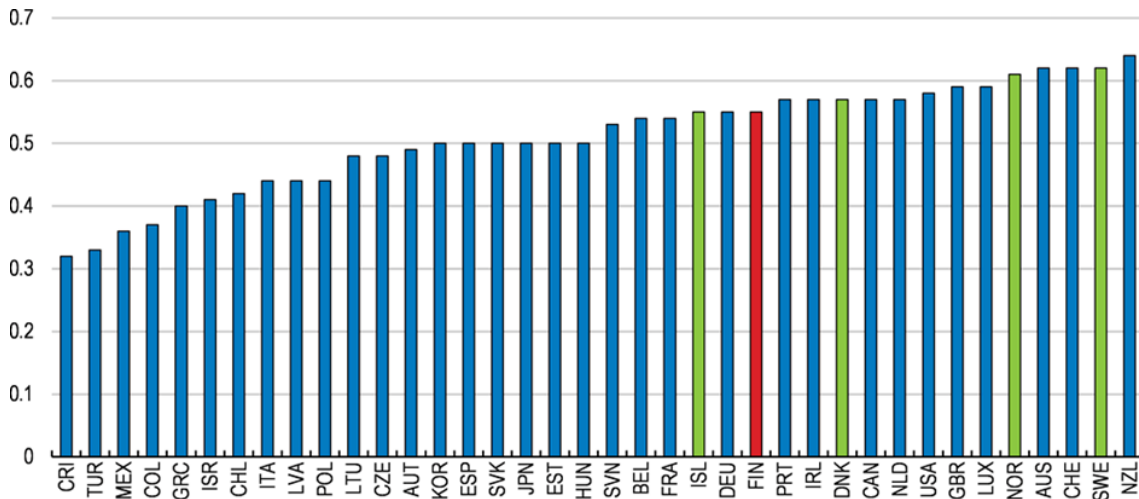


Figure 2: Talent attractiveness, highly educated workers, 2023 (Source: OECD, 2025)

There is an alarming increase in more foreign-language working-age population annually in Finland, as it is predicted to be 11,000–12,000 by 2040, based on the source statistics Finland, population estimate concerning foreign-language speakers 2021–2040 (City of Helsinki, 2025). Moreover, the percentage of other language speakers seeking jobs with the City of Helsinki grew from 12.7% to 21.7% between 2020 and 2024, based on the Helbit recruitment system of the City of Helsinki, and 11.1% of the City of Helsinki's employees are native speakers of a language other than Swedish or Finnish, based on the staff report 2024 (City of Helsinki, 2025).

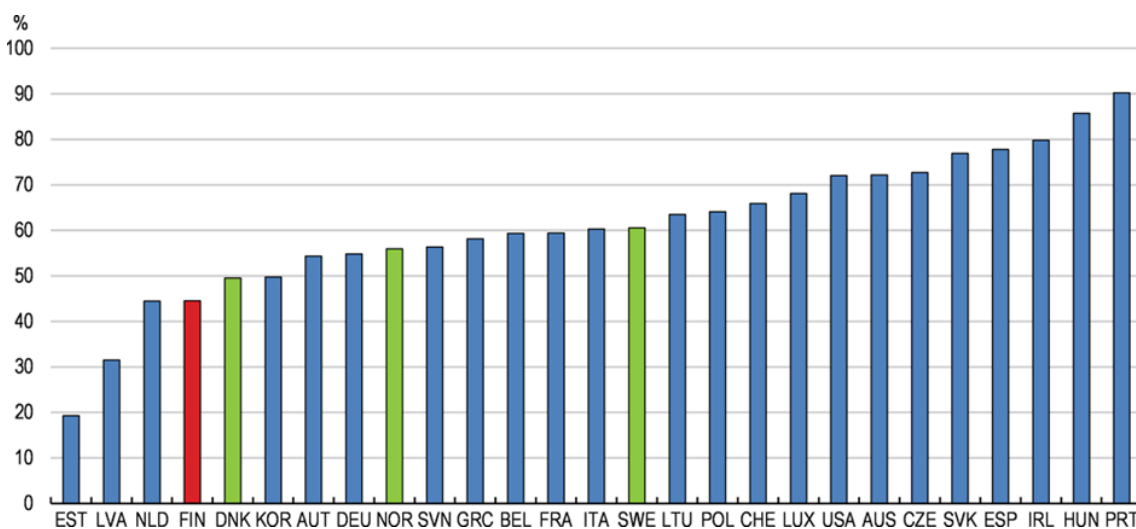


Figure 3: Advanced host-country language proficiency, 15-64 year-old foreign-born, 2021 (Source: OECD, 2025)

Figure 3 shows that in terms of language proficiency, around 45% immigrants aged between 15-64 in Finland only speak the native language, which is either Swedish or Finnish. In reality, employers require proficiency in either Swedish or Finnish, and foreign talent frequently finds it difficult to obtain positions in their fields of competence due to their inability to speak their local languages. A survey was conducted by E2 Research, where almost 750 foreigners residing in Finland were surveyed. They stated that difficulties in learning and utilizing the Finnish language and a lack of Finnish friends are among the reasons that make it difficult to adapt in Finland (Yle, 2022). OECD (2025) also discovered that one of the primary barriers to foreign talent's successful integration into the Finnish workforce is a lack of sufficient proficiency in the Finnish language, where most of the employers' demand proficiency in either Swedish or Finnish.

Moreover, a survey conducted by the Union of Professional Engineers in Finland and TEK, named as International Technology Experts 2025, finds that the most cited obstacle to finding a suitable work is a lack of language skills, and language proficiency is also a frequently reported attribute that hinders the appeal of Finland to live (TEK, 2025). The respondents of the survey also highlight that the lack of Finnish language proficiency restricts their ability to advance in their careers, find employment, and integrate into society (Helsinki Times, 2025). Some of the respondents pointed out that social and internal communication is still mostly in Finnish, even in English-speaking companies (Helsinki Times, 2025). Additionally, from the employers' side, a survey found that around 60% Finnish firms consider language limitations to be a significant barrier to recruiting international employees, although the increasing acceptance of English in fields like technology (OECD, 2025).

Therefore, the authorities are trying to minimize the language barriers in the workplace. For instance, the City of Helsinki has implemented official language guidelines to encourage multilingualism in its workplaces, to integrate language learning into the culture of the workplace, understanding the growing use of languages other than Finnish or Swedish (City of Helsinki, 2025). In addition, due to labour shortages in different industries,

employer groups like the Chemical Industry Federation are advocating for some companies to transition to English as the corporate working language to increase the accessibility of global talent (Yle, 2024a).

Moreover, Finland's Minister of Employment stated the importance of foreign workers from outside the European Union and tried to extend the efforts to retain them in the coming years (Yle, 2024b). Additionally, companies are urged to adopt language-aware working practices to remove challenges to understanding and engagement (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, 2022).

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The key objective of the study is to examine how language barriers affect workplace collaboration among immigrant employees (low native language proficiency) in multinational companies in Finland and to identify the challenges and propose recommendations how these challenges can be addressed. Since the language barrier can induce negative emotions among immigrants and their colleagues, it can risk the teamwork performance and ultimately the company's performance. Prior studies have discussed the problems of language barriers in multinational work environments, but fewer have provided detailed accounts of possible solutions. The study first seeks to identify and analyze the specific challenges that language barriers pose for Finnish multinational work teams in collaboration. After identifying the challenges, the study comes up with potential strategies and solutions that might reduce the challenges brought on by language barriers and improve collaboration within teams.

Thus, the research aims to answer the following key research question:

What are language barriers (if any) in multinational companies in Finland and their impact on workplace collaboration?

To answer the question, the following objectives are formulated:

- To identify challenges to team collaboration arising from language barriers among immigrant employees with limited native language proficiency in Finnish multinational companies.
- To explore potential solutions to the difficulties that can mitigate the challenges faced by the multilingual teams.

Addressing these research objectives significantly enriches the literature by formalizing the inherent language-related challenges and proposing concrete solutions, particularly linking three previously identified separate areas: team collaboration, language barriers, and emotions. Centring the immigrants with limited language proficiency in the Nordic setting, the study contributes to the literature by providing the collaboration outcomes (communication, trust, team performance, job satisfaction) of employees due to the impact of language barriers.

1.4 Scope of the study

The study has some delimitation for keep focus only the research question. This study focuses on the impact of language barriers in workplace collaboration among immigrant workers who have low native language proficiency in Finnish multinational teams. The interesting point of the study is that the study only uses English-speaking employees who have low or no Finnish language proficiency, which reduces the challenges of the transcripts of the interviews. Moreover, English is considered the lingua franca of international business and the working language worldwide.

Moreover, the research will focus on the employees who are already facing language-related issues because of the insufficient level of fluency in the host-country language. The employees who have encountered a challenge like this in the past but are currently learning or have already learned the Finnish language, are beyond the scope of this study. Through this, the study will focus on capturing the current and ongoing collaboration challenges, rather than past experiences.

The study is also limited in scope to collaboration-related interactions in an organizational context, which are not limited to communications in the general society or in a personal context.

1.5 Structure of the report

The rest of the research is structured as follows. Chapter 2 of this dissertation presents a comprehensive literature review to understand the existing research on the relationship between language barriers and workplace collaboration. The research methodology is described in Chapter 3, which covers the sample selection process, data collection process, techniques used for conducting the research, and tools used in analyzing the results. Chapter 4 presents the research findings and analysis, outlining the outcomes of the research, providing answers to the research questions, and examining the findings in the context of the literature. The final chapter, Chapter 5, outlines the conclusions of the study, including contributions of the study, practical implications, and avenues for future research.

