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Predictors of satisfaction / dissatisfaction with Icelandic language course and Icelandic proficiency among adult immigrants in Iceland

1. Introduction

Acquiring the local language is often considered a central aspect of immigrants' integration into society (Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, and Sweet 2018; Chiswick and Miller 2001; Kristen, Mühlau, and Schacht 2015). Prior studies among adult immigrants have indicated that obtaining language training positively affects immigrants' language proficiency (Hoehne and Michalowski 2016; Van Tubergen and Wierenga 2011) and inclusion into the receiving society (Lochmann, Rapoport and Speciale 2019). However, the degree to which attending courses in the receiving country language leads to language acquisition and integration is disputed. The effect of language courses depends on the teacher and design of the courses (Reichenberg and Berhanu 2018) and on learners' investment in the language which is contingent upon other factors such as personal interest, perceived utility of the language, and positive experiences in the speaking community (Norton and Toohey 2011).

The purpose of this study is to examine predictors of self-reported language proficiency and satisfaction with Icelandic language courses among adult immigrants in Iceland. Investigating immigrants' self-reported Icelandic proficiency and their satisfaction with language courses allows us to provide insights into peoples' experiences with formal language training in Icelandic as a second language, their self-reported proficiency in Icelandic, use of the language, as well as a better understanding of how language training and language proficiency are related.

There are several reasons why Iceland is an interesting case study to study immigrants' experiences while learning the language of the receiving society. Firstly, knowledge about the process of language acquisition among immigrants is mainly based on studies conducted in larger language communities with longer histories of immigration and researchers have only recently turned their attention to studying immigrants' experiences learning smaller languages (Hoffmann and Holm 2021; Rosiak 2023). Secondly, the Icelandic language context is characterized by ideologies of linguistic purism, which implies that increasing migration to Iceland poses the question how non-native Icelandic speakers are perceived and integrated into the Icelandic speaking community (Bade 2019; Kristinsson 2018). Thirdly, Iceland's migration policies and educational program in Icelandic as a second language were implemented relatively recently (Innes 2020), making Iceland an interesting case to study how formal language training, language acquisition of immigrants, and inclusion in the receiving society are linked.

We aim to answer the following research questions:

- a) Which demographic, social, and economic factors determine Icelandic proficiency among immigrants in Iceland?
- b) What are the factors contributing to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of immigrants with language courses in Iceland?
- c) How are language proficiency and satisfaction with language courses related to immigrants' socio-cultural and economic involvement and inclusion in Icelandic society (e.g., social contacts, participation in local associations, and income)?

In the following sections of the present work, we provide an overview of recent immigration to Iceland, as well as the government's current language policies. We then reflect on the state of research on language acquisition among adult immigrants and immigrants' satisfaction with language classes. We present the methods, i.e., data collection and analysis, followed by the results of our study. Finally, we discuss our results and how they relate to current literature on immigrant language acquisition, limitations of the present work and the most important conclusions.

2. The context: Immigration to Iceland and Icelandic as a second language

Immigration to Iceland has increased notably in recent years. In 2022, about 16.3% of Iceland's inhabitants were immigrants, while in 2000, the number of immigrants amounted to just 3% (Statistics Iceland 2022). The largest group of immigrants in Iceland is from Poland, comprising 40% of the total immigrant population. We follow Statistics Iceland in defining an 'immigrant' as "a person born abroad with both parents foreign born and all grandparents foreign born" (Statistics Iceland 2022). With about 350,000 speakers, the Icelandic language community is relatively small. The Icelandic government is committed to the preservation of Icelandic, and language ideologies in Iceland are characterized by linguistic purism (Hilmarrsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010; 2018; 2020). Examples of institutions and initiatives involved in the preservation of Icelandic are the Icelandic language committee (Íslensk málnefnd), specifically, by coining Icelandic neologisms instead of adopting foreign loanwords (Kristinsson 2020, 3). Kristinsson (2020, 7–8) lists some of the measures taken by the Icelandic government to assure the continuity of Icelandic: "(1) a detailed official language policy, in 2009 [...], (2) "a separate language legislation on Icelandic and Icelandic Sign Language, in 2011", (3) "an ambitious language technology program for 2018–2022." The explicit aim of the language technology funding and program is "to protect and support the Icelandic language as well as to facilitate the use of new information technologies in the Icelandic community, for the

