Economic integration of Iraqi immigrants with higher education into the Swedish labour market

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ABSTRACT

The issue of unemployment and labour integration of immigrants into the labour market in host countries has always been a source of debate among the public and policymakers in the host countries. This study focuses on the economic integration of highly educated Iraqi immigrants into the Swedish labour market. Based on semi-structured interviews with eight Iraqi immigrants living in Malmö, who have higher education from Iraq, this study aims to illuminate the obstacles and opportunities for Iraqi immigrants to integrate into Swedish labour market, and to find out if their position in the Swedish labour market corresponds to their academic qualifications obtained from Iraq. The theoretical framework of this study explores the concepts of integration, human capital, social capital, and discrimination. Findings of the study revealed that, lack of fluency in Swedish language, family responsibilities, and devaluation of human capital function as main obstacles for highly-educated Iraqi immigrants’ integration into Swedish labour market. The social networks of Iraqi immigrants can be considered as a tool to avoid unemployment in Sweden, but at the same time, it provides access only to a certain categories of jobs that are not in par with higher education of these immigrants. Furthermore, the finding of this study also reveals that the positions of the highly educated Iraqi immigrants have acquired in the Swedish labour market are not commensurate with the educational qualifications they have from Iraq.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Acknowledgment

Table of contents

1. **Introduction** .................................................................01
   1.1. Aim and research questions..........................................02
   1.2. Delimitations...................................................................02
   1.3. Structure of the Thesis..................................................03

2. **Contextual background** ..................................................04
   2.1. Migration to Sweden.....................................................04
   2.2. Historical background of Iraqi immigrants to Sweden............05
   2.3. Recognition procedures of Foreign Education and qualification in Sweden……07

3. **Previous research** ............................................................09

4. **Contribution** .................................................................12

5. **Theoretical Framework** ...................................................13
   5.1. Integration..................................................................13
   5.2. Human capital.............................................................15
   5.3. Social capital...............................................................16
   5.4. Discrimination.............................................................17

6. **Methodology** .................................................................20
   6.1. Philosophical considerations.........................................20
   6.2. Inductive approach......................................................21
   6.3. Access research field....................................................21
   6.4. Research design..........................................................22
   6.5. Semi-structured interviews...........................................22
   6.6. Sample criteria.............................................................23
   6.7. Data collections...........................................................23
   6.8. Validity and reliability..................................................24
   6.9. Role of the researcher...................................................26
   6.10. Ethical aspects............................................................27
7. Presentations of interviewees.................................................................28

8. Finding and analysis.............................................................................30

8.1. The main obstacles and opportunities at the Swedish labour market........30

8.1.a. Swedish language...........................................................................30

8.1.b. Knowledge and preparation for the Swedish labour market.............34

8.1.c. Family hindrance and mobility.......................................................35

8.1.d. Discrimination................................................................................36

8.1.e. Official support.................................................................................38

8.2. The role of human and social capital of Iraqi immigrants in the Swedish labour market.................................................................41

8.2.a. The role of human capital.................................................................41

8.2.b. The role of social capital.................................................................45

8.3. Occupational match/mismatch among Iraqi immigrants in the Swedish labour market.................................................................48

9. Discussion.............................................................................................52

10. Conclusion.............................................................................................55

10.1. Suggestion for Future Research.......................................................56

References.................................................................................................57

Appendix....................................................................................................62
1. Introduction:

For centuries, Europe was a major source of migration to various parts of the world and colonies on all continents for different reasons, whether political or economic. After the Second World War, the characteristics of immigration and migration trends between European countries began to diverge for various reasons, such as rapid economic growth and the end of the former colonies (Castles, Haas & Miller 2014, p.102). Contemporary Europe has transitioned from net emigration to net immigration from an increasingly diverse range of countries. Sweden is one of the European countries that has received a large number of immigrants for work, political or humanitarian reasons. In 2014 the number of foreign-born individuals in Sweden was approximately about 1.5 million people, accounting for over 15% of the Swedish population (Aldén & Hammarstedt 2014, p.3). For Sweden, where immigrants account for a large proportion of the population, the type of immigrants have changed from labor immigrants over the last century in post-World War II which was accompanied by economic growth in Sweden to refugee migration and family reunification becoming prevalent in the last three decades (Bevelander 1999, p.449). From the 1990’s to 2010, individuals from the Middle East and Africa formed the major immigrant groups in Sweden. Within the groups of Middle Eastern immigrants, Iraqi nationals constituted a large proportion, often due to fleeing the war. Iraqi immigrants begun to come to Sweden as asylum seekers in the 1980s. The number of Iraqi immigrants in Sweden has increased in the last decade, according to Sweden’s Central Statistical Office for 2017, there are 140,830 Iraqis in Sweden, forming the third largest immigrants group after Finns and Syrians (SCB 2017). Iraqi Immigrants in Sweden differ in terms of their cultural, educational and religious backgrounds, and despite these differences, they are continuing to face some difficulties entering the labour market. The Swedish migration agency estimates that 40 percent of immigrants in Sweden have higher education; either at a bachelor’s, master’s or PhD level (Migrationsverket 2015). Regarding Iraqi immigrants with higher education in Sweden, according to the Swedish Council for Higher Education, Iraq ranked second in the top 5 countries of 2017, where applicants completed their higher education and get recognition on it in Sweden (UHR 2017). In this thesis, I will focus on Iraqi immigrants with higher education who completed their studies in Iraq, and the main possibilities and obstacles they face during their economic integration into the Swedish labour market. My interest in doing research on highly educated Iraqi immigrants in Sweden stems from several reasons. First, I am from Iraq and therefore there is a similarity
between myself and this group of immigrants in terms of culture and language. Second, I am a highly educated immigrant who has experienced the process of economic integration into the Swedish labour market, which enables me to understand their experiences of the labour integration and the main factors affecting their position at the labour market in Sweden. Third, although Iraqi immigrants are large minority in Sweden, I believe that there has not been enough research on Iraqi immigrants particularly those with higher education.

1.1. **Aim and research questions:**

I am interested in exploring the performance of the Iraqi immigrants in Sweden who already have an education from their country of origin and have a certificate for a specific discipline. The aim of this research is to illuminate their possibilities and difficulties to get enrolled in the Swedish labour market, and to find out whether the position of those highly educated immigrants at the labour market are compatible with their qualifications. Thus, the ultimate aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the labour integration process of these highly educated Iraqi immigrants at the Swedish labour market.

The research questions are therefore as follows:

- What are the obstacles and opportunities for Iraqi immigrants with higher education to obtain a job in Sweden?
- What is the role of human and social capital of these highly educated immigrants in accessing into the Swedish labour market?
- How do their positions in the Swedish labour market correspond to their educational qualifications?

1.2. **Delimitations:**

A number of delimitations were identified in this thesis and some strategies were adopted to maintain the coherence of the thesis and achieving its aim. First, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach through conducting semi-structured interviews with eight Iraqi immigrants with
higher education in Sweden. Second, there is a territorial delimitation as this research involves only immigrants who had come from Iraq, those had been born and grew up in Iraq, which means that this research excludes the second generation of Iraqis who grew up in Sweden. Third delimitation is that those Iraqi immigrants had completed their higher education and had graduated from the educational institutions in Iraq. Thus, it excludes the Iraqi immigrants who did not go through the Iraqi educational system as they have completed their education from other countries. The fourth delimitation of this study is that it involves only those Iraqi immigrants who had spent at least 3 years in Sweden after obtaining their residence status. The reason behind this limitation is that 3 years is considered as an adequate time period for an immigrant to learn about the culture of the host country and become qualified at the very least to acquire suitable employment. The fifth delimitation, I tried to interview both the employed and unemployed immigrants who still seek employment, in order to get an in-depth understanding about their experiences at the labour market. Lastly, this study involved only those Iraqi immigrants who are currently living in Malmö, as it is time consuming and expensive to travel to other parts of Sweden for interviews. Furthermore, a large population of Iraqi immigrants are living in Malmö, which made it convenient to access them.

1.3. Structure of the thesis:

This study consists of ten chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction of this study. Chapter 2 contains an explanation of the contextual framework of this study, including an overview of migration to Sweden, Iraqi immigrants and the Swedish Council for higher education (UHR). Chapter 3 provides a brief explanation of the previous studies done about immigrants with higher education in the receiving countries. Chapter 4 contains the contribution of this study. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the theoretical framework of this study. Chapter 6 describes the Methodology of this study, including the research method, ethical aspects, etc. Chapter 7 contains a presentation of the participants in this study. Chapter 8 presents the findings and analysis of this study. Chapter 9 contains the discussion. Chapter 10 summarizing the conclusion of the study with closing remarks including the suggestions for future research.
2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Migration to Sweden, an Overview:

Sweden was a source of emigration until World War II, after massive migrations to the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century and continued until the twentieth century. After World War II, Sweden emerged as a destination country for immigrants where it received refugees from the Nordic, Baltic and other European countries. Between 1945-1970, Sweden experienced a major industrial revolution and economic growth that required much labour, so the tendency was to allow labour immigrants and to conclude agreements with various countries to export labour to Sweden (Bevelander 2010, p. 287). Labour migration to Sweden was varied, but in general, was dominated by those from Norden countries, and in the 1950s by those labour migrants from Germany, Austria, Italy, and in the 1960s from Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey (Lemaître 2007, p.12). There was a widespread need for skilled labour in Sweden, as the skilled foreign labour were recruited from sending countries to Sweden. However, the majority of migrant labor came to Sweden as tourists at first and then found work after their arrival. To facilitate the recruitment process for non-European workers, Sweden has ratified bilateral agreements with various European countries to recruit workers in the Swedish labour market (Ibid).

The migration of refugees to Sweden was mainly due to wars or authoritarian regimes in the origin countries of immigrants. During the 1970s, asylum seekers came mainly from Latin America while in the 1980s, people who fled the Middle East constituted the bulk of the humanitarian flows to Sweden (Aldén & Hammarstedt 2014, p.4). In the early 1990s, the majority of refugees arriving in Sweden were from the former Yugoslavia because of the war. In the late 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium, immigrants from Iraq have dominated the immigrants to Sweden, as they constituted the most significant proportion of asylum seekers (Lemaître 2007, p.13). Refugees or people who need protection under the conventions that give special status to the refugee in host countries have the right to get residence permits in Sweden. The other provisions for obtaining a residence permit in Sweden, whether permanent or temporary, include family reunification, adoption of foreign children, a work permit and studying (Ibid). As a result of these migratory flows across different periods to Sweden, whether labour migration or asylum seekers, and the stability of many of them in
this country, foreign-born people make up 16% of the total population, according to statistics of the Swedish Statistical Centre (SCB 2018).