2 Literature review

This section identifies the impact of language barriers on the collaboration outcomes based on previous literature. Therefore, this literature review is separated into five sections: language barrier in different sectors, which describes the studies conducted on language difficulties that occur in different areas of society (healthcare, education, trade, government services, and so on); language barrier effects on communicating in Multinational teams, which refers to how differences in language skills among team members from different countries make it harder to share information explicitly and the solutions of these barriers; language barrier effects on building trust in teams, which identifies how the communication problems due to language barriers can weaken or slow down the development of trust between team members and how can it be solved; language barrier effects on team performance, which explains how communication problems brought on by a lack of a shared language (or a lack of proficiency in it) might hinder a team's ability to function effectively and efficiently and how firms can deal with it; language barrier effects on turnover intention and job satisfaction which describes how poor communication in the workplace due to a lack of a shared language can make team workers unhappy and more likely to think about quitting and how can the team managers deal with these challenges.

2.1 Language barrier in different sectors

Language barriers are being faced in the workplace of different industries and affect organizations internally and externally. This section showcases some examples of how language barriers affect operations and development of various organizations, as well as other spheres of life.

For instance, studies highlight the challenges posed by the language barrier in the healthcare system. Jacobs et al. (2006) investigate the mechanisms through which language barriers impact health and health care services, the effectiveness of language access service treatments, and the costs of language barriers and attempts to handle the

challenges. Not only are the clinicians facing the problems of language barriers, but also other people in health care, such as buyers, insurers, and regulators, are not sure whether they must deal with language barriers in medical care, or how to do it (Jacobs et al., 2006). Buyers may question the value of pushing for the availability of language help services for its workers or beneficiaries, insurance companies may query if these services qualify as a covered benefit, and regulators may worry if it is necessary to promote or require the provision of these services, and how best to do so (Jacobs et al., 2006). The challenges faced by patients due to the language barriers are that people with less language knowledge are not getting the care they need, as they cannot understand and communicate effectively, due to not understanding, the patients are less likely to follow the treatment recommendations, and for the next checkup visits, and the poorer language knowledge patients are less satisfied with their health care (Jacobs et al., 2006). Moreover, Zhao et al. (2021) find that patients with less language knowledge often feel anxiety about talking about health in a second language. This anxiety is both language and health specific. Translation of language cannot be the proper solution for reducing the language barrier, as misunderstandings involving language translation between patients and physicians raise the patient's risk of readmission to the hospital, adverse events, and care delays (Whittal & Lippke, 2015). MacFarlane et al. (2009) illustrate that language barriers have significant negative effects on the delivery of healthcare services, especially due to communication problems between service providers and clients in linguistically and ethnically diverse areas. Hence, these challenges lead to a prevalent and substantial dependence on informal replies, such as utilizing friends, relatives, or neighbors as unpaid translators. Additionally, using unpaid translators raises the risks concerning confidentiality, anonymity, and bias (MacFarlane et al., 2009). Organizational challenges and the following delays are frequent even if formal responses (professional interpreters) are utilized (MacFarlane et al., 2009).

Language barriers are shown to have an impact on students' social integration and academic achievement in educational settings. It is often challenging for non-native stu-

dents to follow lectures and take part in class discussions, which leads to feelings of loneliness and a decline in motivation to study (Baker, 2011). Moreover, Barnard et al., (2003) identify language barrier as a "non-connectivity" challenge, which hampers citizens' ability to access electronic government services. As electronic services must be customized to each citizen's particular situation, including preferred language, to be effective, therefore, if these choices are not accommodated, access to significant portions of the population would be restricted (Barnard et al., 2003).

Additionally, language barriers can impede trade activities due to the expense of communicating in different languages (Lohmann, 2011). The countries that have similar languages can make trade easier between these countries, as it minimizes the costs of communication through different channels (Lohmann, 2011). Hence, people often prefer trading with those countries that speak a similar language, as they may also have a similar culture or history (Lohmann, 2011). Moreover, Harzing et al. (2011) identify language as an essential barrier for the relationship between a company's headquarters and its subsidiaries due to its slowing down of business activities and increasing costs. Additionally, prior studies show that some international businesses fail due to a lack of cultural understanding and skills, an inability to interact efficiently in an international setting, and the failure to use proper corporate communication norms (Tam et al., 2016; Q. Wang et al., 2020). Thus, in the following section, language barriers in the workplace and specifically when working in multinational teams are explored.

2.2 Language barrier effects on communicating in Multinational teams

While identifying the impact of language barriers in multinational teams, previous literature finds that difficulties in communication between team members with various linguistic backgrounds are evident. For example, language barriers are faced in multinational mergers and acquisitions (Kim et al., 2019). They find that both the non-native and native speakers encounter challenges of stereotype risk, anxiety, exhaustion, status loss, negative emotions, avoidance goal orientations, and avoidance while communicating with each other. Aichhorn and Puck (2017) also note that foreign language anxiety is a

key obstacle for multinational companies' employees when communicating in a non-native language, which results in communication withdrawal and avoidance. Thuesen (2017) discovers that language barriers cause confusion and poor team communication, and when members of ethnic minorities communicate in their native language, it can cause hostility and mistrust. Poor communication was identified as a possible challenge in critical teamwork situations, such as receiving important safety warnings.

Communication problems resulting from linguistic diversity have a small impact on the completion of work tasks or team performance overall (Thuesen, 2017). In the case of distributed product development projects, Anderson et al. (2018) identify that the impact of language barriers is significant. When team members speak various native languages, they frequently express significant concerns, such as experiencing collaboration difficulties and having inherent biases. Language barriers increase the risk of misunderstandings, which can cause delays as an explanation is needed (Anderson et al., 2018).

Additionally, Tenzer et al. (2021) discover that two types of language barriers multinational teams usually face, such as the evident and hidden barriers. The evident language barriers are explained as the lack of lexical and syntactical proficiency, which creates a communication hurdle for the team members (Tenzer et al., 2021). Lexical shortcomings refer to limitations in vocabulary during conversations, and syntactical challenges refer to a lack of proficiency in grammatical structures (Tenzer et al., 2021). On the other hand, hidden language barriers are stated as pragmatic and prosodic transfer, where pragmatic covers the use of words to convey a particular meaning, and prosodic transfer includes the way in which speakers use acoustic signals such as intonation or speaking rhythm and speed to express meaning (Tenzer et al., 2021). Additionally, Tenzer et al. (2021) explain that the evident language barriers hinder both easy and complicated knowledge processing tasks by lowering team communication and participation, whereas hidden language barriers impede sensemaking in the team, hindering complex knowledge processing tasks.

Méndez García and Pérez Cañado (2005) find language proficiency as the most influential element for achieving an advantageous position and is regarded as a necessity for productive work. Native or native-level speakers of the vehicular language hold a prestigious status as they can express themselves more strongly, effectively, and clearly (Méndez García and Pérez Cañado, 2005). Therefore, they are perceived as being "more at the core" of the team, sometimes regardless of the content of their contributions. On the contrary, a poor proficiency in the vehicular language is a major obstacle to cross-cultural communication, resulting in challenges to comprehend, causing fear and inhibition, and forcing non-fluent speakers to adopt passive conduct or develop dependency relationships (Méndez García and Pérez Cañado, 2005). R. Offermann et al. (2014) also discover that language barriers severely hamper communication and social dynamics. English-speaking team members frequently felt left out when Spanish-speaking team members gathered and spoke Spanish, even though Spanish speakers said they were just looking for comfort and support (R. Offermann et al., 2014). Therefore, the challenges need to be identified and addressed to achieve the successful integration advantages (Kim et al., 2019).

The above literature review explains that research on language barriers often identifies communication difficulties as inevitable challenges at the workplace, which can cause delays and errors in teamwork. However, the impact of language barriers on communication in teamwork is studied separately in the previously provided literature, but they did not properly described all of the challenges faced by non-native employees. Therefore, this study aims to identify all the collaboration challenges due to language barriers.

2.3 Language barrier effects on building trust in teams

The literature finds that the formation of trust in teams is another challenge for employees. Prior research shows that language barrier difficulties have been found to have a negative impact on trust, interpersonal relationships, and the workplace environment (Schweiger et al., 2003). Additionally, Henderson (2005) finds that working across languages causes conflicts and barriers, which creates a substantial effect on interpersonal

interaction and teamwork. Tenzer et al. (2014) define language barriers in multinational teams as obstacles to effective communication, resulting from a lack of native language proficiency, which hampers trust formation. These trust formation barriers cause several adverse cognitive and emotional responses. Multinational team members tend to commit the cognitive mistake of attributing low language proficiency to a general lack of abilities, which leads to attributions of low task competence that diminishes ability-based trustworthiness (Tenzer et al., 2014). Likewise, linguistic misunderstandings result in unfulfilled expectations and low dependability attributions, particularly when team members believe teammates are "hiding behind the language barrier" to avoid work, which reduces integrity-based trustworthiness (Tenzer et al., 2014). Additionally, code-switching, or switching to one's native tongue, is viewed by excluded members as rude, annoying, or proof of evil and "conspiracy," which diminishes benevolence-based trustworthiness (Tenzer et al., 2014). The need to speak a foreign language frequently causes language-based anxiety, which increases emotions of vulnerability and lowers the multinational team member's emotion-based intention or readiness to trust others who are more proficient (Tenzer et al., 2014).