benefit of the public, institutions and companies” (Rannís 2018). The Icelandic Language Technology Fund supports projects related to Icelandic language technology in the digital age. Lastly, “a parliamentary resolution on Icelandic was unanimously passed by the Icelandic Parliament” in which a “nationwide language awareness campaign [...] is promoted” (Kristinsson 2020, 7–8). The need “to protect the Icelandic language” is also emphasized in the migration policy implemented in 2007, in which Icelandic language education is described as serving a dual purpose of “speeding up their [immigrants’] integration into society and strengthening the position of the Icelandic language” (Icelandic Ministry of Social Affairs 2007, 6).

While “Icelandic with a foreign accent is increasingly a part of everyday language experience” (Kristinsson 2018, 245), studies have indicated that it is not always easy for speakers of Icelandic as a second language to use the language in their everyday lives. Skaptadóttir and Innes (2017) show that Icelandic proficiency functions as a tool for inclusion in terms of social contacts or access to the labor market, but the authors also show that many immigrants perceived the difficulties they faced when trying to become a part of the speaking community and use Icelandic in their everyday lives as “the largest hindrance to integration and acceptance” (Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017, 25).

Innes (2015) illustrates that formal education in Icelandic as a second language is a relatively recent development. Informal conversational courses were offered in people’s homes from the 1980s onwards (Innes 2015, 188). Until today, informal courses are offered by volunteers in various initiatives across the country. Formal Icelandic language courses were first offered in the 1990s by companies for their employees. In the 2000s, schools devoted to teaching colloquial Icelandic were established. Although it had not yet instituted any formal overview over language training, the government began turning its attention to the language skills of immigrants, particularly those seeking permanent residence and citizenship. The 2007 decision to make language learning a condition for permanent residence permits and citizenship was based on policies in Denmark, Finland, and Norway (Innes 2020). Language tests were administered to applicants starting in 2009. Today, anyone seeking permanent residency must

complete 150 hours of formal Icelandic training before applying (Island.is). In contrast, those applying for citizenship are not required to attend language classes; however, they must take a language test to prove their competency. The level of proficiency required to pass the test is equivalent to an estimated 240 hours of language training (Innes and Skaptadóttir 2016). A study of “residents of Iceland whose families had lived in the country for several generations (‘natives’)” (Innes 2020, 179) showed that first language Icelandic speakers perceived the language test as a recognition of “language as an important component of Icelandic identity and citizenship” (Innes 2020, 183).

Compared to some of the other Nordic countries, there is little government influence on language education for adult immigrants in Iceland in terms of access to funding and standardization of the courses as well as requirements for teachers. This is in line with the results that “Iceland’s approach to social welfare [...] has never been as universal or state driven as in other Scandinavian countries” (Innes 2020). For example, students in Iceland must pay language course tuition in full up front and may receive full or partial refunds from their unions, while such courses are completely free of charge for everyone in Sweden and Denmark (Fabricius and Westerberg 2023, 5). Findings of a previous study based on our data indicate that immigrants are rather dissatisfied with the quality of Icelandic language courses (Sölvason and Meckl 2019). The Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture has developed curricular guidelines for courses in Icelandic as a second language for adult learners (Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2008; Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2012). Research has indicated that teachers and schools use the guidelines as a rough framework, but that these guidelines do not affect the course design as significantly as in other countries, while some teachers are unaware of the guidelines altogether (Innes and Skaptadóttir 2016; Innes 2020).

In Iceland, language schools are funded by a combination of private funding and government grants. The sole criterion for a language course to receive government support is that it has a minimum number of participants; the curriculum does not have to meet any requirements for quality or efficacy, as is the case in many other countries.