2.2. Historical background of Iraqi immigrants to Sweden:

As mentioned in the introduction, there are 140,830 Iraqis in Sweden, and they form the third largest immigrant group after Finns and Syrians (SCB 2017). Since Iraqi immigrants in Sweden now make up a large proportion of the population, it is important to have an overview of the history of Iraqi immigrants to Sweden. It could be observed that the influx of Iraqi immigrants in Sweden came at four different stages of time. The first wave, which brought relatively few Iraqis to Sweden was between 1968 and 1979, began with the Baath party taking power in Iraq. This period was marked by a policy of repression by the Baath Party in Iraq against dissidents and Intellectuals who opposed to the authority, such as the communists and other Islamic parties, by murder and torture-to silence every voice opposed to the ruling party in Iraq (Allawi 2007, p.31). Therefore, many of the opponents and members of other political parties who opposed to the policy of the Baath party, left Iraq and some of them migrated to Sweden in this period, especially Kurds and Assyrians. According to the Swedish Migration Agency, the second wave witnessed the arrival of about 10,000 Iraqi immigrants to Sweden between 1980-1988 (Migrationsverket, 2019). This period witnessed the war between Iraq and Iran and the deterioration of economic conditions and social peace in Iraq. Many citizens were compelled to leave Iraq to various countries, including Sweden, to escape military service or genocide committed by the regime, represented by President Saddam Hussein who had a strong dictatorship. The third wave of Iraqi immigrants to Sweden occurred between 1991 and 2000 as a result of the harsh economic embargo imposed on Iraq by the United Nations in the resolution 661 of 6 August 1990, which was the result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Scherrer 2014, p.66). This contributed to spread of poverty and the deterioration of the economic situation in Iraq in general, and many Iraqis fled the persecution of his regime after the 1991 revolution in southern Iraq against his regime. In that period (1991- 2000), around 15,000 - 20,000 Iraqi immigrants arrived in Sweden. The fourth wave of Iraqi immigrants that flowed into Sweden was between 2003 and 2010, when more than 40,000 Iraqis migrated to Sweden due to the war launched by the International Coalition against Iraq, the occupation of the country in 2003 and its negative consequences including the sectarian conflict witnessed in Iraq, and the terrorist operations that threatened the safety of the community (SCB 2019).
Furthermore, financial corruption that spread throughout the country forced many Iraqis to search for a safe place to live and Sweden was the most favoured option. The last wave of Iraqi immigrants to Sweden was in 2015, the so-called immigration crisis in Europe caused a huge number of Iraqis to come to Sweden by crossing the Mediterranean from Turkey, according to the Swedish migration agency approximately 21,000 Iraqis have sought asylum in Sweden in year 2015 (Migrationsverket 2017). It could be observed that after 2003 Sweden has been the preferred destination for Iraqi immigrants compared to other European countries, due to easy access to the permanent residence and the Sweden’s reputation of humanity and democracy (Sperl 2007, p.12). The main factor that encouraged Iraqis to come to Sweden is the ties they have with relatives and social network they have in Sweden with previous Iraqis who had migrated to Sweden during different periods and settled in this country (Sperl 2007, p.11).

Figure 1: Number of Iraqi immigration applications received in Sweden 1990 – 2017
2.3. Recognition procedures of Foreign Education and qualification in Sweden:

The recognition of foreign qualifications is the most critical requirement that immigrants need to obtain employment or to continue their studies in Sweden. Recognition of educational qualifications is the technique of evaluation of foreign certificates by the Swedish authority to verify their studies in Sweden. The Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) is responsible for evaluating the foreign qualifications of immigrants in order to provide support to them in seeking employment, or to continue studying at one of the Swedish educational institutions, through the issuance of recognition statement for foreign qualifications that can be used for these purposes (UHR 2015, p.4). The recognition process is based on the evaluation of the immigrant's foreign certificate to compare it with its counterpart in Sweden, for example, duration of the course, level of difficulty, the grade of study/thesis, and the purpose of the study such as recruitment and future studies (Schuster, Desiderio & Urso 2013, p.151). The higher education certificate must be issued by a higher education institution recognized by the competent authorities of the country. Recognition of foreign qualifications indicates that foreign qualifications are accepted in Sweden by describes the equivalent of this foreign education in the Swedish education system (ibid).

The evaluation methods used in Sweden are of two folds, quantitative method and qualitative method, considering the task’s specificity. The quantitative method of evaluation compares the duration of study of educational systems in foreign countries in general with Sweden and the duration of university education as well (Schuster, Desiderio & Urso 2013, p.152). The qualitative method is used to compare the quality and content of the education achieved by the immigrant with the quality and content of counterpart education in Sweden (Ibid). The Swedish Council for Higher Education takes between 4 to 8 months in the recognition process of evaluation and assessment of foreign educational qualifications.

Some professions and specialties in Sweden are regulated by a special law, which means that the requirements of the authorities responsible for the granting of a work license must be completed in Sweden (UHR 2015, p.6). The immigrant must contact the body that is responsible for that regulated profession to obtain an evaluation on his/her degree. For example, an immigrant should contact the Swedish National Education Agency (Skolverket) to get a teacher's license or contact the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), if an immigrant has a medical or nursing qualification from a country outside Sweden to get a license in Sweden. In its effort to help immigrants to integrate into the labor market, facilities are
provided by UHR for the recognition of foreign qualifications for immigrants. For instance, immigrants have the right to evaluate their degrees or educational qualifications even if they do not have a residence permit yet, but they should prove that they already applied to get a residency permit in Sweden (UHR 2018). Also, if the immigrant does not have any documentation of all or part of his/her foreign higher education, the immigrant can apply to get a background paper from the Swedish Council for Higher Education rather than a recognition statement (UHR 2015, p.8). The background paper is a document describing the immigrant's educational background and is considered as an alternative when there are no educational documents, which is favourable for the immigrants when looking for work or planning to study in the future.
3. Previous research:

The issue of the integration of immigrants and their employment and unemployment at the labour market in the host countries especially in the west, have always been a source of controversy that push policy makers to make certain changes in integration policies time to time. Although many studies have been conducted on the labour integration process of immigrants and their performance in Swedish labour market there is a paucity of research focused on immigrants with higher education. This section of the thesis will provide evidence of some researches that discussed the challenges faced by educated immigrants at the labour market and the probabilities of obtaining suitable employment.

Inge Dahlstedt (2011) in his article *Occupational Match Over- and Undereducation among Immigrants in the Swedish Labor Market* aims to examine the differences in the occupational match/mismatch between natives and immigrants with respect to their education level in Sweden (2011, p.349). The author uses data from LISA, Statistics Sweden’s database, including information on labour market issues of immigrants between the ages of 16 and 64 from nine different countries (Ibid, p.351). In this article, Dahlstedt tries to find out whether the immigrant population has jobs that are higher than their level of education (undereducation) or lower than their level of education (overeducation) compared to the native population. He divides the education as general education and vocational education to find out the importance of the type of education in the occupational match-mismatch of these immigrants compared to citizens in Sweden. This study reveals that the immigrant population has a lower level of occupational match and higher odds to overeducation compared to natives’ population in Sweden. Furthermore, it reveals that the occupation match and mismatch differ among the immigrant groups identified in this study. The author concludes in this paper that the occupation mismatch of the vocationally educated population usually stems from overeducation, while the mismatch among the population with general education stems from undereducation (Ibid, p.360).

In the same context, Dahlstedt (2015) in his article *Over-education amongst the children of immigrants in Sweden* aims to investigate the occupational mismatch of descendants of immigrants at the labour market in Sweden (2015, p.36). The author uses the 2007 census data provided by Sweden statistics to analyse the employed population between 25 and 64 years of age. The author also tries to investigate the possibility of employing the descendants of
immigrants in jobs that are lower than their educational skills, described by him as ‘over-education’. To achieve this aim, Dahlstedt makes a comparison between the descendants and the first generation of immigrants, as well as descendants with natives who have Swedish parents (Ibid). The author reveals in this study, that the descendants have a low mismatch rate than immigrants’ parents, and the author associate this result to several reasons (Ibid, p.44). The main reason is that descendants get their education in Sweden and thus are not affected by devaluation of human capital (Ibid). Furthermore, the descendants are less likely to be affected by signalling problem because they have got their education in Sweden, and are more competent in language accompanied with a better knowledge of the labour market in Sweden. In addition, the author found that there is a slight difference between the descendants’ men compared to the citizens regarding the occupational mismatch, but there is no difference found between the descendants' women and citizens (Dahlstedt 2015, p.41). Finally, in the author's investigation of whether the country of origin of the parents affects the mismatch of the descendant groups involved in the study, he points out that there are significant differences between the groups of immigrants. The authors explains that one of the main reasons for the lack of occupational match between descendants and Swedes is the discriminatory practices that those immigrants may face in the labour market, such as the non-Swedish name and the signalling problems (Ibid, p.44).

Ahmed Faris (2016) in his research (Challenges Faced by Immigrants with Higher Education in the Swedish Labour Market) aims to capture the different perspectives of the experiences of a group of immigrants with higher education in the Swedish labor market. This qualitative research has been done by conducting semi-structured interviews with 6 immigrants in Sweden. In this study, the author reveals that the educational qualifications and academic experience of the respondents are not recognized in the Swedish labour market and therefore cannot find jobs corresponding to their educational qualifications, while some are unable to secure any job (Faris 2016, p.68). Thus, respondents of this research had been able to work only in secondary sector jobs where they do cleaning, catering, driving or building. He further explains that the failure to recognize their educational qualifications in the Swedish labor market had resulted in the loss of their professional knowledge due to lack of practice (Ibid). This study reveals some critical factors that are considered as affecting the utilization of foreign educational credentials of immigrants in the Swedish labour market. The respondents of this research consider that failure to recognize their educational credentials is an essential
obstacle to their ability to find suitable jobs (Ibid, p.70). Furthermore, lack of proficiency in the Swedish language and lack of social networks are other factors that respondents in this research consider obstacles in finding a qualified job (Faris 2016, p.69).

Bernardi et al. (2010) in their quantitative study (The Recent Fast Upsurge of Immigrants in Spain and Their Employment Patterns and Occupational Attainment) provide an analysis of employment and occupational attainment of recent immigrants to Spain. The authors used data from the Spanish labor force surveys for the years 2002 to 2007 and compare the probability of being active versus inactive and being employed versus unemployed among immigrants as well as with Spaniards (Bernardi, Garrido & Miyar 2010, p.149). The authors focus on the effects of the level of education of immigrants and the time they spent in the host country. Considering that the original human capital of immigrants may be devalued in the host country for various reasons the authors point out that formal qualifications obtained in the country of origin may be assessed at lower levels in the host country. Also, formal recognition of a foreign degree is often a long process, with some bureaucratic obstacles, and lack of language fluency may be a significant obstacle to recognizing skills and competencies acquired in the country of origin (Ibid, p.151). In this article, the authors reveal that the educational returns to avoid unemployment are somewhat similar for immigrants from EU and OECD countries to those of native Spaniards; as the higher the education they have, the greater the likelihood of being employed. While negative returns are obvious for immigrants from Eastern Europe when those with lower qualifications are more likely to be employed than immigrants with university degrees (Ibid, p.165). Also, the researchers’ findings indicate that immigrants in Spain have relatively high employment opportunities but are more stuck with low-skilled, low-paid jobs (Ibid, p.174). The authors emphasize that there are Serious bureaucratic obstacles to formal recognition of foreign qualifications. Thus, it is not surprising that the educational returns of immigrants are lower than those of natives, which means that even highly educated immigrants seem to have less opportunities in finding a qualified job in Spain.
4. Contribution of the current research:

Since the aim of the current research is to investigate the main factors affecting the economic integration of Iraqi immigrants with higher education at the Swedish labour market, it will contribute to the literature of the labour integration of immigrants in host countries. However, the important contribution that this research seeks is to add to the existing knowledge on the Iraqi immigrants in Sweden and their economic integration process at the Swedish labour market, as there is a paucity of research focused on Iraqi immigrants with higher education. The data collected directly from the interviews with these highly educated immigrants, maybe be useful for future research on this matter.
5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concepts of integration, human capital, social capital, and discrimination will be used to explain the subject of this research in order to obtain a better understanding of economic integration of immigrants with higher education levels at the Swedish labour market.

5.1. Integration:

The concept of integration has a broad meaning, but this concept has been used extensively in the migration studies to explain the experience of immigrants in host societies in different spheres. Integration is the process through which immigrants get social membership in the host society and symbolize the development of the ability of immigrants to participate in the main institutions in the country of destination (Bartram, Monforte & Poros 2014, p.84). Integration refers to changes that are experienced by immigrants after arrival in the destination country. There is no one or specific meaning about integration and it's often used without specific definition, and sometimes used by different people in the ways that can be described as incompatible. One could say that the basic meaning of integration is to increase the social membership of immigrants in the country of destination (Ibid). We could distinguish between the concepts of integration and assimilation by noting that integration of migrants can occur even without becoming equivalent to native people in the host society, particularly in terms of culture. Some researchers such as Entzinger states that integration can be achieved in terms of achieving equal opportunities for immigrants without necessarily achieving cultural assimilation (1990, p.60). As for immigrants, they can receive partial membership by increasing their acceptance of ethnic and cultural differences among native peoples in host countries. However, some of the host countries have rejected the type of integration of immigrants that do not prefer to be similar to culture of the majority. Those countries insist that immigrants must adopt the values and attributes that are essential to a presumed national lifestyle. So in practice, then, integration in some environments can be full assimilation.