Hwang (2013) finds that low proficiency is mistakenly attributed to low task competence. Less intense interaction creates suspicion of concealing information, contributing to low levels of trust. Operational challenges and misunderstandings, such as changes in agreed-upon points, lead to a decline in integrity-based trustworthiness (Hwang, 2013). Additionally, Henderson (2005) finds that mostly mistrust emerges when team members meet and misinterpret new or unfamiliar communication patterns or metacommunicative routines, resulting in adverse judgments such as "unprofessional," "impolite," or "ignorant." However, he also finds that team members' language strategy and behavior have a direct impact on building trust. Therefore, occasionally it is important to speak the language of other team members, regardless of fluency, which causes a positive connection and results in "enormous appreciation" and a "huge difference" in terms of teamwork and mutual trust.

Thuesen (2017) discovers that language barriers, such as various degrees of majority language proficiency and the leading misunderstandings, have a significant impact on social relations in low-skilled, ethnically and linguistically mixed workplaces. This happens due to the engendering of mistrust and animosity between ethnic majorities and minorities. Specifically, when it comes to trust, an inadequate understanding of the language and cultural convention levels makes it harder to determine the intentions of others, which develops mistrust, misunderstanding, and hostility (Thuesen, 2017). R. Offermann et al. (2014) also conclude that due to feelings of exclusion arising from language difficulties result in negative affective responses directly impacting trust by fostering a widespread suspicion, mistrust, and anxiety that team members are dismissing them or hiding crucial informal information. In contrast, language bridges efficient communication through teamwork (work talk) and particularly "small talk" (social talk) that supports the development of cross-cultural social capital, which consists of reciprocity and trust (Thuesen, 2017).

The discussed literature shows that the lack of language proficiency in multinational teams often distorts and damages relationships due to miscommunication and distrust. This study also tries to understand whether the language barrier has disruptive effects on trust formation by conducting interviews in the Finnish context.

2.4 Language barrier effects on team performance

From the perspectives of employees, team performance hinders when collaboration hurts. Language barriers increase coordination costs, slow information exchange, and reduce shared understanding, which makes it challenging to meet deadlines, retain quality, and provide creative solutions ; therefore, team performance suffers.

Tenzer & Pudelko (2015) investigated how language-induced emotions can be addressed by leaders in multinational firms to foster sensemaking, build a positive team climate, and enhance team members' willingness to follow leadership initiatives. They found that language barriers trigger negative emotions of self-directed anxiety and other-directed

resentment, which reduce performance outcomes. However, leadership strategies can moderate the effects by taking three measures: reducing the impact of language barriers, redirecting attention away from them, and reducing their negative appraisal (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2015). Moreover, while working with virtual teams, team members may become tense and frustrated because of the cultural disparities in communication techniques and knowledge sharing conventions (Rosen et al., 2007). In this situation, team members might choose to work around rather than engage with culturally diverse teammates by keeping them out of conversations (Rosen et al., 2007). Moreover, R. Offermann et al. (2014) find that language barriers are a major obstacle to team performance and organizational functioning, as they make it difficult to communicate critical data rapidly in emergencies and suggest possible safety hazards for non-native speakers. Hence, these communication barriers make it difficult for varied groups to share knowledge and elaborate on task-relevant information, which has a detrimental impact on team performance. Teboul & Yoon (2019) investigate the challenges non-native employees face in integrating into the workplace by examining the experiences and responses of native speakers to foreign languages. Therefore, it is essential to find solutions to the differences to maximize team effectiveness.

The language barrier can also result in misunderstanding at work. Fiset et al. (2024) discover that language-related misunderstandings can arise due to standard language barriers, which are the challenges employees encounter while interacting as they speak various standard languages or the same standard language with differing degrees of competency. Another reason for misunderstanding is from hybrid language forms, which means the informal practices that deviate from established standard language rules, such as non-native accents, code-switching, and jargon (Fiset et al., 2024). Due to these language-related misunderstandings, employees' performance and attitudinal outcomes are influenced through three pathways. The relational pathway, which results in conflict and language-based subgroups; the affective pathway, which generates negative emotions like anxiety, frustration, and distress; and the informational pathway, which causes insufficient information exchange, information loss, and cognitive resource difficulty due

to reduced processing fluency (Fiset et al., 2024). Moreover, to minimize the misunderstanding at work due to language barriers, Fiset et al. (2024) offer several practical solutions and interventions : language management interventions, training, leadership, and employee interpersonal competencies. Hideg et al. (2022) also highlights the negative aspects of non-native accents. The negative aspects are due to the stereotypes and stigma paradigm. In stereotypes, team members may have the perceptions of low competence-related traits as it is assumed that the speaker is less smart, less skilled, or less socially capable (Hideg et al., 2022). In stigma paradigm, it is stated that the effort needed to process accented speech causes listener cognitive depletion (Hideg et al., 2022). Hence, this results in adverse intrapersonal effects (such as speakers' feelings of fear, self-exclusion, and status loss) as well as interpersonal effects (such as fewer employment recommendations and less credibility).

Previous research shows that having a language barrier can adversely impact the work processes and creativity in multinational teams because of not understanding each other, having a higher workload, difficulties, and being anxious related to foreign languages (Loderer et al., 2024). However, the research also discovered some surprisingly positive effects of foreign language use on team members' creativity at the individual and team levels. Moreover, in the case of product development projects, statistical results showed that a direct increase in language difference was linked to overall improvements in quality, relationship, and response time performance in comparison to initial project targets (Anderson et al., 2018). This is a surprising result that may have happened because the initial outcome projections were very low, and project outcomes exceeded these expectations. Therefore, Anderson et al. (2018) suggest integration strategies to address these inherent difficulties. For instance, when language diversity was present, the adoption of Design Information Systems (DIS) was linked to higher quality and relationship performance since DIS helps to create a "common language" of concepts to develop shared understanding and makes implicit information explicit.

The literature reviewed shows the negative impacts of language barriers on team performance due to the results of miscommunication and distrust. Moreover, it also identifies the benefits of language diversity on team creativity and proposes to minimize the adverse effects of the language barrier.

2.5 Language barrier effects on turnover intention and job satisfaction

The language literature describes that because of communication challenges, the language barrier diminishes the sense of security, belonging, and trust, increasing unnecessary disputes and laborious rework, which reduces regular satisfaction and job pride (e.g., satisfaction lowers).

Communication is the way by which employees gain information about how to perform their duties, know organizational standards, and receive feedback (Schuler, 1979). Therefore, effective communication is essential to contribute to organizational effectiveness, to maintain strong relationships between employers and employees, and to ensure favourable attitudes towards job performance and productivity (Bakker et al., 2005). Madera et al. (2014) have discovered that managers facing low communication barriers experienced less confusion about their roles and fewer work conflicts, which makes them less inclined to quit their jobs. Moreover, unsatisfactory communication can result in low feedback, absences, burnout, or anxiety among employees, and increased staff turnover (Pettit et al., 1997). Additionally, Wang and Jing (2018) find that the inability to communicate in the language of the host nation is a key obstacle for migrants looking for work. Immigrants who are unable to speak the local language typically have less work satisfaction. Immigrants who struggle to connect with natives or build new social networks may find it challenging to re-establish their employment due to a lack of language proficiency (Wang and Jing, 2018). On the contrary, a high degree of competency in the local language can positively impact immigrant workers' job satisfaction as they often earn higher salaries or income than low-level language proficient natives (Wang and Jing, 2018).

Language barriers hinder communication between employers and immigrant employees, which negatively impacts organisational attitudes such as task satisfaction and job dedication (Madera et al., 2013). They also highlight that language and communication challenges are significant aspects of tasks that might affect how satisfied an employee is. Immigrant workers with inadequate language proficiency often express confusion and doubt about their activities, which then negatively impacts job satisfaction (Madera et al., 2013). Xia et al. (2024) also conclude that employees who suffer from language anxiety and subsequent frustration may feel less motivated and satisfied at work and contribute to less innovation processes. Moreover, inadequate communication skills have a greater negative impact on immigrants' labour market participation and employment status than formal skill deficiencies due to the low-skill profile of immigrant professions (Ghio et al., 2023).

The previously used literature shows that language barriers are not only limited within language problems. It affects regular communication, slows information sharing, and weakens the trust. That creates the causes of rework and increases misunderstandings. It can also reduce job satisfaction and can increase thoughts of leaving from discussions of group meeting even if it is important. However, some studies explained the language barriers in the general way but many studies used case company in a specific country to support and keep focused to their research questions. Welch et al. (2020) point out that using case studies is a very appropriate form of research as it assists in demonstrating how organizational and national environments influence the experiences of people at work. Siggelkow and Nicolaj (2008) also stated that using a context can be powerful method as it makes an argument more convincing and concrete; it gives the reader an opportunity to visualize the situation. In this study Finland is to be used as a context as it is well suited for this study. In Finland recruiting of international people is growing, but local-language demands continue to influence participation, internal communication, and careers, even in workplaces where English is used as an general communication lan-

guage (Yle, 2024b). In this situation it is significant to investigate the ways in which language-related issues are manifested within Finnish multinational teams and how organizations adapt to them in their everyday operations.