There are no formal requirements for teachers of adult learners of Icelandic as a second language and the “majority of teachers also have had little to no training in adult education strategies” (Innes 2020, 179). The MA-course in *Annarsmálsfræði* (Second Language Studies) at the University of Iceland teaches general skills for teaching a second language and contains a course specifically about teaching Icelandic as a second language (Háskóli Íslands, n.d.), but resources for teachers of Icelandic as a second language are otherwise limited. In Denmark, Finland, and Norway, teaching qualifications are a precondition to teaching either by law (Denmark and Norway) or as a crucial criterion (Finland) whereas in Sweden, “teachers without qualifications are permitted to deliver training, which also regularly happens” (Fabricius and Westerberg 2023, 61).

Language teachers in Iceland are paid per course and “almost none of them work full-time as language instructors” (Innes 2020, 178). Due to the similarity in Sweden and Iceland that teachers of Icelandic and Swedish as second languages are not required to have teaching qualifications, it is noteworthy that an uneven quality of courses is reported in both countries (Fabricius and Westerberg 2023; Hoffmann et al. 2021).

Icelandic is primarily taught at institutions for continuing education which generally offer four courses of increasing difficulty, though there are institutions that offer five courses. The University of Iceland offers a one-year practical diploma as well as a BA in Icelandic as a Second Language, which consists not only of language lessons, but also courses on Icelandic culture, literature, and the history of Iceland. Students can choose to complete a minor, major, or a full bachelor’s degree in the program (Course Catalogue 2019–2020: Icelandic as a Second Language 2019). The University of Iceland also offers single courses, for example Icelandic – the Basics and Icelandic culture (Course Catalogue 2019–2020).

To conclude, policies and measures taken by the Icelandic government have increasingly focused on the topic of immigrant integration and immigrant language acquisition in recent years. However, in contrast to other countries, such as Germany or the Nordic countries, Iceland does not have a coordinated, state-governed program.

3. Literature review: Immigrant language acquisition and the role of language courses

There exists a considerable body of literature on the relation between language acquisition and immigrants' integration into receiving societies (Chiswick and Miller 2001; Esser 2006; Norton and Toohey 2011). In short, the literature pertaining to language proficiency and integration strongly suggests that a higher level of proficiency in the receiving country's language is linked to immigrant integration. However, if this link between language and integration is more closely studied, research indicates that other factors must be taken into consideration. The idea that language leads to access to the labor market has been described as a "shaky promise" by Heinemann (2017, 177). Studies on the link between language proficiency and immigrants' incorporation into receiving societies vary with respect to how integration is measured. Approaches include economic integration (Lochmann et al. 2019), social incorporation, e.g., in terms of inter-group contact (Tip, Brown, and Morrice 2018), or combinations of economic and non-economic aspects (Kristen et al. 2015). Numerous studies investigate predictors of language acquisition among immigrants. Many of them refer to three key groups of factors defined by Chiswick and Miller (2001):

- *exposure factors*, such as language acquisition pre- or post-migration, length of stay in the receiving country, and frequency of use of the language,
- *efficiency factor*, such as educational attainment, age at migration, and linguistic distance, and
- *economic incentives*, such as employment status, income, and intended duration of stay.

A review of literature shows that a higher level of exposure to the language both pre- and post-migration, a longer length of stay in the receiving society and a higher frequency of use are linked to a higher proficiency in the language of the receiving society among immigrants (Chiswick and Miller 2001, 393).

More efficiency with regards to language learning is also associated with higher levels in the receiving country's language. A higher level of education is strongly linked to higher proficiency in the local language (Asfar et al. 2019; Chiswick and Miller 2001; Kristen et al. 2015; Van Tubergen and Wierenga 2011). Further, a younger age at migration is associated with higher language proficiency (Asfar et al. 2019; Chiswick and Miller 2001; Kristen et al. 2015; Van Tubergen and Wierenga 2011). The linguistic distance, the degree to which two languages are similar or different, between the native language of an immigrant and the native language of the receiving society can also predict the likelihood of an immigrant learning the language of the receiving society: Immigrants whose native language is similar to the language of the receiving country tend to be more proficient in the local language (Chiswick & Miller 2004).