Economic integration can be understood as immigrants participation in the labour market on an equal footing with the natives and have the possibility to receive employment and incomes that reflect their qualifications and abilities. Some researchers like Hassan Kaladjahi has cited two approaches to study and explain the economic integration of immigrants in the labour market of host societies (Kaladjahi 1997, p.18). The first approach is by comparing the last
occupations they had in their country of origin with the current occupations they occupy in the host country (Ibid). Thus, the immigrant is considered economically integrated if his current job matches his profession in the country of origin. The second approach is by measuring the economic conditions of the immigrants in the host country and compare them with the natives, and the immigrant is considered to be economically integrated if he/she enjoys the same socio-economic status and living standards enjoyed by natives (Ibid, p.19).

When the political sphere is considered, integration means the increase in political participation of immigrants in the voting of municipality and parliamentary elections, campaigning and demonstration in ways that are equal to those of natives. Integration involves developing abilities of immigrants in a manner that navigates the main social institutions that may operate quite differently from their counterparts in the country of origin. Acquiring citizenship is often an indication of integration of immigrant in the receiving country, as integration in different dimensions is a precondition for naturalization, such as in Germany and Denmark. Naturalization can also be a mechanism for integration whereas exclusion from formal citizenship enhances social exclusion and naturalization should be seen as a tool to help immigrants in their integration in host countries, such as Sweden (Hansen 2003).

Nowadays, integration has become a clear policy goal and the desired outcome for governments of different countries especially the western countries, built into many projects working with immigrants of different kinds, particularly refugees (Craig 2015, p.22). One important aspect of integration is the development of social relationships, social networks, and the means and confidence to exercise rights to resources such as education, work, and housing in the host countries (Ibid, p.23). Furthermore, integration usually refers to the development of a common sense of belonging and identity. The immigrants should feel they are not just foreigners but have a meaningful sense of identity to the host countries. Castles and Miller refer to integration as the process of an immigrant becoming part of the receiving community and nation (2009, p. 245). Another explanation for integration is given as the qualitative increase of participation of minority members in systems of the social interaction and relations within the majority society (Bernard 1973, p.87).
5.2. Human capital:

The economic status is not equal for immigrants in the labour market compared to the host population, especially in Western societies (Kaladjahi 1997, p.26). There are different perspectives on human capital. Human capital refers to skills and characteristics of the worker, such as school education, language proficiency, etc., that increase his/her productivity and the probability to be employed (Acemoglu & Autor 2011, p.4). The human capital plays a vital role in explaining the factors that affect performance of immigrants in the labour market of the host country, as it is a measure of economic integration of those immigrants in the labour market in terms of skills and qualifications they have, which help them to integrate in the labour market of the host country. The human capital theory is used to illustrate the patterns of participation in the labour market, particularly for immigrants. This theory is based on the assumption that opportunities in the labour market depend on the human capital of people (Van Tubergen 2006, p.15). Some research has been conducted on economic integration of immigrants to determine the factors that contribute to the differences in labour market performance between natives and immigrants. Some of these research indicate that disparity or difference between immigrants and natives as relating to human capital they bring with them to the new labour market (Kaladjahi 1997, p.26).

By analysing different studies conducted on labour market in host countries, one could observe that immigrants do not find equal places like the natives in the labor market because they lack the human capital that the majority has or they lack the requirements of the labour market in the receiving country (Van Tubergen 2006, p.15). In addition, people are aware of the relationship between individual skills and opportunities in life, thus, they are investing in their human capital to develop their employability and increase their opportunities in the labour market. People in general may invest in themselves either in education or in acquiring special skills because they expect that the future financial benefits will exceed the temporary costs of investment (Ibid, p.16).

Immigrants often have a poorer economic status than citizens in their first years at the labour market of destination country because they have less human capital (ibid). Barry Cheswick (1978), for instance, assumes that most of the immigrants come from non-Western countries and therefore have less human capital than the native population (1978, p.898). In addition, the work experiences acquired by immigrants in the labour market in their country of origin is not equal to the same level in the host country because it has a different structure and different
rules and it is difficult for that experiences to be transferred to the new labour market. Some of the studies show that immigrants with language proficiency of the host country earn higher than the other immigrants who do not know the new language (Grenier 1984, pp.40-41). Human capital theory suggests that investment in education has a positive effect on the development of the nations, as it has a reciprocal relation with the economic growth of the countries (Olaniyan & Okemakinde 2008, p.479). Education increases the productivity of workers by increasing their skills and this helps the growth of nations (ibid). In addition, some studies show that the educational attainment and practical experience of the immigrant, have a role in raising the earnings of the immigrants compared to other immigrants who are not educated in the labour market of the host society, such as United States (Borjas 1994, p.1686). However, all these important aspects of human capital of immigrants mentioned above might have no value in the host country for various reasons, such us the recognition of formal qualifications of the immigrant's skills being lower in the host country, etc.

5.3. Social capital:
Social capital theory is one of the most important ideas in the social sciences that illustrate the relationship between economy and social relationships. The main idea of social capital theory is that investment in social relationships produces predictable returns. Social capital explains the idea that different types of resources - economic in particular - are integral parts of social relations (Bartram, Monforte & Poros 2014, p.133). Thus, investment in social relations can lead to benefits of different types. Social capital theory has been widely used in migration studies and in explaining the factors affecting immigrants in host countries. The social capital of immigrants is also an important aspect which affect the economic integration of immigrants in the host country. Social capital highlights the importance and the value of immigrants’ social networks as it may help them and facilitate the access to work for the immigrants in host country. As Boxman (1991) in his interpretation of the social capital pointed out, the people that immigrant know in the host society may provide the support and information that the immigrant needs in the host society (Boxman, De Graaf & Flap 1991, p.52). According to Robert Putnam (1995), “social capital is the features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits " (Putnam 1995, p. 67). There are different perspectives on the meaning and use of social capital in contemporary time. The liberal perspective focuses on individual transactions in which
social capital is created, and the consequences of having social capital often affect the individuals. The communitarian perspective focuses on social capital as a collective commodity rather than an individual, and therefore its results benefit the group rather than the individuals. Social capital can be a source of social control, family support, and benefits gained through social networks owned or acquired by immigrants in the host country. As the social capital of immigrants in the host country might come through the family or ethnic group that immigrants belong to, it often facilitates the immigrant's access to work in the host country. Without the networks that make up the social capital of migrants, migration will be costly and risky for many immigrants (Bartram, Monforte & Poros 2014, p.134). It will be difficult sometimes to provide a co-ethnic groups network for immigrants in the host country, especially if immigration to this society considered a new phenomenon (Bernardi, Garrido & Miyar 2010, p.152).

5.4. Discrimination:

Discrimination is a concept that refers to the treatment of a person or group of people belonging to a particular category in a manner that is lower than the treatment of others. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2016), discrimination is "unjust treatment of one person or group, usually due to prejudice about age, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender" (Oxforddictionaries.com, 2016). Discrimination has been observed previously and is still in various areas of life of immigrants, and it could be seen especially in the labour market of many countries. Various studies explain the impact of discrimination on equal opportunities among those with immigrants’ background and natives in receiving countries. The effect of discrimination, denying members of a group the opportunities or privileges that are available to other groups, leads to exclusion of the individual or entities based on an irrational or illogical decision. Borjas (2000), for instance, pointed out that differences in wages and job opportunities may arise even among skilled workers who have the same skills and work experience in the same job due to race, sex, national origin, sexual orientation or other characteristics that seem unrelated to worker efficiency (2000, p.367). Discrimination in the labour market occurs when employers consider factors unrelated to the efficiency of the applicant such as race, sex, and ethnicity in assessing and evaluating his/her productivity.
Moreover, statistical discrimination which is a behaviour that results in inequality among individuals because of race, sex, and nationality occurs when consumers, workers, and employers have incomplete information about the individuals they interact with and a false stereotype about their productive ability (Borjas 2000, p.381). According to the theory of statistical discrimination, inequality may exist and persist among population groups even when economic agents are rational and non-prejudice. Statistical discrimination indicates that employers evaluate-applicants for work based on ethnicity or gender due to the lack of the information needed about the applicants or because employers are more confident in the performance or productivity of specific group over another (Wrench 2007, p.118). Statistical discrimination is associated with the employer's fundamental uncertainty about the applicant and therefore uses statistics on the average performance of the group to predict a person’s work performance. The theory of statistical discrimination explains that as a result of this behaviour, applicants from high-productivity groups benefit from membership in those groups, while applicants from low-productivity groups do not benefit (Borjas 2000, p.383).

Furthermore, some studies have pointed out that discrimination could be either subjective or objective. Subjective discrimination refers to the feeling of being discriminated while objective discrimination could be in the form of direct and indirect discrimination and may be positive and negative (Stefańska 2007, p.1). Immigrants may feel discriminated, but that does not necessarily mean that they are a victim of objective discrimination, which can be found based on an objective criterion, for example by comparing the salaries. There may be a situation in which a foreigner feels discriminated against, when in fact, he or she is not. On the other hand, there are some cases in which a foreigner does not feel discriminated against or does not realize it but is treated differently from the native employees regarding the working conditions and salary.

In the same context, Michael Spencer (1973) developed the theoretical basis for market, “Signaling market theory” (1973, p.355). This theory is based on Spencer's view that recruitments, when it comes to employers, is an uncertain process because of the uncertainty involved in choosing a candidate due to the lack of prior knowledge of applicant's productivity or experience. Employers, therefore, use Signaling as a decision-making tool in hiring a candidate (Spencer 1973, p.356). Based on the previous market experience the employer will have potential assessments of production capacity of the candidates given by different sets of signals and indices. Spencer pointed out that the observed attributes that can have a signal value
are two types: fixed attributes that cannot be changed by the applicant (sex, race, nationality, age), which is called "indices" and those that can be modified by a candidate, which Spencer called "signals" (Spence 1973, p.357). Spenser explained that there are many attributes associated with the social disadvantages of their owners and have seen as the negative signals in the labour market, such as belonging to the ethnic minority, low education, disability, old age, and long-term unemployment (Bonoli & Liechti 2014, p.2).
6. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

6.1. Philosophical consideration:

The philosophical aspect adopted by the researcher is essential in terms of its impact on the practice of research, thus, it is important to be explicitly identified by the researcher (Creswell 2009, p.6). The researchers who prepare a research plan should clarify the philosophical ideas that they adopt. The primary definition of the philosophical paradigms is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba 1990, p. 17). Regarding Philosophical ideas, as it is guide individuals in explaining the world formed from a set of beliefs that individuals have and the discipline area, they engage in it. These types of beliefs maintained by researchers often lead to choosing between a qualitative, quantitative or mixed approach to their research.

Social constructivism is one of the philosophical approaches, which is often seen as an approach to qualitative research (Creswell 2009, p.8). The social constructivism approach is built on the assumption, that individuals are trying to understand the world in which they live and work, by placing individuals themselves as the meanings of the reality of life through their experiencing to certain things (Ibid). In social constructivist, the research aims to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views on the situation subject of study (Honebein 1996). This current study is based on the social constructivist approach since it deals with individuals as the primary source of data based on their experiences and explanations about their integration process in the Swedish labor market. The social constructivist approach is more suited to the qualitative research carried out in this study, as adopting this approach will allow me to be closer to these individuals and be more open in listening to them, in order to get a better understanding about their views on the issue of this study. When it comes to the questions that researcher should prepare for the participants, the more open the questions made by the researcher, the more carefully the researcher will listen to what people are saying or doing in their life settings. The main idea of this approach is that the reality is socially constructed, that is, people are the ones who construct the facts based on their experiences, cultural backgrounds and their interaction with others (Creswell 2013, p. 25). In conducting qualitative study, I tried to use open-ended questions in his research so that participants can share their views. In the same context, and by recognizing the fundamental role of the researcher’s cultural background in the interpretation, thus it is essential for me to clarify my position in this research by
explaining the cultural and personal background that I have to illustrate their impact on the interpretation in the study.