2.6 Language barriers in Finland and in the workplace

This paper uses Finland as a context for studying the impact of language barriers in team collaboration among immigrants. Migration to Finland is an increasing and comparatively recent issue due to an upsurge of skilled and economically motivated immigrants. Previous literature has conducted research on Finland to understand the challenges of language barriers in various sectors. For instance, Khanal (2025) finds that low proficiency in the native language, mostly Finnish, creates a key communication obstacle that significantly limits their capacity to access, navigate, and efficiently utilise healthcare facilities in Finland. Therefore, this language barrier makes it difficult for participants to understand important medical instructions and prescriptions and to communicate with healthcare professionals. Additionally, communication challenges create feelings of perceived mistreatment, as immigrants who have trouble explaining their symptoms feel ignored or see that others who speak Finnish well receive better care and appointments more quickly (Khanal, 2025).

Nshom et al. (2022) identifies language as a significant issue that is referred to as a "linguistic barrier" or "Finnish language" causes problems. The language barrier hinders cultural adaptation and makes the process of adjusting to Finnish society more challenging (Nshom et al., 2022). Due to this reason, immigrants sometimes feel they lose out on important offerings in the workplace, where Finnish-speaking people are given priority. Vorobeva et al. (2022) also concludes that a poor command of the Finnish language is considered a major structural obstacle that prevents immigrants from getting jobs, finding better housing, and accessing a variety of functional areas in Finnish society. This language barrier also serves as a cultural barrier, which limits access to important cultural customs and makes it challenging to comprehend Finnish people and talk about their basic daily issues (Vorobeva et al., 2022).

Based on the previous literature, the study comes up with the following theoretical framework.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

The study aims to identify the impact of language barriers on team collaboration among immigrant team members having low proficiency in the Finnish language. The most cited challenges identified from prior literature are the communication barrier and trust formation, which result in hampering team performance and reducing job satisfaction among members. The prior literature also highlights the recommendations, based on which the study tries to identify the possible solutions to the language barrier challenges. Figure 4 shows the theoretical framework that describes the challenges of the language barriers among immigrants for their teamwork collaboration.

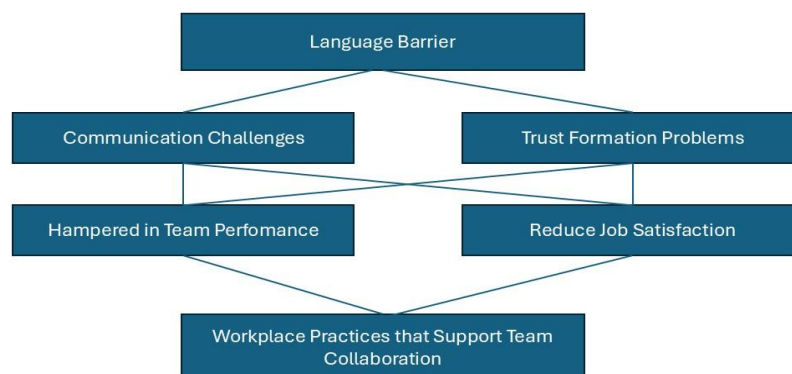


Figure 4: Theoretical Framework (Source: Author's work)

This paper is based on the theoretical framework that describes the role of language barrier as a factor in teamwork within organizational multilingual environment. Based on the previous study, the framework correlates language proficiency and communication practices with such essential outcomes of teamwork as the formation of trust, team

performance, and job satisfaction (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014; Hinds et al., 2014; Luring and Klitmoller, 2015; Tenzer et al., 2014). In this context, language barriers can be perceived as components that influence formal and informal processes of communication, which further impact interpersonal relationships and team effectiveness.

The existing literature indicates that poor language proficiency can decrease the active involvement of employees in meetings, the ability to understand each other, and the asymmetry of interactions in teams (Tenzer et al., 2014; Luring and Klitmoller, 2015). These issues have the potential to undermine trust and cause an adverse impact on team performance and job satisfaction, especially when the environment is knowledge-based and teamwork-based (Hinds et al., 2014). Language-related issues might be still evident even in situations when English is used as a common working language as team members have different fluency and confidence levels (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014).

Although this framework has been actively used in the research of multinational and multilingual teams, the Finnish setting has certain peculiarities that require more detailed analysis. English can be formally the corporate language in a Finnish multinational organization, but local language can still be in use in informal communication, in daily coordination, and in other informal problem-solving contexts (Yle, 2024c). Access to information, being part of the social bond and informal learning opportunities can be affected by such practices. Consequently, immigrant workers can acquire certain coping mechanisms to overcome the language-related issues in the formal and informal work environments.

Nonetheless, there is a gap in the literature that does not clearly show the dynamics of the same in the Finnish context and how the immigrant employees actively manage the language barriers in their daily practice of work. Previous studies primarily consider the overall results of language diversity, and less attention is paid to coping mechanisms at the micro-level and context-related communication norms (Luring and Klitmoller, 2015; Tenzer et al., 2014). Thus, the analysis of language barriers in multinational groups in

Finland can contribute to the further understanding of how the workforce can adjust to local language use and how they can cope with inclusion, participation, and teamwork in the environment where there are high expectations of communication clarity and high levels of informal workplace relationships.

The language proficiency of immigrant team members forms the beginning point of the framework as depicted in Figure 4. Previous research indicates that workers with low levels of corporate or host-country language proficiency might have difficulties with participating in work-related communication, informal discussions, and other knowledge-sharing practices (Harzing et al., 2011; Tenzer et al., 2014). This low competence contributes to language barriers. In this paper, this is seen as a practical barrier to understanding and expressing oneself as well as being understood in the daily work conditions. The framework considers the fact that the low language proficiency of immigrant workers is a major antecedent that generates language barriers in multinational groups.

Based on this key construction of language barriers, Figure 4 indicates that the literature identified two key areas of challenges: barriers to communication and barriers to the formation of trust. The language barriers lead to communication issues like a lack of understanding, the need to exchange incomplete information, time wastage in clarifying the tasks, and shyness in speaking at meetings. Low proficiency is also a cause of low competence when the employees feel left out of the discussions or when they are afraid to speak up due to the fear of errors. Simultaneously, they may also destroy trust. The arrows in the framework reflect how linguistic challenges transfer into interpersonal and relational issues within the team, connecting language barriers, communication barriers, and the formation of trust.

The next section of the framework is then associated with these communication and trust-related challenges with team-level and individual outcomes. Figure 4 demonstrates that, among other things, poor communication and trust are likely to impair the performance of the team by slowing down the process of coordination, diminishing mutual

understanding, and causing mistakes or repetitive work. Simultaneously, they are also decrease job satisfaction of immigrant workers because inability to be a part of the whole can lead to frustration, stress, insecurity, and a complex of undervaluation. In such a way, the framework implies that the adverse impacts of language barriers on the performance and job satisfaction of the team members are indirect, but they are mediated by the intermediate processes of communication issues and inability to establish trust.

Lastly, this study includes a block of recommendations, coping practices and is expected to test them empirically. These can be the individual-level coping methods (preparing more before a meeting, clarifying, using translation tools, etc.) and organizational or team-based operations (simplifying language, repeating important points, providing visual aids, providing language support, and maintaining an inclusive communication climate). These practices are included within the theoretical framework as possible answers to the challenges directly connected with the language barriers. This study aims to understand how employees and organizations can address language barrier issues in practice through the perspective of those variables.

Overall, the theoretical framework offers a overview which being explored in this research. It relates the negative effects that immigrant employees face according to their language proficiency, such as relationship and trust building, team performance, and job satisfaction, not to mention the value of practical recommendations and coping strategies. This framework will lead to the design of the interviews and the following analysis to help in organizing the empirical findings around the paths and relationships that were proposed by past research.

3 Methodology

This section describes how the study is designed, conducted, and analysed to ensure the credibility of the results. This section is divided into four parts: research design, which outlines and justifies the study's design by discussing the research approach based on prior literature; research setting, which describes the sampling strategy and all the conditions to conduct the study; data collection, which details the interview methodology, focusing on the number of respondents, sampling logic, questionnaire design and data collection procedures; and data analysis, which explains the analysis methods and validation processes.

3.1 Research Design

Multinational teams can provide the appropriate context, as this study deals with language barriers among various native speakers (Tenzer et al., 2014b; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2015). These teams normally show a greater level of language variation when compared to conventional hierarchies (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2015). Tenzer et al. (2017) finds that language diversity impacts regular collaboration and decision-making in multinational corporations, which makes multinational teams an ideal setting to examine effects on work processes and outcomes.

This study was conducted using an exploratory, theoretical analysis approach, which was well-suited to address the research questions, as with this, it was possible to have a thorough understanding of the micro-processes under study. This approach allows a new perspective and enables this study to see the complex impact of language in a comprehensive way (Tenzer et al., 2021). In accordance with the concept of systematic combining, this research alternated between the analysis of the interview data and the theory to refine the analysis and create ideas (Dubois and Gadde, 2014). Additionally, classic guidance suggests that conceptual case work (within-case analysis, constant comparison, replication logic) is effective at explaining how and why processes develop (Eisenhardt, 1989). Since this study tried to explain how language barriers impact the multinational

teams' collaboration, the theoretical analysis approach helps to develop own concepts based on the interviewed data.