Another category of factors associated with immigrants' proficiency in the language of the receiving society are economic factors such as their employment status, their income level, and their intended length of stay in the receiving society. Chiswick and Miller (2001, 395) find that those with more wealth tend to be more proficient in the language of the receiving country. However, in light of increasingly transnational and global labor markets, there is also a considerable group of wealthy migrants that does not intend to learn the local language, for example because they only intend to stay temporarily in the receiving country. Intended duration of stay is, thus, another factor associated with immigrants' proficiency in the language of the receiving society: Those who intend to stay longer or settle permanently in the receiving society are more likely to acquire the language of the receiving society (Chiswick and Miller 2001, 394).

The gender factor does not fall directly into the category's exposure, efficiency, and economic incentives discussed in this section. Gender is, however, a noteworthy factor to discuss in this article because the link between immigrants' gender and language proficiency reveals contradictory results. Several studies indicate that female gender is positively correlated with language proficiency (Kristen et al., 2015), while other publications report that male gender is positively correlated with language proficiency (Morrice et al. 2019). Furthermore, some studies suggest that gender has no relevant effect

on language proficiency (Asfar et al. 2019; Chiswick and Miller 2001). One explanation for these contradictory results is to be found in the set-up of the studies. Studies explaining a better male proficiency are mostly smaller-scale case studies focusing on specific groups of migrants. For example, in the case of a study on refugees in the United Kingdom (N=280), female respondents had both significantly lower levels of language proficiency and significantly lower levels of pre-migration education (Morrice et al. 2019, 11). These results suggest that there are gendered differences in opportunities for language acquisition in specific groups of migrants. In contrast, several larger-scale studies show that female immigrants report better skills in the receiving country language (Kristen et al. 2015; Van der Slik, Van Hout, and Schepens, 2015).

In addition to studying immigrants' language acquisition, studies on their opinions about the language course they attended can provide valuable insights on the factors impacting immigrants' proficiency in the local language. Research on satisfaction with language courses in Sweden has shown that the majority of participants in "Swedish for Foreigners" classes "report a high satisfaction with their language learning at the training program" (Reichenberg and Berhanu 2018, 284) and the authors identify factors that can impact immigrants' language learning process.

There are indications that students' perception of the teacher impacted their satisfaction with the language training and that "the more engaged, humorous and nice the teachers were, the more satisfied the students were with their language learning" (Reichenberg and Berhanu 2018, 287). A second correlation, which is independent from the courses as such, is that participants who had more exposure to the language outside of the classes were more satisfied with the language training (Reichenberg and Berhanu 2018). The study among immigrants in Sweden further showed that those with a higher level of education reported to be less satisfied with the courses than those with lower levels of education (Reichenberg and Berhanu 2018).

Several studies, for example, two quantitative surveys conducted among Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in Western Europe, have shown that attending language courses positively influences immi-

grants' language proficiency (Hoehne and Michalowski 2016; Van Tubergen and Wierenga 2011). Prior studies also show that language course attendance has a possible effect on other areas, such as social contacts (Hoehne and Michalowski 2015) and increased knowledge about the receiving society, e.g., about its culture but also practical information (Lochmann et al. 2019). For example, Lochmann et al. (2019, 266) found evidence for an “information effect” in their study among immigrants in France: “There is as well suggestive evidence of an information effect: before, during and after the classes, immigrants can obtain useful information on job search strategies from interactions with classmates and teachers.” The attendance of language courses, therefore, also impacts domains other than just the acquisition of the language.

However, while the influence of language courses on learners' lives goes beyond the sole acquisition of the language alone, studies also show that there are other factors more relevant to language acquisition than formal language training. Esser (2006) states that “existing studies only show a weak positive effect of language courses on immigrant language acquisition.” Hoehne and Michalowski (2015, 134) have suggested that the small impact of language courses on immigrants' language acquisition “brings up the question of whether policy makers are mistaken in spending a substantial amount of public money on language teaching for immigrants.” In the same article, Hoehne and Michalowski (2015) show that timing of courses is a crucial factor and early attendance of language courses was found to have positive effects on both language skills and social contacts.

The literature review reveals that, while there is ample research on predictors of immigrant language acquisition and the role of language course in immigrants' language acquisition, most studies have been conducted in larger language communities with longer histories of immigration. We aim to contribute to this research with a larger case study in a society with strong ideologies of linguistic purism and high expectations that immigrants will learn the language.