6.2. **Inductive Approach:**

The researcher's aim in using inductive approach is to explore new phenomena or to look at phenomena that previously explored but from a different perspective to find out theories that explain and interpret these phenomena (6 & Perri 2012, p. 76). The inductive approach requires that the researcher should be a completely open minded without any preconceived notions about the results, which could be obtained through the study. By using inductive research, the researcher would be able to generate a new theory based on the data collected by the researcher from the study. In the same context, some studies suggest that the inductive approach begins with the formulation of research questions, and the researchers can employ what they see as necessary to help them to collect data and reach results. However, when researchers adopt an inductive approach, they move from specific to the general. This current study adopted inductive approach because it appropriates with the research questions and the purpose of the research, which is to identify the factors that affect the economic integration of Iraqi immigrants with higher education in Sweden. I adopted the inductive approach in this research as I am not testing a theory or a hypothesis, but focus on exploring the subject from the different perspectives of the participants.

6.3. **Access to research field:**

Three criterias were used in reaching the Iraqi immigrants with higher education in Malmö, in order to obtain a suitable sample for interviews on their economic integration at the Swedish labour market. First, a variety of Iraqi cultural associations in Malmö were contacted to get volunteers, such as the Iraqi Cultural Association in Malmö. Secondly, my social networks were used to find those who meet the requirements of the sample. The third criteria was contacting the Swedish public employment service in Malmö and requesting their help to select the right individuals as they have a database of all immigrants registered as job seekers or unemployed in Sweden, which is a much convenient way in finding the sample.
6.4. Research design:

Perry 6 and Christian Bellamy explained the methodology as "It is much more to do with how well we argue from the analyses of our data to draw and defend our conclusion" (2012, p. 4). I adopted qualitative research by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with 8 Iraqi immigrants with higher education from Iraq and living in Malmö, in order to give me an in-depth picture of the economic integration of these highly educated migrants at the Swedish labour market. Qualitative research is a research method used to explore and understand the desired meaning of individuals in describing or explaining a social or humanitarian problem (Creswell 2009, p.4). The qualitative research methods mainly involves emerging questions, procedures and data collection under this method is usually through the participants of the research. The role of the researcher here is to try to understand in-depth and interpret these data collected from individuals. Obviously, the research to be more appropriate to use the qualitative research methods when the issue to be studied needs an in depth explanation or when the researcher needs to identify variables that are difficult to measure by other methods (Creswell 2013, p.44).

Since the purpose of this study is to identify the main factors that affect the economic integration of these highly educated migrants at the Swedish labour market, it is expected that qualitative research methods will elaborate this purpose. Furthermore, qualitative research is useful in this study since that the aim of the author here is to encourage individuals to share their experiences for instance, at the labour market, directly with the researcher (Creswell 2013, p.48). In the qualitative research process, the researcher focuses on learning and understanding the meaning of the participants on the issue or the subject, not the meaning that researchers bring to the research (ibid). The researcher does not interpret his or her personal experience on the issue being studied. Thus, through using qualitative method in this study, I can expect outcomes that cannot be obtained by using quantitative research methods, which involves more numbers and statistics.

6.5. Semi-structured interview:

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study in order to give interviewees more space to answer, and make them comfortable and feel free to think, explore, make assumptions and express their attitudes and emotions, Moreover, Open ended questions enabled me to capture
unexpected issues and information. Some studies indicate that field researchers who have a certain level of flexibility may prefer to conduct semi-structured interviews as a method to collect data from participants of research (Bailey 2007, p.100). The reason behind that is those researchers prefer to conduct interviews in an open and flexible manner, but also wish to maintain some structure on its features at the same time (Ibid). It is very common that the semi-structured interviews are scheduled in advance and that the interview has a certain period, during the interview, the researcher may conduct a dialogue with the interviewee instead of just asking questions and get specific answers (Bailey 2007, p.101). Therefore an interview guide was used in this study to ask questions to cover different aspects regarding labour integration. These questions were used as a starting point for discussion with the interviewees of this study, to get the details related to the process of economic integration of these highly educated immigrants in Sweden.

6.6. Sampling criteria:

In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 highly educated Iraqi Immigrants in Sweden. I focussed on Iraqis of both genders regardless of their ethnicity since they master the Arabic language, which is my mother tongue. This made it convenient for me to gain a better understanding of their experience and perspectives on economic integration in to the Swedish labour market. The criteria adopted in selecting the sample was:

i) they should have a higher education from Iraq (university degree)

ii) they should have spent at least 3 years in Sweden after they received their residency (which is considered as a reasonable period to gain access to labour market in Sweden)

iii) they should be living in Malmö (for the convenience of researcher to reach them).

6.7. Data Collection:

Since the Iraqi immigrants that I interviewed speak Arabic, which is my native language, there was no need for an interpreter, and this facilitated the communication and accurate understanding of them. The semi structured interviews were audio-recorded using a tape-recorder in order to keep all the details and answers mentioned by the interviewees during the
interviews. This was done with the purpose of returning to important things for better clarification of the facts that are directly related to the purpose of this research. The interviews were transcribed carefully, and notes on interviewees were taken during the interviews as they are the primary source of data gathered for this research. The places to conduct interviews were selected according to agreement between the researcher and the interviewees, mostly they were conducted at informal places such as cafes, libraries or any place where the interviewee felt comfortable and non-restrictive.

6.8. **Validity and reliability:**

Validity, which is a criteria that evaluate a qualitative research, is based on determining whether the results are accurate from the perspectives of the researcher, participants or the readers. To examine the validity of this study, I would like to define the concept of validity as the degree of the statements used is close to the truth (6 & Bellamy 2012, p. 15). Validity is divided into two as the internal validity and external validity.

The internal validity of this research is expected to be high as I investigated what was supposed to be investigated, i.e. the main factors that affect economic integration of Iraqi immigrants with higher education into the Swedish labour market. Concepts and research methods used to explore these factors are linked to the purpose of the research. However, the external validity of this study may probably be low even if the author tried to avoid the bias and be objective as far as he could. At the same time, the external validity may not be as high as the internal validity because the research itself deals with people’s views and ideas (social facts). Creswell (2009) suggests several strategies to confirm and strengthen the validity of qualitative research, calling them validation strategies to verify the accuracy of the results (2009, p. 191). For example, a researcher should use different data sources, theories and methods to examine evidence from sources and should use them to build coherent adjustment and supporting evidence. If the subjects of research are created based on evidence from multiple sources of data or views from participants, then this process could increase the validity of the research (Ibid). The second strategy he suggests is the researcher seeking views of participants on the credibility of results and interpretations. This is the most important technique to determine the credibility of research, by taking data, analysis, and interpretations back to interviewees, for instance, to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the content (Ibid). Another strategy that
helps in increasing the internal validity of research, is by clarifying researcher's bias in research, which might help the reader to understand the researcher's position and any assumptions that may affect the inquiry (Creswell 2013, p. 251). This clarification is done by providing a comment by the researcher about his past experiences, prejudice or any trends/possesses that can constitute particular explanations in the research. In this study, I am keen to explain my position along with the cultural and scientific background which I have to clarify whether there is any bias that can affect the objectivity of this study. It is expected that this would give the reader some background information about the author and also maintain a high validity of the thesis.

Another important criterion in evaluating research is reliability, which indicates consistency of the research. Some studies indicate that reliability questions, regardless of when they are asked, should get the same answers, which gives consistency to the research (Baily 2007, p.184). Reliability as the criterion of precision and dependability, shows how precise is the research method used by the researcher in creating or collecting data (6 & Bellamy 2012, p. 14). Through using qualitative research method, I tried to get precise answers from the interviewees and coded everything carefully to make the reliability of this research high. This means that if the research is repeated, the same results and analyzes will be presented to the researcher (Ibid). Silverman (2009), proposes five approaches to enhance the reliability of process and results, namely; refutational analysis, constant data comparison, comprehensive data use, inclusive of the deviant case, and use of tables" (2009, p.472). It should be noted that this research depends on interviews with individuals as the primary source, and the data derived from these interviews will be perceptions, opinions, and feelings of individuals towards a particular experience, which are subject to change over time. Thus, it is not logical to claim high reliability in this study, but the author attempted to emphasize the internal coherence of the core elements of the research through research questions, data collection, theoretical framework used in research and analysis of results, to achieve high reliability in the research.
6.9. **Role of the researcher:**

The researcher has a vital role in research, and this importance comes from the impact of researcher’s background and his/her own experiences on dealing with the participants in the research and interpretation of the content. The personal properties of the researcher, such as the ethnic background, values, beliefs, and experiences of his life in general, will shape how the discourses are presented in the study, and reflect on what he interprets (Maxwell 2002, p.20). Thus, the researcher must be aware of the subjectivity that he/she will add to the research, especially in qualitative research. The researcher’s self-awareness, paying attention to this influence and trying to control it by maintaining a neutral position in the research, will avoid the effect of researcher’s personal properties on the interpretation and results of the study (Miller & Glassner 2011, p.141).

In this study, I believe that it is necessary to make the subjectivity visible to the readers and clarify my position and background in order to conduct honest and transparent research. As the author of this thesis, I am an Iraqi immigrant living in Sweden for more than five years. It is possible to say that I share many similarities with the participants in this research in terms of; being a highly educated immigrant, holding a Bachelor of Law Degree from Iraq and having passed through the experience of economic integration in the labor market in Sweden. I believe that having similarities with the group under the study in terms of having similar experience in the labor market gave me an advantage in obtaining a better understanding of the participants’ experiences. Also, this similarity in ethnicity as an Iraqi immigrant may have made me closer to participants of this study and made them speak freely and interact more with me. This too helped me in gaining a deep understanding of their experiences in the economic integration process.

One of the disadvantages in this study is the personal influence of the researcher on the study and the reflection of personal experience on the analysis and the results of the study, mainly due to similar background and experience which I have to interviewees. According to Creswell (2007), “researcher should keep a focus on the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research” (2007, p.39). However, I tried to exclude the impact of my personal experience and focus more on the meanings and interpretations of the participants on the issue of the study.
6.10. **Ethical aspect:**

Maintaining ethical aspects is fundamental in conducting any research. The researcher must take ethical responsibility and adhere to the ethical principles of his/her research, such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and usability. Researchers need to anticipate ethical issues that may arise during conducting their research and during all research procedures undertaken by researchers (Creswell 2009, p.87). In research, especially in qualitative research, which involves collecting data from people and about people, it is essential that the researcher should be careful on ethical issues that may arise during the study. The ethical problems in the research affect the quality and credibility of the research. Thus, researcher must take care to protect the participants in the research, develop confidence with them, promote research quality and be careful to avoid any misconduct with research participants (Creswell 2009, p.89). The researchers must not cause any negative impact on the participants of their researches and protect their rights, since the ethical practice in the research is not to harm any participant, thus the researcher needs to focus on protecting participants from any harm (Somekh & Lewin 2005, p.56). According to Creswell (2009), the ethical aspect of research requires the researcher to assess the risk potential, such as risks that lead to psychological, social, economic or legal harm to participants (Creswell 2009, p.89). Also, when dealing with particular categories of people such as minors, victims, prisoners, etc. It is crucial that the study will protect the identity of the individuals involved in it by keeping them anonymous (Bryman 2012, p.142). As in survey research, for example, researchers disassociate participants' names during the coding and recording process. While in qualitative research, researchers should use aliases for individuals to protect the identities of the participants in the research.

In this study, the participation in the interviews were voluntary, and the interviewees were informed about the details of the interview, the purpose of the interview and obtained their consent to record the interview with them. It was emphasized not revealing the personal information of the interviewees such as names or address. It is important to mention the usability in this study, as this material is only used for this particular study and will not be used in another study or research. All the interviewees were informed about the whole research project before conducting interviews with them, as well as their right to withdraw from the interview and if that happens, not using their information in this project.
7. Presentation of interviewees

**Ahmed** - in his 30s, from Iraq and he has a Bachelor's Degree in Law from Iraq. He has been living in Sweden for 5 years and currently work part-time and studying Masters in Sweden.

**Haider** - in his 40s, from Iraq and has a Bachelor’s Degree of Engineering from Iraq. Haidar has been in Sweden for 10 years, and currently working in the field that correspond to his educational background in Sweden.

**Ali** – in his 20s, from Iraq- and lives in Sweden for about 5 years. Ali has a Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science and he used to work in the field of journalism and media in Iraq. Currently, he is looking for a job in Sweden.