Moreover, this study chooses a qualitative, interview-based research design that can align with the research objectives to answer the “how” and “why” questions (Pratt, 2009). Particularly, this study performs semi-structured interviews to ensure uniformity and comparability across our respondents and to allow for the emergence of new topics (Myers, 2008). Semi-structured guides are useful because they allow for exploring what arises while keeping a common core of queries when the study doesn't yet know the whole construct space (Myers, 2008). Therefore, this study followed the semi-structured approach to get in-depth information about team members' subjective perceptions, providing them with the opportunity to address the specific challenges.

3.2 Research Setting and interviewee selection

Finnish multinational companies where the language mode was either Finnish, English, or Swedish were particularly well-suited for this study. The chosen firms provided a very intriguing setting for studying the impact of language diversity in team collaboration at the workplace, as they operate in a country with an increasing foreign workforce and a work environment that values the Finnish language for local integration and career advancement, even though English has been used for global communication (Yle, 2022). Moreover, Finland's second national language creates internal difficulties resulting from historical disputes coming from Finland's previous affiliation with Sweden (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2024). Therefore, the Finnish work environment is an interesting context to identify the impact of Finnish language proficiency on the non-native employees and the challenges they face while working in this culture.

For industry selection, this study focused on a sector that (a) has a workforce that is largely multinational and hence has low native language skills, (b) heavily depends on teams, and (c) is defined by complex operations requiring extensive knowledge processing following Tenzer et al. (2021). Therefore, the Information Technology industry

A	Online	Quality administratr	Bangladeh and Bengali	4 years	From Fin-land	No	3	33.20
B	Online	Product developer	Bangladesh and Bengali	3 years	From Fin-land	No	12	18.30
C	Online	Offering development	Iran and Parsi	1.5 years	From Fin-land	Yes	8	28.29
D	Online	Accountant	Bangladesh and Bengali	3.9 years	From Fin-land	No	15	21.28
E	Online	R& D and engineering	Bangladesh and Bengali	3.4 years	From Fin-land	Yes	6	21.12
F	Online	Sales engineer	Philippines, and Pili-pino and English	8 years	From Fin-land	No	5	22.23

3.3 Data Collection

This study collected data through semi-structured interviews. Before conducting the main interviews, a pilot study was carried out. The pilot study was conducted with two participants to strengthen the validity and reliability of the interviews. The pilot study ensured that the right questions were given to the participants to answer the research topic. The information gathered from the pilot study helped to revise the initial interview questions and guidelines. Both participants said that the interview questions are well

organized and no need to change anything. After the pilot study, the main interviews were conducted.

The interviews were divided into 5 parts. First, respondents were asked to describe the demographic background, such as job responsibilities, positions, and language characteristics of the people with whom they work in a team. In the second part, the interview consisted of questions directly related to the participants' subjective experiences and challenges faced in working in a multilingual team. The participants were encouraged to elaborate on their comments by detailing their real work experiences and their actions to tackle any challenges faced at that time. In the third and fourth part, the questions were organized that how language affect the trust formation and relationship improvement between the team members. In the fifth part, the participants were asked to share their own recommendations that can be offered by the companies to improve their experiences while working in a team.

The interviewees were initially contacted through LinkedIn messages. First, their profiles were identified via the company websites, after that connection requests were sent to them. Once the connection requests were accepted, detailed information was shared through LinkedIn's messaging option. They were informed about the purpose of the thesis and asked whether they would be able to manage time for an interview. Although this approach was informal, it was adopted due to the lack of alternative contact methods. After the interviewees replied to the messages, the pre-prepared interview questions were sent to them, and a convenient time was requested in order to schedule and conduct the interviews.

The total interview processes were conducted in online. The participants were also approached by getting appointments beforehand, and a Team's link has created to conduct the interviews. The Team's link was then provided to the respondents before the scheduled time. The total number participants were 6. The duration of the meeting was around 30 minutes - 35 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in February 2026,

except one, and the audio of the conversations was recorded with the interviewees' permission. All the interviews were conducted in English, as the sample respondents are good at English for communication and collaboration. The respondents were briefly explained about the objectives of the study and assured about their privacy and secrecy. All the respondents asked the same predetermined questions prepared by the researcher.

3.4 Data Analysis

In order to determine the effect of language barriers on workplace collaboration among the immigrant employees in multinational corporations in Finland this paper used a qualitative data analysis method. The study did not consist of simply describing experiences but comprehending the processes according to which language barriers influence collaboration. The analysis was informed by the available theoretical insights on language and communication, building trust, team performance, and emotional experiences in multilingual teams.

All the recordings were transcribed after conducting the six semi-structured interviews. Transcripts were read multiple times in order to become familiar with the information. At this point, this study focused on interpreting the descriptions of experiences of language barriers, collaboration, and workplace dynamics by each interviewee. Based on a hermeneutic approach, interpretation was formed under the constant movement between the data of the interviews and the theoretical framework (Rantala et al., 2001). This enabled the empirical material to be interpreted in terms of larger theoretical ideas and also made sure that the interpretations were based on the data (Rantala et al., 2001).

Once this was done, certain data were analyzed further and in accordance to the theoretical framework that directed the research. As an example, in cases where participants explained something about the common official language then I added them under the point Language use and communication in multinational teams. For more instances, where participants explained any circumstances whereby colleagues switched to Finnish

and their feelings about it, these data were formed using the interpretation of the Job Satisfaction and Emotional Experiences. Similarly, the descriptions of trust and relation between team members that were mentioned were perceived in terms of trust formation and relational dynamics. Instead of accepting such statements as isolated cases, they were examined as illustrations of how linguistic asymmetries can affect information sharing, engagement and relationship processes in teams.

Besides analyzing the statements of the participants, the analysis also took into account the manner in which they presented their experience. The interviews were approached as a kind of socially constructed text where meaning is created with language. Based on the findings of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory was used which helped to understand how the text create the specific meaning. . This theory helped to understand how the participants talked about actions, allocated responsibility, evaluated situations, and placed themselves and others within their narratives (Fernandez, L. 2018). Considering an instance, there is a significant distinction between an occurrence of saying, "it just happens" and "they switch to Finnish". The former portrays exclusion as impersonal and automatic, whereas the latter attributes definite agency to particular actors. These linguistic decisions were seen to have meanings as they demonstrate how participants perceive the meaning of responsibility, inclusion, and relations in multilingual workplaces (Fernandez, L. 2018).

Lastly, I arranged the chapter on findings to reflect the theoretical framework. The empirical findings from this study are provided under such sections that are arranged according to the key elements of the framework: (1) language use and communication in multinational teams, (2) trust formation and relational dynamics, (3) perceived effects on team performance, (4) job satisfaction and emotional experiences, and (5) coping practices and recommendations. In every part, there are illustrative quotes that serve as an indication of how the experience of the interviewees can be an example of the mechanisms discussed in the past studies and also the context of the immigrant employees

working in Finland. It is a structure that guarantees consistency of the theoretical framework, data analysis process, and how the findings are presented.

Through this theory-based analysis, the research stays within a well-identified theoretical model and lets the data to expand knowledge on how the language barrier determines multinational team cooperation, trust, performance, and job satisfaction.

3.5 Ethical considerations of the study

The ethical guidelines given by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, TENK 2019, for conducting research with human participants, are followed in this dissertation. TENK produces, updates, and communicates national guidelines for responsible research conduct and good scientific practice (GSP) in Finland (TENK, 2021).

The major ethical considerations that followed in this study were that participants were treated as autonomous entities, and there is freedom of participation (no pressure or coercion). No individual name included in this study, and any personal information was managed carefully in accordance with TENK standards and legislation. The research was careful in contexts where participants may feel pressured, and the research aims, methods, data collection processes, and use of this data were discussed with the interview participants. Moreover, as the research involved different cultural or ethnic individuals, the researcher was respectful towards cultural norms, rights, and history, and accepts differing norms. Overall, the study was prepared by fulfilling all the required ethical issues by ensuring the privacy of the participants.

To maintain reliability this thesis adheres to the notion of trustworthiness, which is typically discussed in terms of dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). That means the research process is outlined and followed in a consistent way, so that the reader can know how the conclusions have been derived (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Reliability is enhanced through the use of the identical semi-structured interview guide for all

participants, maintaining precise records of interview arrangements, and recording every analysis step of transcript preparation to theme development (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Shenton, 2004).

Credibility and confirmability are the key elements of qualitative trustworthiness which treated as a validity in this study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To support of credibility, the interviews focus on the actual work situations of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Shenton, 2004). Confirmability is enhanced by keeping the analysis close to the data that the participants are describing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010).

4 Findings

4.1 Language Use and Communication in Multinational Teams

In the interviews, the participants repeatedly said that English is the working language in the multinational corporation considered in the research. The role of the English language is central since all the participants are immigrant employees with little or no knowledge of the Finnish language, which is necessary to participate as a professional.

All of the participants said that English is their working language. One of the interviewees explained the companies' institutional rules for using the language. For using English as an official language, they do not face any language related obstacles, as English is the common language that everyone can speak.

Participant B said that,

"English is our official language, and this is mandatory. So, we cannot and we should not speak other languages in official work rather than English."

Interviewees D also said that, *"we used English language and because the most of us are international from multiple region and nations and the work language in general is English."*

This assertion implies that the firms have adopted an institutional solution to the possible language discrimination by instituting English as the official communication medium.