4. The study

In order to analyze self-reported Icelandic proficiency and satisfaction with Icelandic courses among immigrants in Iceland, as well as factors influencing these two variables, we analyzed survey data collected among adult immigrants in Iceland. In the following chapter we describe our data collection and data analysis.

4.1. Data Collection

The research presented in the following section drew on data derived from a large-scale survey conducted in autumn 2018 among adult immigrants in Iceland. This survey was carried out in the form of an online survey implemented by the Research Center of the University of Akureyri (RHA) using the software SoGoSurvey. The survey was available in Icelandic, English, Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Arabic, Russian, and Thai. The translation office Skjal provided some of the translations, and native speakers on the research team provided further translations. The questionnaire contained 39 questions covering socio-demographic information, social aspects, economic factors, language, and information about participants' migration experiences and intentions. Snowball sampling was used, and lifelong learning centers and language schools played a key role in starting the snowball. The following lifelong learning centers and language schools were involved in the data collection: Austurbrú, Fræðslumiðstöð Vestfjarða, Fræðlunetið – Símenntun á Suðurlandi, Fullorðinsfræðlan-IceSchool, Miðstöð Símenntunar á Suðurnesjum, Mímir, Múltíkultí, Námsflokkar Hafnarfjarðar, Retor Fræðsla, Símenntunarmiðstöð Eyjafjarðar – SÍMEY, Símenntun á Vesturlandi, Dósaverksmiðjan – The Tin Can Factory and Viska Símenntunarmiðstöð Vestmannaeyja. Based on the response in the first two weeks of the data collection, it can be estimated that about a quarter of respondents received information about this study through lifelong learning centers. In addition to lifelong learning centers and language schools, we followed a second path of recruitment through organizations and individuals. In this second phase, the survey was distributed on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook) and in certain regions of Iceland through assis-

tants based in these regions, who forwarded the survey to immigrants to collect data in these areas. The assistants hired to help with the data collection were in the extended network of the researchers involved in the research project and well-connected with the immigrant communities in certain regions. They were hired to distribute the survey and recruit more participants in regions where participation of immigrants was low. Participants received written information on the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and anonymity of the data collected. Names were not collected. Due to Iceland's small population, additional measures were taken to protect immigrants' identities. Instead of collecting information on countries of origin, we collected information on larger regions of origin.

4.2. Data Analysis

We examined the factors (independent variables) age, gender, origin, education, region of residence in Iceland, duration of stay in Iceland, regular use of Icelandic, number of memberships in clubs, organizations, and associations, social contacts, language of response, number of Icelandic classes taken, and income. The dependent variables were 1) satisfaction with Icelandic language classes (SILC) and 2) proficiency in Icelandic as indicated by a composite score (PICS). SILC was measured by one question in the survey: "If you have taken Icelandic courses, how satisfied were you overall with them?" This question was answered by participants on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant "very dissatisfied" and 5 meant "very satisfied." We compared those who were dissatisfied with those who were satisfied, thus, grouping those who were very dissatisfied and rather dissatisfied in one group, and those who were rather satisfied and very satisfied in the other group. This grouping excluded all those who chose "neither/nor" as an answer. PICS was defined by a question asking about proficiency in Icelandic on a Likert scale from 0: don't speak Icelandic, 1: rather poor, 2: neither poor nor good, 3: rather good, 4: fluent. People indicating their proficiency was "rather good" or "fluent" fell into the class "high-PICS," whereas all others fell into the class "low-PICS," except for those who answered the questionnaire in Icelandic. They were also counted to be high-PICS.

To assess the regular use of Icelandic, we built a composite score including ratings of the frequency of using Icelandic media and the likelihood of using Icelandic for shopping, having informal conversations with friends, discussing matters at work, visiting a doctor, and being at home with the family. Each of these situations were rated on a scale of “very unlikely”, which corresponded to a value of 1, to “very likely”, which corresponded to a value of 5. We summed up those values to obtain the composite score. When assessing social contacts, we summed up participants’ answers to two questions: whether 1) they have been invited to Icelandic friends’ homes, and whether 2) they have invited Icelandic friends to their home, where the scale ranged from never=0, once or twice=1, a few times=2, and many times=3. Thus, the maximum score was 6. Social contacts were further assessed through peoples’ memberships in clubs and associations in Iceland. For both dependent variables SILC and PICS, we fitted a binomial logistic regression model with the R-function `glm()` with the independent variables mentioned in this chapter.