**Mahmood** – in his 40s, from Iraq and he has moved to Sweden in 2007. He has a Bachelor’s Degree in Arts from Iraq. Mahmood currently working in a field far from his academic qualifications in Sweden.

**Adil** – in his 40s, from Iraq. He has been living in Sweden since 2005. Adil has a Bachelor's Degree in Police Science and worked as a police officer in Iraq. He is working in a field far from his academic qualifications in Sweden.

**Samar** – in her 40s, from Iraq. Samar has been living in Sweden for 12 years and she is a mother of some children. Samar has a bachelor’s degree of Engineering and has worked as an Engineer in Iraq. Currently, she is working a field far from her academic qualifications in Sweden.

**Zina** – in her 40s, from Iraq. She has been living in Sweden for five years and is a mother of some children. Zina has Master’s Degree in English Language and worked with international organizations in Iraq. Currently, Zina is looking for a job in Sweden.
Humam – in his 20s, from Iraq and has been living in Sweden for 6 years. Humam has a bachelor’s degree in Computer Science from Iraq, and currently studying at a university in Sweden.
8. Finding and analysis:
The aims of this study were to identify obstacles and opportunities faced by Iraqi immigrants with higher education in the Swedish labour market as well as to find out whether they could obtain a job in Sweden corresponding to their qualifications or field of study in Iraq. The author devotes this section to explain the results and analyse these results based on the theoretical framework of this study and through previous researches that discussed the situation of immigrants with higher education in the labour market of the host countries. Based on the research questions, the findings of this study are divided into three main categories. First, to identify obstacles and opportunities faced by Iraqi immigrants in the Swedish labour market; secondly to find the role of human and social capital of these highly educated Iraqi immigrants in the labour market; third, to find out if these immigrants got a job in Sweden corresponding to their educational and academic background from Iraq.

8.1. The main obstacles and opportunities at the Swedish labour market:
The author conducted semi-structured interviews with eight Iraqi immigrants living in Sweden to explore their experience in the Swedish labour market. The interviewees pointed out to the factors that they experienced as obstacles or as opportunities in accessing the labour market in Sweden. These factors are discussed in depth in this section from the perspectives of the interviewees and the theoretical framework of the research. The results of the study revealed some obstacles and opportunities that function as an advantage or disadvantage for highly educated immigrants in obtaining employment in Sweden.

8.1.a. Swedish language:
Swedish is the official language in Sweden and the most widely used in all fields, whether in education or work. There are also 5 other languages for minorities living in Sweden, which are officially recognized in Sweden as stipulated by law: Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, Romani, and Yiddish. In addition, the Swedish Parliament passed the Language Law in 2009, which recognizes that Swedish is the main and common language of society, as well as the official language used in international contexts (Landes 2009). However, English is of great importance in Swedish society, and can be considered as the second language of the Swedes,
as most people in Sweden are fluent in English (Gee 2013). English is widely used in educational institutions such as universities. There are many educational programmes and courses that are taught in English, but Swedish remains the dominant language especially in the labor market (Andersson 2018, p.15).

One of the obstacles referred to by most of the interviewees is the lack of fluency in the Swedish language. The proficiency of the language of the host country is an essential factor which opens many prospects for social and economic integration in the host country. The interviewees in this study believe that lack of proficiency in the Swedish language is a major obstacle that prevents them from getting a job or in particular, obtaining a qualified job corresponding to their academic backgrounds. These interviewees pointed out that they were excluded from many opportunities to get a job due to their lack of proficiency in the Swedish language. Most of the jobs in the Swedish labour market required from immigrants to master the Swedish language, so that they can communicate better. In this context, Ahmed who has a Bachelor’s Degree in Law from Iraq, pointed out that his inability to speak Swedish fluently was the biggest obstacle for him in getting a job in Sweden.

*I tried to get a job in the legal fields here in Sweden, especially after being good in Swedish. Also, I applied for several jobs in different places and got job interviews, but the Swedish language was the biggest barrier for me because the level of Swedish language required is high compared to my Swedish* (Ahmed).

One could see that proficiency in Swedish is the most critical requirement in the Swedish labour market as most of the jobs available required mastering Swedish, especially when it comes to the white-collar work; i.e. the professional, managerial, and administrative work. Most of the interviewees in this study had been working in this type of jobs in Iraq and they need to be fluent in Swedish in order to do get similar jobs in Sweden. Zina, who has been living in Sweden for five years and has a Master's Degree in English and significant work experience with humanitarian organizations in Iraq, explains that without being fluent in Swedish, there is no value for all educational qualifications and academic experience that immigrants have from the original country in the Swedish labour market.

*I can speak English very well, and I have a lot of experience and expertise from humanitarian organizations in the field of children's rights, but no one is looking at*
these experiences and academic qualifications that I have from Iraq in the labour market in Sweden. All the emphasis here is on mastering Swedish language, which made me frustrated because I do not understand why, as a high-skilled immigrant I am evaluated on the basis of mastering Swedish only, while I possess many qualifications to help me get a job in this field, especially in the field of humanitarian organizations (Zina).

One of the interviewees in this study is Humam, who has been living in Sweden for six years. Humam has a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science from Iraq and has completed all the courses for learning Swedish. He mentioned that for him, as an immigrant with higher education does not give him a fair opportunity even in areas considered inferior to his educational background due to lack of fluency in the Swedish language. As he explained that studying the language in SFI schools (Swedish for foreigners) is not adequate to make the immigrant speak Swedish fluently.

_I have a Bachelor Degree in Computer Science from Iraq, but in the early years of my arrival in Sweden, I tried to find a job in different fields, but language proficiency was the main obstacle to find a job because I do not speak Swedish very well_ (Humam).

Through this study, most of the interviewees revealed the importance of mastering the Swedish language for immigrants in accessing the labour market in Sweden. This is corresponding with what some researchers pointed out to the importance of mastering the language of the host country in securing a job and getting a high wage compared to other immigrants who do not know the language (Grenier 1984, pp.40-41). In addition, some researchers have also noted that, lack of proficiency in Swedish is one of the main hinders to the highly educated immigrants from getting a job because of the ineffectiveness of the Swedish system for integrating it into job marketing. The factors that interviewees pointed out has been discussed by Inge Dahlstedt, who demonstrated in his study, that the first generation of immigrants is facing more obstacles to get a job in Sweden compared to the descendants because of the language fluency of the later (2015, p.44). In addition, Dahlstedt explained that descendants of immigrants have a higher probability of getting a job, especially a job related to their education.
background because of their proficiency in Swedish since they grew up here in Sweden, unlike the first generation who has a low probability in this matter (Ibid).

The interviewees referred to several reasons for the lack of proficiency in Swedish language. Some of them mentioned that the quality of learning Swedish language in schools is poor and the teaching methods used to teach the language to the immigrants need to be improved. Also, the interviewees emphasized the importance of considering immigrants with higher education as a separate group and they should not study Swedish with other immigrants who may be illiterate at the same class, because it requires different teaching methods. The other reason is the lack of opportunities to practice language outside the Swedish language schools due to lack of Swedish friends. Having Swedish friends is very important in the process of learning the language because communication with Swedes helps a lot in learning Swedish. This is one of the obstacles that the interviewees face in learning the language; lack of social life with the Swedes. The author also observes from the interviews that the language is an obstacle that is reinforced by segregation areas, by certain neighbourhood in Sweden that the majority of the residents are immigrants, hence excludes them from the Swedish public society.

*I studied at a university in Sweden and most of the students speak English because the programme was in English. I also live in a neighbourhood where most people live there are immigrants who speak their native languages; thus, I cannot find the right environment to practice my Swedish* (Zina).

This study also reveals a different perspective on the importance of mastering the language, which has been underestimated in accessing the labour market and securing a job, that function as an obstacle in facing the Swedish labour market. For instance, Ali, who believes that there are many jobs in Sweden that do not need to know Swedish or at least do not need to be fluent in Swedish language to get them. He refers to other obstacles which seems more influential at labour markets in Sweden, such as mediation or lack of acquaintances - that has a bigger role in this matter.

*Mastering the Swedish language is not so important to get a job, as many people I know do not have good knowledge in Swedish, but they have been able to get a job because of acquaintances who help them in getting a direct contact with employers. I was looking for a job even far from my field of*
specialization, but I was not accepted, not because of the language only, but because I did not have the acquaintances that help me with employers (Ali).

While for Haidar, who lives in Sweden for 10 years and currently works in the field of medical devices in Sweden, points out that mastering the language is not so important in getting a job. He explains that it is enough to have a simple knowledge of the new language if the immigrant has good skills and experience to do a particular work. Also, Haider mentioned during the interview with the author that he was able to get a job in Sweden that corresponds to his academic specialization as a medical device engineer, although he does not speak Swedish fluently, his experience in this work enabled him to get a job.

Language is important, but it does not need to be very fluent in order to get a job, I believe that skills and experiences are more important to get access into the Swedish labor market (Haider).

As we can see from what is mentioned above, there are different perspectives and experiences about the importance of mastering the Swedish language and even if it could be the real obstacle in securing a job, there is another factor that seems to be more important when it comes to labour market, as mentioned by Ali, the role of acquaintances and social network could be more efficient to get a job in Sweden.

8.1.b. Knowledge and preparation for the Swedish labour market:

As revealed through this study, another obstacle faced by these highly educated immigrants is the lack of knowledge and preparation for the Swedish labour market. All interviewees stated that they faced difficulties in the early years in terms of entering the labour market in Sweden because they did not know how to communicate with employers and what are the appropriate ways to get a job. The interviewees in this study indicated that the labour market system and the right methods for applying for a job in Sweden differ from that of Iraq. They explained that the labour market system in Sweden is more complicated than Iraq in terms of applying and get a job. Accessing the right channels and following the right methods in applying for a job and obtaining an opportunity for an interview is an obstacle to secure a job, due to lack of knowledge in the labour market system. In this regard, Samar encountered some difficulties,
as she indicated that the search for work is entirely dependent on the immigrant even if there is some help or guidance from the Labor Office. However, the help provided by the Labour office is just general information and does not serve her interest in a way to meet the employers and get a job.

The lack of knowledge of the Swedish labor market, the proper ways of providing my personal information to the employers was an obstacle that prevents me from getting a job for a long time. The Labor Office did not provide me with the necessary facilities in this regard because the Labor Office gives only general information and pieces of advice that does not serve me in practical terms to get a job (Samar).

This finding of this study also reveals that preparation to access the labour market that increase employment opportunities is very important for highly skilled immigrants. The author observes that most of interviewees explained that it was difficult for them to get a good preparation such as to obtain an internship, as the Labor office or institutions responsible for this issue does not provide the possible facilities for them to get the internship, which is an obstacle to them to get a job in Sweden. For Zina, one of the most fundamental requirements of highly educated immigrants is to obtain an opportunity for a job training/an internship even without a salary, because it is a good opportunity to show show their work skills and the ability to learn more.

Internship also helps to prepare immigrants for the labour market by learning more about the work system in Sweden and improve their Swedish as well by practice the language more (Zina).

As explained by the interviewees, it can be seen that the highly educated immigrants just need a simple preparation in terms of a job training or an internship, which contributes immensely in accessing the labour market and increasing the opportunity of getting a job.

8.1.c. Family hindrance and mobility:

According to this study, family responsibilities is an important factor that sometimes function as an obstacle of accessing a job. Sometimes, immigrants face the need to move to another city that provide more job opportunities. But it is not always easy to take that decision of moving to another city, especially for those who have family settlement issues. The responsibility of taking care of the children and the partner sometimes restrict the mobility of person seeking a
job anywhere in the country. The interviewees of this study, especially those having children too, revealed that their responsibilities with the family restrict their ability to move to another city or finding a job even far from their interest. As these interviewees explained this as an obstacle especially when they are new residents in Sweden, because he/she does not have the absolute freedom to seek a job everywhere in Sweden as he/she needs to be close to his family to take care of them.

From the perspective of the interviewees, they are in the first place do not have a lot of opportunities in the labour market of the receiving country. Therefore, they mentioned that they need to be open to work in any place or city in the new country, but the responsibility of the family prevents or restricts their freedom to go to any place to get a job. Ahmed experienced this matter and explains that family responsibility was an obstacle for him to not seeking job in any place far from where his family lives.