Participant D focused on the practicality of having a common language within multinational teams by stating that,

“ Mainly we use English because we are working from different countries and we have different backgrounds and the mother tongue is different. So, our common language is English. ”

These narratives point to the fact that they use the common language for their communication, and for the immigrants included teams English is a language equalizer, and it lessens the formal drawbacks that otherwise would be exposed to immigrant staff in a Finnish-speaking workplace. As they are using English as their working language, they do not need to face any language related obstacles even though they have different linguistic backgrounds.

Moreover, in some cases, intentionally language switching occurs in teams, because they want to add one immigrant team member in their team.

Participant C demonstrate that, *“ Yes, I have seen that sometime before I join people are talking in Finnish, but when I join they change to English immediately because they want to include me too. But all the meetings are happening, all the meetings are in English too..”*

Such types of behaviour indicate active inclusive awareness. In accordance with this situation, it can be said that when one company wants to hire international people as their team member, they have the tendency to accept those people into their team. So, they can easily switch their language to the common language. So that, everyone can communicate confidently and participate in every task without facing any language related problem.

Nevertheless, there are still informal multilingual interactions, especially at the social level like coffee breaks. All of the participants said the same thing that their colleagues switch their languages during the break time. Although this was not viewed as an exclusionary behavior by the participants, it points to the multiple layer of the language use

in the multinational work environment. Almost all of the participants said that language switching during break time is normal, even all of the people have the same tendency to use the common or native language when they speak to the same linguistic background people. All participants also confirm that they do not switch their language when they work so it does not make any obstacles for their work and communication within the team members.

For support this immediate above discussion I have added one most relevant participant comment here. Participant A said that,

“when we go to the restaurant or some program or is it like that, is it just some party or internal discussion or internal program or workshop that time they are this talk in Finnish. But if it is a big issue or it is important things that time they also speak in English but everywhere most of the time, they are speaking English. But sometimes they switch those things with each other.”

All in all, the results indicate that language obstacles in these teams are not restrictive. Rather, they manifest themselves through the form of minor communication inefficiencies that have to be clarified and adjusted. As all of the team use English as their official language the language can not make any unavoidable effect even though immigrant people working in another country and with majority of Finnish language speaking people.

4.2 Trust Formation and Relational Dynamics

The theoretical model hypothesized that issues in communication that occur due to language barriers might undermine the building of trust. The empirical evidence shows that trust in such groups is mostly established upon the basis of openness, transparency and supportive attitude as opposed to the basis of shared native language.

They often reported that their teams were psychologically safe spaces. One participant stated that trust improves when they can ask questions, information without fear, and their manager also make a yearly session about this matter. Here leadership plays an important role in managing the trust and transparencies between the team members. When management level creates this type of environment where every team member treats the same, they can fearlessly say their problem to their leader, and then the leader works on it. So, the team members do not need to worry about trust between the team members.

Participant A said that,

" If I describe trust issue, yes, it's a really trust, I think generally it's really good because we can ask question, share information and support each other without fear Every year we have two sessions with our manager, how you feel inside this team or how you're working environment. So, in that time he or she will ask everything about his employer or something. If you are facing any type of problem, you can tell me or if you don't feel safe. In this department or something, any types of some. So, in this way when we have this collaboration with each other, it's really made a good trust."

According to the participant B and C trust does not depend on the language. It depends on the team members' behavior. When one team member faces any problem and other team members help him willingly it helps to develop the trust. They stated that if other team members speak the same language, it does not affect on trust. Participant C also added that trust depends on the people's behaviour not on their language.

Participant C said that,

" language doesn't do anything here because it's not like that if someone talks in my language. I can trust them more because I think it's their characteristic and their performance and their behavior, not their language..... For example, if someone is out in person, I don't think I have more trust for them. I trust the behavior of people, not their language."

Participant C, D, and F said that clear, good and open communication beside with honesty increase the trust between team members. When team members can clearly explain their needs and problems and others can understand them clearly then they automatically feel good. According to participant F, if team member expresses the fact honestly such as when they do not know something about one specific topic and they honestly say that to the other members. It helps to improve the trust between team members.

One most relevant participant comment is used here for supporting the above discussion. Participant D said that,

"..... good communication skills or, sharing the problems and what you need from them that can be helpful for developing deep relationship with team members."

In this case, trust comes as a result of mutual help and collective responsibility. Knowledge of the language also plays an indirect role in such a process since the confidence in the ability to express oneself will have an impact on the level of participation. Nonetheless, the participants did not report the language barrier as having a direct influence of undermining trust. Rather, trust seems to be robust in case teams are able to create norms of including communication. In this way, the results narrow the theoretical premise: the language barriers can cause the vulnerability in relationships, but the effect of these factors on the trust is mediated by the team climate and the communicative openness.

4.3 Perceived Effects on Team Performance

According to the theoretical model, the problems with communication can eventually harm the performance within the team. The interviews demonstrate that the language barriers bring new coordination challenge, but it does not essentially interfere with the performance.

Participant E said that they usually have an open discussion and everyone can participate based on their opinion. In the theoretical framework it refers that team performance mostly effected by the language. Participants A, C,D and E clearly mention that the team's performance does not depend on the language, it depends on the participants' experience. If one team member has low experience and knowledge about one specific topic, they tend to remain silent. Participant E also explained that teamwork is a combination of various expertise. So, it is normal that one team member can be more expert on some specific topics than others. For that reason, some team members are more involved in the conversation sometimes, that does not mean they do not perform in the task.

Participant E also explained that,

"..... we every one of us try to put our opinion and then I'm holding one task or if I'm taking a lead of one thing. Then based on my assessment and then under the consultation of my upper manager or some if I mentioned supervisors he will lead to that direction that who are what we going to do or how we going to do it..... "No one is knowing everything but we bring each expertise in the table make it to solve the puzzle."

Participant C said that team performance depends on the personality. In every place there have some people who do not like to talk more and another types of persons who like to share their thoughts as much as they can. It does not depend on the language.

Participant A, D and E stated that team performance mostly depends on their experience but in accordance with participant C it also depends on the people's personality. Participant C said that,

"I think it depends mostly on the personality. Some people like to share more and some people like me like to share less. I don't think it's because they the language is different"

At the last it can be said that, the languages use of team members does not directly effect the team performance. The lack of information, knowledge and personality directly create effect on team performance. Because when someone does not know about the exact meaning of something or does not have enough knowledge, they do not feel comfortable to involve the team discussion. But in the theoretical it discussed that team performance directly affected by the language use.

4.4 Job Satisfaction and Emotional Experiences

4.4.1 Job Satisfaction as an Immigrant Team Member

The literature review above links language barriers creates low job satisfaction. The empirical evidence provides a less bias and context-sensitive image. Some of the respondents reported positive experiences associated with English work.

Participant B, C and D clearly point out that they are feeling comfortable because of they can use English as their working language. They also indicate that it increases their job satisfaction as well. They said that language is a big part of satisfaction and motivation. Though the participant work in the Finnish multinational company without knowing any Finnish, but they do not get demotivated or dissatisfied as they can use English in their workplace.

Participant D stated that its feels motivated and satisfied when team member use the common language that everyone knows and understands.

, "...when you express yourself by your words and other person can understand. I think that it is helpful or influence someone or give motivation or satisfaction in work. So that is the thing I'm getting though I'm living in Finland and working in a Finnish company. But still, I can use English as a official language, so this is the good thing for me. I feel really comfortable and motivated."

Participant A said that good communication and positiveness between teamwork improves the motivation and satisfaction level. Beside the use of same Language proper communication and positiveness between teamwork are important to increase motivation and satisfaction. Participant A points out that,

"Good communication and positive teamwork is really motivated and satisfying for everyone. It is really good for when team communication is clear when any team communicates with you clearly, shares the information and work together and that thing everyone will feel safe and easier and your work environment will be enjoyable."

Participant D stated that motivation and satisfaction increase when team members can share their opinions and struggle and get the expected help from other team members. Common language and good communication are not the only factors that improve the satisfaction level. When team members can share their struggle with others and get help from colleagues that also increase motivation.

"I think we need to value our opinions and if we can share our struggle and we can get help from our team members that can be motivated for everyone."

So, motivation and satisfaction do not depend on the language specially in Finnish culture as they use the common language of their official work, rather it depends on positiveness, openness and on the desire to help other team members.

4.4.2 Emotional Experiences as an Immigrant Team Member

The literature review implied that the language barriers can affect the emotional well-being of the employees as they make them feel excluded, anxious, or less belonging in the multicultural workplaces. This relationship has a subtle insight into the findings of the interview of this study. Although there was no significant difference between the formal working work relationships and language, the emotional experiences were more complicated in the non-formal social relations like lunch breaks and coffee breaks.

Participant B, C, E and F stated that their Finnish colleague use Finnish language during the break time, but it does not affect them. One participant thinks If some team members use their own language to explain their personal issue it doesn't affect other team members who do not know this language. Participant C stated that it does not happen frequently when they work together, and it does not feel bad. Participant C also stated that he also changes the language when he speaks with team members of the same nationalities, so it does not feel bad. Participant F said that team members switch their language not to everyone, its happen when they talk with same language speaking person, but if they use their own language to the immigrant colleagues who do not have the language proficiency then they can request for using the English as a common language , and then they do that. So, it does not create any problems and any bad feelings.