5. Results

In the following chapter, we present the results of our study. First, we outline the characteristics of the sample that the study is based on and how we obtained the final number of participants for analysis. Then, we present the results of two logistic regression analyses evaluating factors influencing immigrants’ self-reported proficiency in Icelandic and satisfaction with Icelandic courses, respectively.

Our analysis is based on a sample of 1934 participants. We arrived at this number after we had to include 277 of the initial 2211 participants. We will first outline how we obtained the number of participants this study is based on and the reasons for excluding the participants after describing the characteristics of the final sample.

5.1 Recruited sample and exclusion of missing and ambiguous data

Initially, we recruited 2211 responses from migrants in Iceland or about 4% of the immigrant population in Iceland on 1 January 2019

(Statistics Iceland, 2019). After excluding participants who did not indicate their age or gender, there were 0.5% (N=10) over 66 years old (5 female), 30% (N=625) between 41 and 66 years old (407 female), 61% (N=1284) between 26 and 40 years old (854 female), and 13% (N=274) between 18 and 25 years old (193 female). Because of the small size of the oldest group, for the purpose of further analysis, we merged the two oldest groups.

We further excluded participants who have never lived elsewhere than in Iceland, i.e. who were not immigrants (N=13), and participants who did not indicate how long they had lived in Iceland (N=6), their income (N=62), age (N=12), gender (N=8), origin (N=7), and proficiency in Icelandic (N=19).

Finally, we needed to exclude participants who did not provide a meaningful answer to the question about how many Icelandic language courses they had taken. There were several participants who obviously misunderstood this question and seemed to indicate the number of individual lectures attended, not courses as the number of courses indicated was considerable higher than the number of courses usually offered (4–5). We decided to exclude all participants who reported taking more than six courses. This led to the exclusion of an additional 165 respondents, resulting in a sample of 1934 participants for further analysis. To be included in our assessment of satisfaction with language courses, participants had to have taken at least one language course and answered the question about satisfaction. There were 357 participants who indicated that they had not taken a course, and 54 participants who did not answer the question about satisfaction. This number (411) is a bit lower than the number of participants we included in the category “0 courses” for the variable numbers of courses taken (N=435). The discrepancy might be due to some people starting a course but never finishing it, and therefore indicating the number of courses as 0.

5.2 Sample characteristics

Most participants (62%, N=1215) were female, between 26 and 40 years old (57%, N=1111), and came from Central and Eastern Europe (66%, N=1287). Because so few participants indicated being from

Asia, Africa, Central America, South America, and “other” regions, we merged them into one category for further analysis. Table 1 shows the demographics of the sample by gender, age, and origin.

There were 1% (N=21) answers in Arabic, 35% (N=669) in English, 8% (N=153) in Icelandic, 3% (N=60) in Latvian, 2% (N=48) in Lithuanian, 50% (N=976) in Polish, and 0.4% (N=7) in Thai. In the sample, 48% (N=926) resided outside of the capital area, while 52% (N=1008) lived in the capital area, including the capital Reykjavík and six municipalities around it.

Table 1: Demographics of the sample by gender, age, and origin.

Gender	female			male		
	>40	26–40	18–25	>40	26–40	18–25
Western Europe, Nordic countries, or North America	81	181	42	33	76	9
Central or Eastern Europe	183	500	105	152	288	59
Asia	32	17	9	4	17	7
Africa	10	4	3	6	4	0
Central America	1	0	1	0	0	0
South America	4	2	7	0	2	0
Other	18	10	5	1	10	0

Most participants in the survey were highly educated. More specifically, 3% (N=63) had completed primary school, 13% (N=244) had vocational training, 31% (N=599) had a matriculation exam, 48% (N=931) had completed a university degree, and 5% (N=97) did not fit into any of those categories. It should be noted that we merged participants who did not indicate their educational level or indicated that they did not know into the category “other.” Furthermore, for the purpose of further analysis, we merged the categories “vocational training” and “primary school.”