I moved to Sweden with a wife and two children and live in Malmo. My responsibility to my family made me not have the freedom to go anywhere in Sweden to get a job, it was an obstacle for me to not get a job in northern or central Sweden because I cannot let my wife alone to take care of two kids and doing other responsibilities (Ahmed).

One can see that the responsibility of the family and children for the immigrant, especially in his first years in Sweden, could be an obstacle to enjoy the freedom to search for work anywhere in Sweden. Also, some interviewees pointed out that this obstacle can occur to anyone whether native or immigrant, but for the immigrant it is considered more difficult because he/she does not have the resources that he can rely on in the host country.

8.1.d. Discrimination:

The other obstacle that immigrants, in general, may face in the labour market is the discrimination whether directly or indirectly. This study reveals that some of the interviewees have felt that they could not get a job because of their ethnic belonging and the stereotype thinking the employer has about the productivity of immigrants coming from the middle east. As the Interviewees indicated, employers in the labour market do not recognize the academic achievements and practical experience they have had in Iraq. This phenomenon becomes
obvious when immigrants apply for a particular job and find it difficult to obtain a job interview, due to employer's negative opinion on their productivity. One could see from the perspectives of the interviewees, that a person with educational qualifications or practical experience from Sweden is preferred because there is more confidence from employers in the productivity of people who have an education or work experience from Sweden than Iraq.

*When trying to get a job in Sweden, despite the different work experiences I already have from Iraq, I always fail to compete with others especially if my competitors have work experiences or educational qualifications from Sweden, which seems a positive signal for Employers (Ahmed).*

Sometimes it is difficult to find a clear indication that a person has been really discriminated against, because the immigrant may feel that he has been discriminated against by the employer, and as a result has not been offered the job. However, perhaps not being accepted in the job may be due to the fact that his/her qualifications are not adequate to offer him or her the job. The subjective discrimination that has been mentioned in the theoretical part of this study explain this feeling of being discriminated without any objective criteria, as it could be real discrimination or just subjective feeling without real evidence (Stefańska 2007, p.1). In this regard, Samar, who has considerable experience in engineering, noted that she felt that she was not placed in the job because of wearing hijab, but at the same time she pointed out that she did not face it explicitly by the employer.

*I felt that I could not get a job as an engineer in Sweden because some employers see wearing the headscarf as a hindrance either for integrating with other employees or for the productivity required at work (Samar).*

Furthermore, the interviewees pointed out the issue of ‘market signals’, which are reflected in the educational qualifications and work experience obtained by them from Iraq, as a significant obstacle for not having secured employment and resulted in staying unemployed for a long time. One can see that these ‘signals’ that the interviewees mention, such as the country that the immigrants got their qualifications from, is a matter in the labour market in Sweden. Ali refers to this problem as an obstacle for him for not securing a job, especially in the type of jobs where competitors have qualifications and skills from Sweden.

*I believe that getting qualifications from a country such as Iraq has caused some concern for employers when it comes to hire me because they do not have adequate
information about the educational institutions or companies in Iraq, so other competitors are always preferred to offer the job, especially if they are from Sweden (Ali).

The author of this study could observe that what the interviewees mentioned regarding this matter correspond to what Borjas (2000) explained in the statistical discrimination theory; how the employer makes evaluation between applicants for specific jobs based on ethnicity or nationality, because of the lack of the information needed about the applicants and the skills they have, as well as the employer being more confident in the performance or productivity of a certain group over another (Borjas 2000, p.381). In the same context, Spencer (1973) discussed the issue of labour market Signaling and how employers receive signals about a candidate for a particular job through several aspects, including his/her educational background, qualifications, and work experience (Spencer 1973, p.356). According to him, recruitment is an uncertain process for employers because they do not know the productivity of the person to be employed (Spence 1973, p.357). Thus, employers use a set of signals that reflect their decision to hire a candidate and among these signals are the country or institution that a candidate obtained educational and work experiences.

8.1.e. Official support:

In Sweden, the government through its official institutions offer support and facilities to the immigrants to assist them in their labor integration and integration into the society. Official support can be seen through several facilities, for example, support provided for Swedish language education for immigrants, which is free of charge, and the support provided for immigrants to enter the labor market through several training programs and financial incentives. The interviewees in this study indicated that they did not receive the facilities needed as immigrants with higher education, and most facilities that provided to them are general facilities offered to all immigrants regardless of their educational or academic background. At this point, the interviewees emphasized that the immigrants with higher education need different facilities and support from the Labor office, because of the ambitions of these immigrants and what they want to achieve in Sweden may be different from the other immigrants without an educational background. Therefore, they need facilities and tools that take their particular situation into consideration. Humam mentioned that there are opportunities
and facilities provided to immigrants, but not necessarily to serve the immigrants with higher education.

I have been able to get a work training in a software company by my personal effort, without any help from the Labor Office because most of the opportunities available to immigrants are in the areas of transportation, cooking or maintenance, which are far from my field of interest (Humam).

However, there are many facilities that the interviewees have been able to benefit from in their economic integration into the Swedish labour market. For example, the government support for immigrants by paying a large part of their salaries in their jobs during the first months, could be seen as a great help to encourage employers to hire them. Samar, for instance, pointed out that she was able to get some of these opportunities during her economic integration in Sweden. She explains that the Swedish government, through the Labor Office supports the immigrants with higher education by providing vocational courses or work training in some companies to increase their ability to work in Sweden and receive knowledge of the Swedish labor market system.

As an electrical engineer I was able to get some unpaid training with different companies in Sweden, which increased my knowledge of the engineering techniques used here and my educational background helped me to get this opportunity (Samar).

Also, the government measures to help immigrants integrate into the labour market by paying their first month's salary or a large proportion of their salary have made it easier for her to get a temporary job as an engineer.

It is a good measure by the Swedish government to help immigrants integrate economically into the labor market by encouraging employers to employ us through paying a large percentage of our salaries in the first months, thus encouraging immigrants to integrate into the labor market (Samar).

One can see that being a highly educated immigrant gives more flexibility in using many opportunities offered by the government or the institutions concerned in the labour market for integration of Immigrants. For instance, at times the labour market demands certain jobs, the labour market authorities will provide short courses or vocational and educational programs to
prepare the immigrants for these jobs. Thus, when an immigrant with an academic background which is recognized by Swedish authority (UHR), is easily be accepted in such opportunities to increase the immigrant's ability to enter the Swedish labour market and get a job.

“I benefited from the opportunity offered by the Labor office by getting a course to study truck mechanics without paying any fee, which helped me get a job in a Swedish company with a good income (Adil).”

As indicated by the interviewees in this study about the opportunities and facilities provided by the Swedish government to them as highly educated immigrants to help them in accessing the labour market. This shows that the Swedish government or institutions that involved in the integration of immigrants in the labour market are trying to give the immigrants the same rights and to enjoy the same privileges that Swedish citizens have in the labour market. This corresponds with what some researchers explained in economic integration of immigrants and the importance of providing the means and mechanisms that help immigrants to achieve economic integration at the labour market of host societies. For instance, Hassan Kaladjahi (1997), pointed out in his explanation of the economic integration of immigrants, that immigrants should participate on an equal basis in the labour market with natives and that they should have access to jobs and income that reflects their qualifications and abilities (Kaladjahi 1997, p.19). The Swedish government policy towards immigrants, through these opportunities and facilities that offered to immigrants without any costs or by paying the salaries of immigrants in the first months to encourage employers to employ them, contributes to the economic integration of immigrants in the labour market by increasing employment opportunities and reducing the possibility of being unemployed regardless of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This is in line with what some researchers, such as Entzinger (1990), explained that integration can be achieved in terms of equalization of opportunities for immigrants without cultural assimilation, and this is reflected on the labour market too (Entzinger 1990, p.60).
8.2. The role of human and social capital of Iraqi immigrants in the Swedish labour market:

The author devotes this section to explain the role of human and social capital of highly educated Iraqi immigrants in Sweden and its impact on their access to the labour market. Through the interviews conducted with eight highly educated Iraqi immigrants in Sweden, the role of human and social capital will be discussed from their point of view. The author divides this section into two parts. The first part will explain the role of human capital of these immigrants in the Swedish labor market, while the second part will focus on the role of social capital of these immigrants in improving their economic status and their integration in the labour market.

8.2.a. The role of human capital:

As some researchers have indicated, human capital refers to a group of skills and characteristics of the worker that increases the productivity and opportunity of work such as school education, language proficiency, experience, etc (Acemoglu & Autor 2011, p.4). It is common that the individual's characteristics of education or work experience and other skills play an essential role in the labour market integration in terms of ensuring that the individual obtains a job or receives high wages. However, when immigrants, mainly those from non-western countries, are considered, the role of human capital may differ and be more complicated in a receiving country such as Sweden. The participants of interviews have different perspectives on the benefits of their human capital in the Swedish labour market, but they are of the common opinion that their human capital has been devalued in Sweden compared to Iraq. The interviewees explained that, as immigrants with university education background as well as work experiences in various fields in Iraq, they faced difficulties in transferring these skills to the Swedish labour market for various reasons. The author finds out that the education system differs between Iraq and Sweden, where the interviewees in this study pointed out that there is more scientific process in terms of studies and work in Sweden. Thus, one can see that the education system and work techniques in Iraq are considered as of comparatively low standard in terms of scientific process in Sweden. These differences make it difficult for Iraq immigrants with higher education to get a job directly after migrated from Iraq to Sweden, especially in the high skilled jobs, without learning these techniques practiced in Sweden.
My knowledge and computer skills became less valuable when I came to Sweden, thus I could not get a job because the level of education and technology in Iraq is considered as lower than Sweden (Humam).

In the same context, the skills of the highly educated Iraqi immigrants, are becoming less valuable in Sweden because it is difficult to transfer these skills from Iraq to Sweden. There is a significant difference in the educational and work system between the two countries as well. For instance, there is a vast difference in the legal field of work between Iraq and Sweden, in addition to that, the immigrant with an educational background in law from Iraq should be fluent in Swedish in order to become qualified to work in the legal fields in Sweden. But, it is obvious that other fields of work that are more dependent on technical skills do not face these difficulties. Thus, devaluation of human capital is comparatively low for Iraqi immigrants with technical background than other Iraqi immigrants who have an educational background and experience in other areas such as law.

I have studied law for four years at the university in Iraq and worked as a lawyer for five years, during which I gained good experience in the legal field. However, all these knowledge and work experience has no value in the Swedish labour market for the difficulty of transferring this knowledge to Sweden because of the significant difference in the Legal field of work between Sweden and Iraq (Ahmed).

Thus, this study reveals that highly educated Iraqi immigrant face difficulties in getting a job, especially during the first years of living in Sweden, due to lack of recognition of their skills in the Swedish labour market. The interviewees also explained that devaluation of the human capital of the Iraqi immigrants is a relative matter that differs from one specialization to another. As Adil shows that his work experience as a police officer in Iraq for several years has no value here in Sweden due to the different nature of the security system in Iraq from Sweden.

I finished my study in the police academy and worked as a police officer in Iraq for several years, but when I migrated to Sweden, I could not take any advantage of my academic background nor my skill in police work. I could not work as a police officer in Sweden because of the difference in the security system and the police tasks between Iraq and Sweden (Adil).
The facts pointed out by interviewees on devaluation of human capital they acquired from Iraq are in consistent with many studies that have revealed the decline of immigrants’ human capital in the labour market of receiving countries. These studies indicate that immigrants do not find equal opportunities like natives in the labour market of the receiving country because they lack the human capital as the majority or lack the skills required for the labor market in the receiving country (Van Tubergen 2006, p.15). This disparity in opportunities between immigrants and natives can be linked to human capital that immigrants bring with them to the host country’s labour market, which does not receive the same value as the human capital of natives. Cheswick (1978), pointed out this by explaining that the labour experience of immigrants obtained in their country of origin is not the same or equal to the counterparts in the host country because it contains the different structure and rules, and it is difficult for those experiences to transfer equally in the labour market of the host society (Cheswick 1978, p.898).