"I don't feel actually anything because they can speak their personal issues with their native language. I shouldn't be bothered about it, and I haven't faced any issue that in between the meetings they are speaking their native language. So it's fine."

Participant C said that when some Finnish speaking team members do not know the exact collocation in English then they explain it in Finnish first and then they try to explain it in English and as a non- Finnish speaking person it does not feel bad.

"....my colleague, switch language. Sometimes they want to say some collocation, but they don't know the equivalent for in English..... It's just like they say it in Finnish and let it go. They explain it in English, and they try to provide a shared understanding of that collocation. It makes me not feel really bad about it."

Participant C shared different feelings that in lunch time team members switch their language from common to their own language then it feels isolated, but it does not happen within the meeting or when they work.

".....at lunch, some people talk in their language. We are on the table like six or seven people and for example two Indian people start talking in Indian and I'm like Oh no And I feel so that decrease my job satisfaction. when I don't understand it, it's like, oh, I'm in an isolated situation."

Participant D said that if the team members do not switch their language even at lunch time when they remain together it feels better.

"I would say this is really important for a company because many internationals are working and I would say in this company they really value the people or diversity. So, I can just say that in my previous team there were Swedish speaking, Finnish Speaking and other we were 12, the employee in our team, but we were seven nationalities. So, we had a common ground that we speak only on the English in our main conversation. So, they value all of us even though they don't try to speak when we are all together on our coffee break or in our lunch break. So, we always speak in English too. That's the thing I really feel good about because no one will feel like I don't know what is going on in the conversation. I would say that multilingual communication is very important for a company."

In such a way, the empirical materials narrow down the body of literature: the language barriers might not interfere with the collaboration process per se, yet they can precondition the shaping of emotional belonging indirectly. Inclusive communication behaviours particularly in informal situations are also significant in maintaining the positive emotional experiences within the work environment.

4.5 Coping Practices and Recommendations

The literature review demonstrated that the issue of language barriers in multinationals is not only a problem of individual communication but also a structural and managerial challenge of the organization design that needs structural and managerial interventions. This opinion is supported highly by the results of the interview. Participants focused on the fact that, although personal effort is important, organizational guidelines, management habits, and integrative communication standards make it easier in diminishing the linguistic obstacles.

4.5.1 Recommendations for Organization

In terms of organization, a number of the participants emphasized the necessity of using English as a standard and constant working language especially when using multinational teams.

Participant B and D recommend that as an organization they need to make sure English as their only standard language. Participant D recommended that managers play a vital role in this matter. Manager can strictly assign the common language as the official language. Because in multinational companies there have different linguistic background people who have to work together. So, strict use of one common language can mitigate the language barriers between multilingual team members.

“We stick to one particular language which is English and I would recommend other organization that if they can also stick to one language so they can promote inclusivity. And yeah, like if you're working with many national people, so you'll get a great input for your organization as well.”

Participant C said that making English as an official language is not the only solution. Because English is not our mother tongue. So, if the manager use the easy English word and provide written document something related with meeting that would be good.

“.....another good approach is providing more explanation and talking in a basic English maybe. Make people more understood, even for example, very proficiency of English and it is good that you use the basic word in English. Then all people have shared understanding no matter what language level they are. It's clear other than that, I think this is usually the in companies people use Teams, Microsoft Teams and it can provide you a summary of the meeting. And can do this to the summary of the meeting and they know they get a better understanding of the meeting agenda and what happened, what was, what's shared, what was shared in the meeting afterwards.....because it's not my first language. English is not my first language and maybe it's better to have something written.”

Participant B and E said that besides making English as an official language, if the organization based on Finnish, then they can arrange language course. It helps immigrant people to involve the organization more deeply.

“If the organization is based in Finland and Finnish is more often uses. So yeah, the local organizations should can arrange language courses.”

Participant E also suggested a language learning team which help to learn Finnish or Swedish at workplace. As E previously suggested, that organization can arrange language integration programs and in case it is not possible then organization can arrange language learning teams.

“.....there is not any language learning team because all of us are from outside of Finland and we don't know very good Finnish, but maybe we can make a language coffee chat or something like that where we can practice language so that would be helpful for everyone to learn the Finnish or Swedish at workplace or practice little bit. ... we are thinking that it could be a good thing to contribute to team or in organizational needs. “

Overall, based on the interviewees suggestion the organizational should make English as an official communication, use simplified language, and introduce some formal-informal integration programs. To avoid language barriers organization should use one common

language which most of the team members can speak fluently. Sometimes only use the common language not the exact solution, as it can be possible that the common language is not the native language of most of the team members. So, technology and software-based companies generally use complicated terms or words and sometimes it is not understandable to all of the participants. For this reason, organizations can use alternative terms or words which are understandable to all of the team members. Additionally, organizations can increase some language integration programs and the language learning teams which helps to learn the local language inside the workplace.

4.5.2 Recommendations for an Individual

Participants also suggest some personal responsibility to improve the host country's language proficiency, besides the organizational responsibility.

Participant A and D explained that as we are planning to live in a country for the long term, we should learn at least basic local language proficiency. It helps to understand the general conversation of the local language. Participant D also added that local language proficiency not only helps to understand conversation, but it also helps for getting job in a foreign country.

Participant D explained that,

"But I would say in the common perspective that when you are leaving in a country. Because you're focusing on Finland or Finnish society. So, I would say that as immigrant or as the person from other country. If we think to live in Finland or work in Finland, we should learn the local language. It could be Finnish or Swedish or both, but I think this is the really important because then you can talk. This is really important for getting job or be settled or in a foreign country."

Participant A shared an important message an opinion, suggesting that some managers in the same firm do not want to hire that person if they do not have Finnish language

proficiency, they only hire when they do not find the Finnish speaking person who have the expertise of the desired position.

"..... some team I heard that but I'm not really sure about that inside the company. .. some team manager or some department they don't want to hire the international people, because if they hire the international people then they have to speak or they have to communicate on all of the team meetings and everything in English or something like that. If they ... have the really good expert person from Finland. So why will they take the international one in that case because in that case they don't need to do anything extra. They don't need to use translation, transcript tool or anything, any summary, every e-mail or everything they will send between their team in a Finnish language."

Language barriers do not affect directly for the team collaboration but to enjoy the informal conversation and getting more job opportunity participants suggested that every immigrant person should learn the host country's language. The findings indicates that sometimes team member feeling isolated when their colleague switch their language. So, for understanding and involving the ongoing conversation team members as an individual should improve host countries language skill. Learning local language also help to get better job opportunity in the foreign country.

4.6 General Assessment

The aim of this study at investigating how language barriers affect workplace collaboration in multinational corporations in Finland. The general interpretation of the empirical results is that the problem of language barriers does affect the collaboration, but it effects indirectly which is findable and also adjustable.

Firstly, English language as an institutionalized working language serves as a structural equalizer. Each of the participants said that they use English for meetings, official documents, and core work-related discussions. This minimizes the risk of systematic exclusion

and encourages the involvement of the immigrant employees with low Finnish proficiency. In that regard, the results contradict previous studies to some extent, focusing on the language barriers as a condition that hinder the cooperation (Tenzer et al., 2014; Fiset et al., 2024). Although some small difficulties admitted like clarification loops and vocabulary, but they did not make a serious threat to the collaboration or performance, and it does not happen for the language proficiency.

Secondly, the results also show that behavioral and relational factors form a stronger influence on trust than language proficiency itself. The pillars of trust were always highlighted as openness, honesty, transparency and managerial support by the participants. Even though some of the previous studies suggest that language asymmetries can lead to competence misattribution and undermine ability-based trust (Tenzer et al., 2014), the patterns were not highly noticed in that case.

Thirdly, team performance was pointed out as indirectly and situationally affected. The results support the assumption that language-related confusion may create new coordination expenses, which conforms to the informational route described by Fiset et al. (2024). Nevertheless, the participants did not consider language barriers as one of the main factors that could determine the performance results. Rather, the differences in performance were effected due to the level of experience, personality attributes and role clarity.

Fourthly, the emotional side of the language use has depicted a more detailed image. In the formal interactions of work, majority of the participants said that they are comfortable and confident in speaking English. Nevertheless, there were some informal setting, especially in case of lunch breaks or coffee conversations when small groups would start speaking their native language a few number of participants feel bad about that. Though such scenarios did not have an impact on task performance but sometimes had an implication on emotional well-being and sense of belonging. This observation is indicative

of affective route suggested by Fiset et al. (2024) in that, the dynamics of language are more emotionally sensitive in an informal setting than during a structured meeting.

Lastly, the results present the proactive aspect of coping mechanisms at personal and organizational levels. On an organizational level, respondents suggested that English should be the official language of organization, written documents should be made, the use of language should be simplified, and language integration programmes should be offered. These are moderating processes that minimize the adverse effects of language asymmetries. Thus, the research recommends that language barriers do not exist independently, their effects largely depend on the way teams and organizations react to them.

Overall, the findings interpretation shows that in Finnish multinational environment, the language barrier does not necessarily weaken the cooperation. Rather, it is directly affected by the inclusive language policies, the supportive leadership, and communication openness. So, the use of common language as an official language, the support provided from the managerial level and free commutation between team members can mitigate the language barriers in the multinational corporation. The findings improve the available theoretical assumptions by showing that although language barriers are associated with the possibility of influencing the interaction, trust, performance, and emotional experience, these implications occur in a context-specific manner and can be neutralized using well-organized organizational behaviors.