The distribution of duration of stay is shown in Figure 1. Most participants were in Iceland for more than 2 years, which confirms that they had enough time to take language courses and experience life in Iceland. In order to avoid small group sizes, we merged all participants with a stay of longer than 10 years into one group and all with a stay of up to two years into one group.

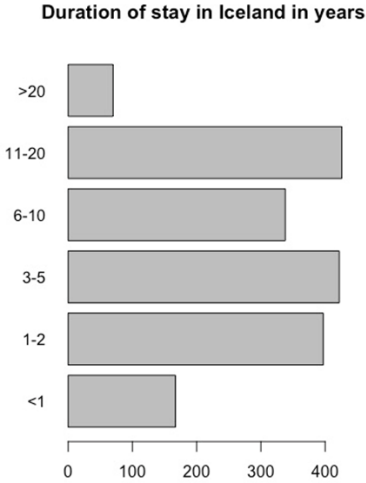


Figure 1: Distribution of duration of stay shows the number of participants on the x-axis and years of stay on the y-axis.

The largest group had taken no course in Icelandic (22%, $N=435$), followed by the group who had taken only one course in Icelandic (21%, $N=405$), but a considerable part took two (18%, $N=352$), three (17%, $N=334$), or even more courses (21%, $N=408$). The detailed distribution is shown in Figure 2.

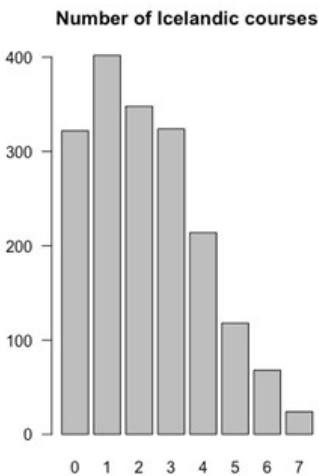


Figure 2: Distribution of number of language classes taken with number of classes on x-axis and number of participants on y-axis.

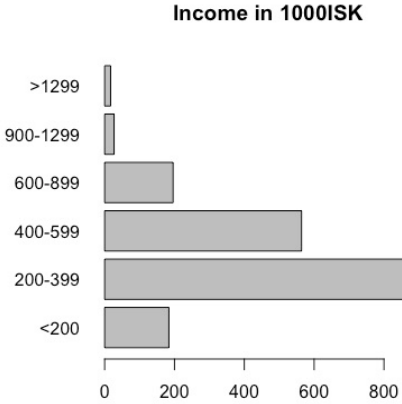


Figure 3: Distribution of income shows number of participants on the x-axis and income classes on the y-axis.

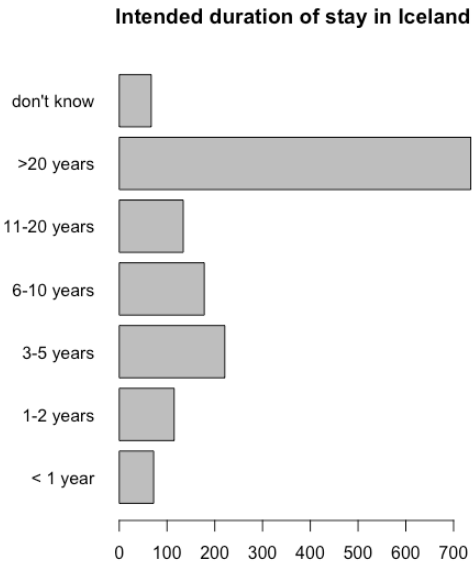


Figure 4: Distribution of intended duration of stay with number of participants on the x-axis and intended duration of stay on the y-axis.

Income before taxes was distributed as shown in Figure 3. Given the typical salaries in Iceland, it turns out that the salaries in the sample were rather small, with the largest part earning less than 400,000 ISK per month. According to Statistics Iceland (Hagstofa Íslands 2019), this means that the largest part earned the minimum

wage or less. Only 0.9% (N=17) participants had an income of 1,299,000 ISK or higher; therefore, for the purpose of the statistical analysis, we merged them with the sample of people with an income of at least 900,000 ISK.