However, the current study also revealed some different perspectives on the role of human capital of these highly educated Iraqi immigrants, as some of them have experienced positive aspects of human capital in the Swedish labour market due to their work experience in a particular field. Haidar, for instance, explains that through his work experience in Iraq, he was able to obtain qualified work in Sweden, and within the same field of work because of his knowledge and work experience in the field of medical devices. Also, Haidar emphasis that he had benefited from his work with international companies in Iraq, through which he acquired extensive knowledge and experience of modern techniques that are similar to the Swedish labour market has contributed immensely in getting a job in within a short period of living in Sweden.

*The educational qualifications and practical skills of the Iraqi immigrant can be used to some extent in Sweden. I was able to get a job as a medical equipment engineer because the techniques I know and the knowledge I have acquired are almost similar to those here in Sweden* (Haider).

Furthermore, the interviewees pointed out that despite the devalued qualifications and skills they have from Iraq, there are many opportunities in Sweden to invest in education and gain knowledge from Swedish universities and institutions. Thus, highly educated immigrants can support their skills gained from Iraq with skills from Sweden, which contribute to increasing
work opportunities in Sweden. The interviewees in this study stated that one of the most important strategies to be followed by immigrants with higher education, who does not want to lose all their years of experience, is to invest in education through studying in the university with a specific program or course which will give them more access to the Swedish labour market. One can see that an immigrant from a country like Iraq whose work system is different from Sweden needs to invest in education and prepare himself/herself to enter the labour market, especially if this immigrant wants to get work in his field of interest. In this regard, Ahmed mentioned that he started studying for a Master’s degree in Sweden to acquire the knowledge that he needs to support his skill acquired in Iraq, with the expectation of increasing his opportunities in obtaining a job.

*I did not want to waste my academic qualifications, but I wanted to benefit from them. So, I started to study a Masters in Sweden. Although the labour market does not recognize my skills, it could be used to complete postgraduate studies at Swedish universities. Thus, gained the knowledge that will help me to get a job here* (Ahmed).

Moreover, the Swedish government, through their financial support programmes for students, provides opportunities for immigrants to invest in education and obtain knowledge, whether academic or practical. The interviewees added that the immigrants could get extra knowledge through studies at Swedish universities to support their qualifications and skills gained from Iraq, which will contribute to increasing the job opportunities for them. Humam explained in this matter, that he wanted to acquire the knowledge that requires in the labour market by studying an educational program in Sweden, which will help him in getting a job in his field without being forced to work in other areas that require fewer skills.

*I began studying networks at a Swedish university for one year to acquire knowledge of the modern technology used in the Swedish labor market, which I had never learned in Iraq, and I believe that this will increase my chance of getting a qualified job in Sweden* (Humam).

Almost all interviewees stated that investment in education in Sweden, particularly for highly educated immigrants with skills and experience from their country of origin, was a good strategy that could support the skills acquired in Iraq with new knowledge from Sweden. Thus, investment in education will increase the value and role of the human capital of these Iraqi
immigrants in the Swedish labor market. The facts that interviewees of the current study pointed out on the investment in education in Sweden and its positive consequences on the Iraqi immigrant with higher education, are in corresponding with some researchers who pointed out the importance of investing in education for the economic integration of immigrants in the labor market. These researchers indicate that individuals should recognize the importance of investing in human capital to develop their employability and increase their opportunities in the labor market of the host countries (Olaniyan & Okemakinde 2008, p.479). Also, some researchers suggest that people may generally invest in themselves either in education or in acquiring special skills because they expect the future financial benefits to exceed the temporary investment costs (Van Tubergen 2006, p.16).

It is important for the immigrants to ensure a well-insured job in the receiving country. The author of this thesis observed that some of the interviewees followed this strategy even though they had a high education from Iraq, but to avoid neglecting their educational background because of the devaluation in Sweden. Thus, this strategy according to interviewees, increase their access to a well-qualified job in Sweden.

### 8.2.b. The role of social capital:

Some studies have revealed that immigrants’ social capital as one of the important factors that affect them positively in labour market of the receiving country. Therefore, in this section, the author examines the role of social capital of Iraqi immigrants with higher education in the Swedish labour market, in order to gain a deep understanding of their perspectives on the role of social capital in their labour integration process. It is important to note that social capital is concerned with the importance and value of social networks of immigrants as it facilitates immigrants' access to work in the host country.

The interviewees in this study emphasized the importance of immigrants’ social networks in Sweden which help them to enter the labour market. This study revealed that social networks play an important role in supporting the immigrants through providing information and guiding them to access suitable jobs in the labour market. According to the interviewees, the social network is considered the most valuable informal way in gaining access to labour market because, only with these social networks can the many barriers that immigrants face in entering the labour market be broken and win employers’ confidence. Thus, it is clear that the social
network of Iraqi immigrants, plays a fundamental role in their stability in the new state and helps in their economic integration in Sweden. The interviewees pointed out that the social network, whether family or friends, provide a sense of safety and support to them through the information and facilities they provide in various areas, such as housing, work, and others. In this regard, Ahmed emphasizes that investing in social networks is one of the best thing for the immigrant to do in order to get a job because it is considered as one of the most effective ways that reduces the effort and time of immigrant to get a job in Sweden.

*I made friends with both Swedes and foreigners living here through study and work. I think the social networks of immigrants, whether the acquaintances and close friends in Sweden, have an important role in getting a job and heading to the right ways in the labour market. I was able to get different jobs through the acquaintances I have here and through the valuable information they brought me* (Ahmed).

As indicated by interviewees of this study, social networks of friends and acquaintances is important in finding work, especially in their early years in Sweden, where this effective means of facilitating access to jobs avoid them being unemployed. But one can also see that these highly-skilled Iraqi immigrants often depend on Iraqi and Arab friends and acquaintances who have lived in Sweden for a long time. In this regard, Mahmood adds that relying on a social network of immigrants with same ethnicity can facilitate access to jobs that are considered unsuitable for immigrants with higher education, but remain an effective way to avoid unemployment in Sweden.

*I got different jobs through my social networks, all of which did not fit my educational background, including my work at a supermarket or as a taxi driver as well as my current job as a butcher. Actually, my social networks in Sweden helped me in getting a job and not to be unemployed* (Mahmood).

The social network is fundamental for Iraqi immigrants to get a job and is considered the safest and fastest way compared to other formal ways of accessing the Swedish labour market. The interviewees added that the fundamental thing that immigrants must consider in order to increase their opportunities at the Swedish labour market, in addition to learning the language, is to form and maintain the social network because it is the best way that supports immigrants to enter the labour market in Sweden. One can conclude from expressions of these interviewees that it is faster using informal channels, such as social network in getting a job, because the
immigrant will get something positive, which is mediation by a friend or access to information that facilitates him/her in applying for the job.

*From my personal experience in work, when there is a job available in a company, the acquaintances of the current employees have access to that information before the job is announced in the official channels for instance. Thus, the social network often comes first in the entry into the labor market* (Adil).

Moreover, it could be observed that as social networking is fundamental in finding a job in Sweden, as explained by the interviewees, lack of social network is a major obstacle for them in getting a job as well. In this regard, Ali stated that there are lot of jobs that do not need high educational qualifications and work experience from Iraq, but the only barrier for him to get a job in Sweden is the lack of social networks needed to facilitate the contact with the employers.

*I tried to get a job in various fields, although these work do not need a very good Swedish language skills or specific skills such as restaurants, cafeterias or clothing shops, but because I do not have the social networks or the mediation to reach the employer I could not take the job* (Ali).

The expressions made by the interviewees on the importance of social networks and its positive role in finding a job in Sweden is correspond with what is explained by some of the researchers in the theoretical framework of this study on the role of social capital and its importance to immigrants in the labour market in the receiving countries. Some researchers have pointed out that social capital explains the idea that different types of resources, especially economic ones, are an integral part of social relations and can be positively utilized by immigrants in the labour market of a host country (Bartram, Monforte & Poros 2014, p.133). Boxman (1991), for instance, pointed out in his interpretation of social capital that people who form the network of social relations of immigrants in the host society can provide the support and information that a migrant needs in the receiving country and it is considered one of the most important factors affecting the economic integration of immigrants (Boxman, De Graaf & Flap 1991, p.52). In addition to that, some researchers argue that benefiting from the social network is not limited to strong relationships or close friends of individual, but even the weak ties can be used to enter the labour market and to find the better job opportunities (Granovetter 2005, p.34).
8.3. Occupational match/mismatch among Iraqi immigrants in the Swedish labour market:

The Iraqi immigrants, since they had their higher education and work experience in Iraq, had been able to obtain jobs that meet their academic qualifications and within their field of specialization in their native country. But, this study reveals that they had to face a totally different situation in the economic integration process in Sweden, as they have issues of mismatch between their academic expertise and accessible jobs at the Swedish labour market. The interviewees in this study explained their experience with regard to accessing jobs that are in par with their academic qualifications and work experience, and reasons for not being able to find such jobs.

The author of this thesis noted that the match and mismatch of the labour positions in Sweden with the educational qualifications of these Iraqi immigrants vary according to the type of these qualifications, in addition to the tendency of the interviewees in choosing their jobs at the Swedish labour market. The interviewees of this study pointed out that it is difficult to obtain a job in Sweden corresponding to the educational qualifications they have because of the devaluation of their human capital in Sweden, and the difficulty of transferring their skills between Iraq and Sweden due to differences of the work system between the two countries. One can see that obtaining a job corresponding to the educational and work competence of these Iraqi immigrants may take a long time because of the need to re-study and be fluent in the Swedish language. As for jobs that match their qualifications, such as lawyers, journalists and police officers, one could see that it requires a high level of the Swedish language and competence in specific knowledge and skills. This is a difficulty from the perspective of some interviewees who indicated that living in a new country requires them to get any work that provides income through which the immigrant can settle and integrate better into the new society.

*I have worked as a police officer in Iraq for several years, but my job experience is not recognized in Swedish labour market, so I could not get a job that matches my educational and work qualifications in Sweden* (Adil).

Adil explains also that sometimes it takes a long time of investment in education to get a job that matches the qualifications of the immigrant, this does not work for him because he needs an income in Sweden to help him to stabilize and integrate into the labor market.
I did not find any opportunity to get a qualified job in Sweden so I was trying to get a good job in a short time and that made me study a course in mechanics and work with a Swedish company with a good income which helped me settle more in Sweden (Adil).

The interviewees pointed out that the Swedish labour market does not recognize the work experience of the immigrant from Iraq, so it is difficult to find a job that matches the academic qualifications of the immigrant. Samar experienced this by stating that she was unable to obtain a job that go in par with her skills in engineering, and because of her need to work she accepted a job in another field, which is lower than the qualifications she possess.

I was not able to get a job as an engineer in Sweden and this made me disappointed, but because of my need for finding a job I started working as a teacher assistant in a primary school which requires less qualifications than I have (Samar).

This study also revealed that, one of the most important factors that make them accept a job that does not match with their qualifications is, the poor economic conditions in Iraq and the dependence of their families on the remittances they send to support their living. This is what Mahmood pointed out in his explanation of why he did not get a qualified job and used to work in other jobs that needed less qualifications compared to his academic background.

I started to work in various jobs in Sweden that are far from my specialization. The reason behind that I needed to start working as soon as possible in Sweden to support my family in Iraq because their economic conditions were difficult, and they did not have another financial source (Mahmood).

The author observes in this study that there are number of interviewees still having the will to find a job in correspondence with their academic qualifications, and they try to do so through investment in education to acquire the knowledge required for obtaining a qualified job in Sweden. We can see that investment in education is a strategy followed by some of the Iraqi immigrants with higher education in order to improve their qualifications and knowledge, thus increasing the opportunity of getting a qualified job in Sweden. The interviewees explain that devaluing of human capital of Iraqi immigrants with higher education is normal in Sweden, because there is more scientific process in the education system in Sweden than in Iraq, as well as there are difficulties in transferring the skills they have in Iraq to Sweden directly. Thus,
acquiring the required knowledge in the Swedish labour market will contribute to supporting the qualifications of Iraqi immigrants with higher education and increase their opportunities in the Swedish labour market to obtain work that match their educational background.

* * 

I have an educational background in computer science from Iraq, and I could not find a qualified job directly in Sweden. Currently, I am studying one-year program in Network design at a university in Sweden to acquire the knowledge required in Sweden in order not to lose my skills and increase my chances of working in the field of computers in Sweden (Humam).