To sum up, language barriers in multinational teams in Finland are not as strict barriers but can be managed as obstacles. Their effects on teamwork are indirect, mediated and socially contingent. This interpretation adds a new point of view to the literature, demonstrating that the connection between language barriers and workplace collaboration is not inevitability in particular, in the environment, where English is institutionalized as a universal working language, and diversity is actively appreciated.

5 Conclusion

This study examined the effects of language barriers in workplace collaboration in multinational corporation in Finland with particular reference to immigrant workers with a low proficiency in the Finnish language. The study combines preconceived theoretical views with the findings of the qualitative interview of six multinational team members, making the study give a more subtle insight into the issues of language barriers in the daily organizational life.

The results suggest that the impact of language barriers on the workplace collaboration in Finland is indirect, situational, and heavily mediated by the norms of communication, as well as the managerial practices. Formally in the workplace, English is a lingua franca that is highly institutionalized and it assist to minimize the structural exclusion. The uses of English in meetings, documentation and official communication helps to establish a common platform that enables the immigrant employees to contribute and take part in the decision making processes.

Unlike a part of the previous sources that discuss the disruptive character of language asymmetries (Tenzer et al., 2014; Fiset et al., 2024), the results indicate that language barriers in the Finnish multinational setting do not necessarily negatively impact trust or the performance of teams. Rather, the formation of trust seems to be largely determined by the transparency of the behavior, openness, support provided by the manager, and collaborative norms instead of the common first language. Equally, the performance of the team was also reported to rely rather on experience, personality, expertise, and coordination structures instead of language proficiency solely.

Nevertheless, the research also unveils the fact that language processes are more emotional in informal situations. Although in general formal communication was shared, the switching of language during a lunch or coffee break created a certain feeling of alienation. These results sharpen the current theoretical hypotheses as they demonstrate that the language barriers can be more effective in the social integration than in the task

performance. After completing the finding section, it shows the only one aspect is supported by the theoretical framework. Sometimes emotional imbalance is only affected by the language barriers. But in the other sectors findings do not support the theoretical framework. Such as participants do not face any communication challenges for the language barriers as they use common language in their workplace, and it depends on the team members' communication skill. Similarly trust improves by the openness between the team members and team supportive behavior. Team performance hampered by the team members experience and the lack of information. In the same way, Job satisfaction do not affect by the language barrier according to the findings its increase for using common language and positiveness between team members.

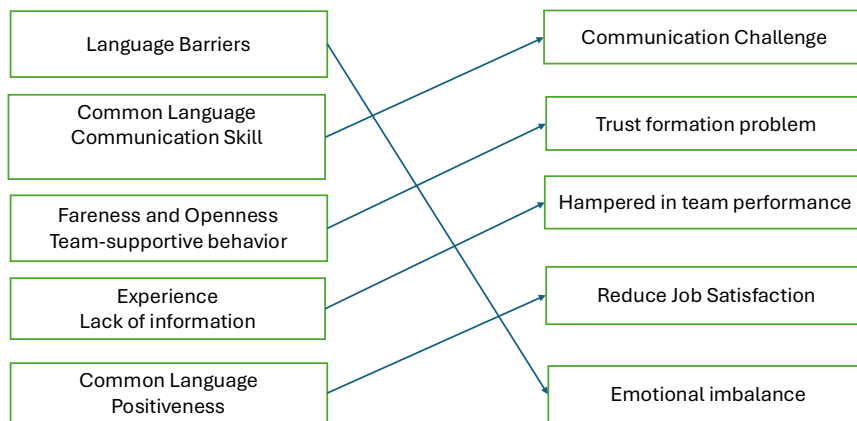


Figure 5: Adjusted theoretical Framework (Author Work)

The study makes contributions to the literature in three aspects. First, it puts existing theoretical models of language barriers within the Finnish multinational context and shows that institutionalization of the English usage may mediate negative effects. Second, it has emphasized the significance of micro-level coping strategies, including clarification strategies, written summaries and inclusion meeting norms. Third, it connects language barriers with communication and trust, as well as with emotional experiences

and belonging and broadens the collaboration-based framework introduced in Chapter 2.

All in all, it can be found that language barriers in Finnish multinational teams do not pose as structural barriers, rather, they can be viewed as manageable. Their effect is largely determined by the way companies create communication standards, and the way executives create an inclusive atmosphere within the team.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

Although this study has some meaningful contribution, this has also a number of limitations that should be noted. The sample size was quite limited and comprised of six interviewees who were part of multinational teams that were based in Finland. Despite the fact that qualitative research involves more focus on depth, the number of the participants is minimal, which limits the extent of the research. The findings are subjective and might not be applicable to all multinational teams in Finland.

Secondly, the researchers considered only those employees of low proficiency in Finnish language who were immigrants. The views of Native Finnish employees were not taken into consideration. Consequently, possible asymmetries in the perception between the majority and the minority language speakers are not completely reflected in the analysis. The fact that both groups were not included would have resulted into a more balanced relational analysis.

Thirdly, the study had a narrow focus to a single national setting. The example of Finland is an exceptional instance of how English is progressively becoming institutionalized among multinational corporations, although Finnish and Swedish are still dominant socially spoken languages. Thus, the results might not be easily generalizable to situations where the needs of local languages are stricter or in which there is a lesser establishment of the English language as a corporate language.

5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

There are a various area where this study can be research again in the future. To begin with, future research can increase the sample and cover several industries to determine whether language barriers can work differently in other fields other than information technology. Across industries comparative research could establish whether knowledge-intensive industries are better adapted to the language asymmetries as opposed to the operational or production setting.

Moreover, the views of native Finnish employees and managers should be included in future studies. The analysis of both majority and minor language speakers would also help better understand the relationship and fairness perceptions and inclusion practices.

Furthermore, a cross-country study of comparisons would be desirable. The Finnish case against that of other Nordic or non-Nordic settings might assist in determining whether the mitigating effect of the English language as a medium of work is culturally particular or universal.

In the future, a mixed analysis method can be adopted. In the quantitative method participant need to directly communicate to the researcher. Generally people have intend to hide the information when they speak directly to others. So, accurate information can be missed fo using the qualitative data analysis method. By using a mixed method, it will be possible to communicate with participants indirectly, which may lead to more accurate and reliable data.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Procedures and Interview Questions

Purpose of the Interview: Thanks for giving me the time. This interview is a crucial part of my master's thesis conducted at the University of Vaasa. The aim of my research topic is how language barriers effects on everyday cooperation, communication, and relationships in multinational workplaces in Finland. Your perspective will provide me with a clearer idea of the ways language might affect the teamwork, trust, job satisfaction, and overall work atmosphere of the workers with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Process of the interview: I will ask some of the questions in this interview include the job title that you occupy in the organization, department, the languages that you use in the workplace, and certain situations where language has been an advantage or barriers to teamwork. The duration of the interview will be 30-60 minutes. Your participation will be volutary and you may avoid any questions in case you are not comfortable answering the question. You are also free to stop me at any time without providing me with a reason. The interview will be recorded. So, you can use any anonymous name or your original name if you think that it would not be a problem for you. I will record you so that I can transcribe and analyze accordingly. I assure you that all is going to be kept confidential, and your name or any other information will not be referred to in the thesis. I will share the recording with trsancript to supervisor. If everything is ok, then I can start to ask the questions.

Demographic questions:

1. Can you briefly explain about your work in this company?
2. How many years have you been living in Finland and working in this company?
3. What is your home country, and what is your mother tongue?
4. Were you been recruited to this company when you were already residing in Finland or from your home country?

Team and work setting

5. Can you please briefly describe your team?

6. What kind of activities or tasks require the most collaboration within your team?
7. How do you usually communicate and coordinate work (meetings, chat, email, tools)?
8. How do meetings usually work in your team (who speaks, and how decisions are made)?
9. What language is used in meetings? What language is used at work in general and in your team? What is the official language of the firm?

Questions related to language barriers, and collaboration challenges:

10. What makes collaboration smooth in your team?
11. What situations make collaboration slower or more complicated? (If any)
12. What kinds of communication practices work especially well in your team? How does language affect your team's collaboration, or it has no effect?
13. What usually helps to clarify meaning when something is unclear?
14. Can you recall any situation when someone understood a message differently? What happened next? Has language used by team members ever been contributing to various misunderstandings or not?
15. Are there moments when some team members are more involved than others? What seems to influence that?
16. How do communication and team interaction influence motivation or satisfaction in your work? How does the language used at work and in your team affect your motivation and satisfaction?

Questions related to trust formation and relationship improvements in the team

17. How would you describe trust within your team?
18. What helps trust develop between team members?
19. Can you describe a situation where trust was strengthened in your team? What contributed to it?
20. How do you perceive the importance of language for improving trust and relationships between team members? Does it matter or not?
21. Have your colleagues been switching between languages at work or using languages you do not understand? If yes, how did you feel about that?

Recommendations for these challenges

22. What recommendations do you have about how the organization can manage multilingual communication?
23. What can be the role of the team managers in handling the language barrier?
24. In your opinion, how team members can contribute to ensure that work in multilingual team is smooth and motivating?
25. If you could change one thing to support collaboration in multilingual teams, what would it be?
26. Is there anything important we didn't discuss that you think matters for collaboration in your team?