In the same context, Ahmed expressed that relying on academic qualifications and work experience gained from Iraq is not adequate to secure a qualified job in Sweden. In addition, it is important that the immigrant should invest in education here in Sweden to acquire knowledge and support his/her qualifications in order to increase the opportunities of getting a qualified job. One can see that although educational qualifications are devalued in the Swedish labour market, they still can be used by Iraqi immigrants to obtain additional education in Sweden that supports their qualifications in Iraq. Therefore, it is considered an addition to the qualifications already acquired, rather than a surrender of their skills and the tendency to get occupied with work that are far lower than their qualifications.

* * 

I am currently studying master’s in international law in Sweden to support and improve my legal qualifications acquired in Iraq. Thus, I expect that it would increase the opportunities to get a qualified job in Sweden, compared to other work far from my area of interest (Ahmed).

In the same context, the author noted in this study that, the human capital of Iraqi immigrants is not devalued for certain cases in the Swedish labor market. By having experience in working with foreign companies or institutions in Iraq, immigrants could gain the experience and knowledge that is similar to Sweden. This facilitates these immigrants’ economic integration and entry into Swedish labour market, compared to other immigrants who were working in local institutions in Iraq. Haider experienced this situation of having a qualified job in Sweden within a short time from his arrival, without need the need of Swedish language fluency and acquiring additional knowledge.

* * 

I was able to get a qualified work in Sweden in the field of medical devices engineering shortly after my arrival. My previous work with German and US
companies in Iraq gave me the knowledge and the experience that required in the work system in Sweden which made it easy for me in access to the labour market in Sweden (Haider).

Regarding the occupational match/mismatch with educational qualification of highly educated Iraqi immigrants in Sweden, the interviewees stated that they have more opportunities to find jobs lower than their educational qualifications in Sweden. In the same context, Inge Dahlstedt (2011) referred to this matter and explained in his study that the immigrants population in Sweden has a lower level of professional matching and a higher probability of being in a job lower than their qualifications compared to natives. Also, Dahlstedt (2015) finds through the statistics, that the first generation of immigrants have a higher odds of mismatch occupations when compared to their descendants and relates these result to several reasons (Dahlstedt 2015, p.44). For example, the first generation of immigrants get their education and work experiences from outside Sweden which make them more likely to be affected by a signalling problem and devaluation of human capital, while most of the descendants get their education in Sweden and thus are not affected by the devaluation of human capital (Ibid). Dahlstedt (2015) also refers to the weaker ability of Swedish language and lack of the labour market information that make the first generation of immigrants have higher odds of mismatch occupations. One can see that the reasons mentioned by Dahlstedt on the occupational mismatch, were same at present and function as the main obstacles faced by the interviewees of this study at the Swedish labour market.
9. Discussion:

This section summarizes the findings derived from this study, that were stipulated through interviews with eight highly educated Iraqi immigrants. This study, as have mentioned earlier, revolves around three research questions proposed by the author. These research questions (RQ) are as follows:

RQ 1: What are the obstacles and opportunities for Iraqi immigrants with higher education to obtain a job in Sweden?

This study reveals several obstacles and opportunities emphasized by the interviewees, which in their view have an essential role in their economic integration in Sweden either positively or negatively. For instance, the lack of proficiency in the Swedish language was one of the critical obstacles faced by the interviewees in the labour market, which prevented them from getting a job, in particular, jobs that are corresponding to their qualifications. It was also revealed that the lack of knowledge and preparation for entry into the Swedish labor market was an obstacle faced by these Iraqi immigrants with higher education. As pointed out by interviewees of this study, there are differences in work systems between Iraq and Sweden. Thus, it is vital to have some knowledge on the work system in Sweden as well as to prepare for the labour market, for instance, by obtaining work training or following some specific courses that qualify the immigrant to get a job later. In the same context, interviewees explained their suffering and frustration due to negative stereotypical attitudes of employers in Sweden towards candidates with academic qualifications and educational background from Iraq. The interviewees added that they often were excluded from getting a job if the competitor had qualifications from Sweden, because employers do not trust the qualifications and skills of immigrants coming from Iraq or the Middle East in general. Therefore, some of the interviewees felt that it was a kind of indirect discrimination practiced by employers against them in the Swedish labour market. These obstacles revealed by this study, are considered the most notable factors that have contributed to the difficulty of labour integration of Iraqi immigrants with higher education in the Swedish labor market, despite the fact that they have all the necessary educational qualifications and practical experience that qualify them to get a job in Sweden.

Furthermore, this study, through the interviewees, revealed some main facilities that they are benefited from in the economic integration process in Sweden. These are provided by the government and its institutions to increase the opportunities of immigrants to access the labour
market. For example, the interviewees referred to the support they received by providing free Swedish-language education for immigrants, and various training programmes and financial incentives that help them in accessing the labor market in Sweden. Also, the interviewees praised the government's efforts in supporting them in terms of paying a large part of their salaries during the first few months, which could be seen as an excellent opportunity to encourage employers to hire them.

RQ 2: What is the role of human and social capital of these highly educated immigrants in accessing into the Swedish labour market?

These results are primarily based on the perspective of the interviewees and their interpretations of the role of human and social capital in their economic integration at the Swedish labour market. However, the author wish to point out that these results differ among interviewees on the role of human and social capital in their labour integration in Sweden.-Human capital refers to the set of skills and characteristics possessed by the individuals which help them to access the labour market. The interviewees in this study are of the opinion that the human capital they have from Iraq, such as educational and work experience has become less valuable in the Swedish labor market. The interviewees referred to the reason behind this devaluation of their skills as the difference in the education and work system between Sweden and Iraq, which make it more difficult to transfer these characteristics and skills to Sweden. Also, Iraq is less advanced in terms of educational and work style compared to Sweden. Thus, some of the interviewees sought to develop their human capital by acquiring knowledge and work experience from Sweden to support their qualifications and skills that already acquired in Iraq. This study also revealed that, in certain cases, the value of human capital acquired by immigrants in Iraq has not been devalued in the Swedish labour market. For instance, those who have had work experience with international companies in Iraq have benefited from their acquired human capital as they have gained access to knowledge and modern work methods that are similar to those practised in Sweden.

The Social capital of immigrants refers to the value of social relations owned by an immigrant that helps him/her in obtaining a job in the receiving country. The finding of this study have indicated that the social network of Iraqi immigrants has an essential and decisive role in providing sources of information concerning the available employment opportunities for
immigrants, thus, reducing the time and effort in reaching the employers, and facilitating access to jobs. At the same time, the interviewees indicated that, although the role of social capital is positive in terms of reducing the time to get jobs and avoid unemployment, it works for some limited categories of jobs that do not match their educational qualifications such as restaurants, cleaning, etc.

**RQ 3: How do their positions in the Swedish labour market correspond to their educational qualifications?**

The Iraqi immigrants with higher education who are the subject of this thesis, also possess work experience in their relevant field of expertise. Having investigated the labour market position of these immigrants in order to find out whether there is a match or mismatch between their educational qualifications and work they find in Sweden, it was revealed that they are working in areas that need far less qualifications than what they posses.

It becomes clear from this study that the Swedish labour market does not recognize the work experience and skills of the immigrant from Iraq, which make it difficult for these highly educated immigrants to find a job commensurate with their academic qualifications in Sweden. The author found out that some of the interviewees still want to achieve their ambition to find a qualified job in Sweden, by acquiring the required knowledge in the Swedish labour market without necessarily wasting their qualifications from their original country. One can see that the interviewees followed this strategy in order to obtain a qualified job, as some of them are studying a course or program in a university to acquire advanced knowledge in Sweden. Thus, it will contribute to increasing their opportunity to find jobs in par with their qualifications in Sweden. The main reason for the occupational mismatch that Iraqi immigrants experience in the Swedish labour market is, the difference in the work system between the two countries, which is more advanced in most industrial and commercial sectors in Sweden than Iraq. Thus, Iraqi immigrants with higher education experience a decline in the value in the labour market. At the same time this study reveals that the interviewees who were able to get a job in Sweden that suits their qualifications, is mainly because of the experience they got by working with international institutions in Iraq. Working with international institutions provided the interviewee the knowledge required in the Swedish labor market even before they migrated to Sweden.
10. Conclusion:

This thesis focused on the economic integration of Iraqi immigrants with higher education into the Swedish labour market. It is a qualitative study by using semi-structured interviews with eight highly educated Iraqi immigrants in Sweden to gain a deep understanding of their experience in economic integration in Sweden. By discussing Iraqi immigrants’ views on economic integration, this thesis aims to find out the obstacles and opportunities experienced by highly educated Iraqi immigrants in the Swedish labour market, the role of human and social capital of these immigrants in entering the labour market, and how their position in the Swedish labor market corresponds with the academic qualifications they have from Iraq.

According to the findings of this study, the main obstacles they faced in entering the Swedish labour market was the lack of Swedish language and poor knowledge of the Swedish labour market, which affected the economic integration of these immigrants in the Swedish labour market. In addition, lack of confidence of the employers in the qualifications of these Iraqi immigrants function as an obstacle, as employers think that their educational qualifications are lower than that of Sweden, and therefore cannot perform well at work. In contrast, the interviewees pointed out to the opportunities provided by the government, which helped some of them to enter the Swedish labour market, such as paying a large part of the salary for the first months, which encourages the employers to hire them.

The finding of this study also revealed that the human capital of Iraqi immigrants is devalued in the Swedish labour market, so they could not benefit from their skills and work experience in finding a job in Sweden. Although the interviewees emphasized the importance of social network they have in Sweden in facilitating access to works and avoid unemployment, these are limited to areas much lower than their qualifications.

Moreover, one can see that the positions of the interviewees in the Swedish labour market are not commensurate with the qualifications they brought with them from Iraq. Therefore, some interviewees still try to obtain a qualified job through studying at universities or training with Swedish companies to gain the knowledge required by the Swedish labour market, without losing the value of their qualifications from their original country.
10.1. **Suggestion for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this thesis, which focused on the first generation of Iraqi immigrants with higher education in the Swedish labour market, it would be interesting to conduct future research on the economic integration of the descendants of Iraqi immigrants who have obtained their higher education in Sweden, in order to illustrate their performance and experience in terms of difficulties and facilities in the Swedish labour market. Thus, it will facilitate providing a complete view of the economic integration of Iraqi immigrants with higher education, both first generation and the descendants, in Sweden.
References:


Swedish Council for Higher Education. (2015). One step on the road to the labour market. 1st
ed. [ebook] Stockholm. Available at:


Appendix:

Interview Guide

*Background, personal information*

1. What is your name if possible?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your place of birth?
4. How many years have you lived in Sweden?

*Educational background:*

5. What is the highest education/degree you have completed? In which country did you obtain this degree?
6. Have you worked in your field of study and gained experience in your country or other countries?
7. Has your academic degree been recognized in Sweden? And how much time has been taken for recognition by official Swedish institutions?
8. Have you completed any Swedish education? If yes, when did you complete this education? Which program and at what level?

*Language background:*

9. What other languages do you speak in addition to your native language?
10. do you speak Swedish? If yes, what motivates/encourages you to learn Swedish? And How do you evaluate your ability to speak Swedish?
   -If not, what were the reasons behind preventing you from improving your Swedish

*Relate to employment:*

11. What is your current employment status? What is your profession (position) in Sweden?
- If yes, how did you get the job? through family, relatives or friends or through Labour offices in Sweden?

12. Is your current job linked to your qualification? If No,
- please explain why you did not work in the same area of your education.
- Have you searched for a job in Sweden connected to your qualification? Have you been invited to job interviews?

13. Are you satisfied with your current job? (income, career opportunities, colleagues).

14. As a higher educated immigrant, have you found any specific facilities provided to you by the labor market institutions, such as the labor office, etc?

15. Do you think that getting additional education from Sweden will help or increase your chances to get a qualified job in Sweden?

Social network:

16. Do you have many friends in Sweden?
   - How many of them are Swedes?
   - How did you get to know the Swedes? (workplace, etc.)?

17. Which role that your friends and acquaintances have in searching for jobs?