We also analyzed the intended length of stay among the participants and found that 38% (N=736) intended to stay for more than 20 years in Iceland, followed by 11% of participants who wanted to stay for 3–5 years (N=221). Figure 4 shows the distribution.

5.3 Proficiency in Icelandic

When asked about self-perceived proficiency in the Icelandic language, most participants perceived their proficiency to be rather low. Specifically, 73% (N=1415) of participants indicated low to medium proficiency in Icelandic, while 27% (N=519) indicated high proficiency. Figure 5 shows the distribution.

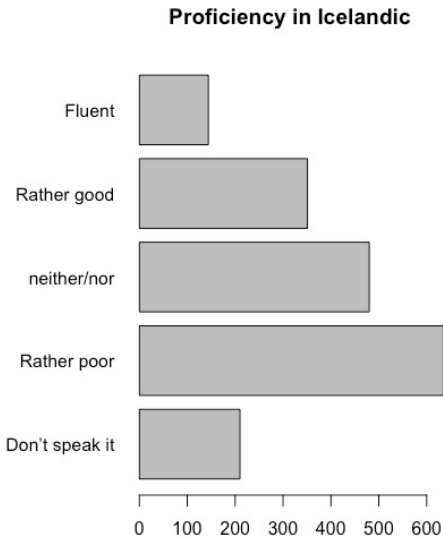


Figure 5: Distribution of self-reported Icelandic proficiency shows number of participants on the x-axis and self-reported proficiency in Icelandic on the y-axis.

We analyzed which factors influenced self-reported proficiency in Icelandic with a logistic regression. The results from the logistic regression for determining factors that influence self-reported proficiency in Icelandic are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Regression analysis for determining factors that influence self-reported language proficiency

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
Length of stay	0.905857	0.072840	12.436	< 2e-16 ***
Age	0.522274	0.130480	4.003	6.26e-05 ***
Female vs. male	0.404486	0.164732	2.455	0.014072 *
Central and Eastern Europe vs. Western Europe, Nordic countries, and North America	-1.144965	0.184258	-6.214	5.17e-10 ***
Other regions vs. Western Europe, Nordic countries, and North America	-0.852370	0.249170	-3.421	0.000624 ***
Matriculation exam vs. primary school or vocational training	0.195448	0.211931	0.922	0.356409
University degree vs. primary school or vocational training	0.875040	0.216358	4.044	5.25e-05 ***
Other education vs. primary school or vocational training	0.850591	0.358838	2.370	0.017769 *
Capital area	0.243662	0.142305	1.712	0.086850
Memberships in clubs and associations	0.026745	0.120962	0.221	0.825016
Frequency of use of Icelandic	-0.208016	0.016751	-12.418	< 2e-16 ***
Social contacts	0.287654	0.040929	7.028	2.09e-12 ***
Number of courses taken	0.056682	0.044906	1.262	0.206863
Satisfaction with courses	-0.003661	0.045398	-0.081	0.935732
Income	0.097644	0.080989	1.206	0.227955
Intended stay	0.116965	0.046604	2.510	0.012080 *
Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1 (Dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1) Null deviance: 2249.7 on 1933 degrees of freedom Residual deviance: 1349.1 on 1917 degrees of freedom AIC: 1383.1 Number of Fisher Scoring iterations: 6				

According to our data, the factor with the largest effect on Icelandic proficiency is the duration of stay in Iceland, where a longer stay is related to higher proficiency. Almost equally strong is the rela-

tion to the composite score of Icelandic use. In contrast to our expectations, the more likely participants were to use Icelandic, the lower they estimated their proficiency in the language.

Another strong factor was the amount of social contact with Icelanders, where participants who reported more social contact estimated their Icelandic proficiency to be higher. Next, origin interacted significantly with proficiency, where origin from Western Europe, the Nordic countries, or North America was related to greater Icelandic proficiency than other origins. A university degree was related to greater Icelandic proficiency than primary school or vocational training, and the heterogenous group with “other” education reported higher proficiency than participants with primary school or vocational training. Younger age, a longer intended stay, and being female were related to higher proficiency in Icelandic. Residence in Iceland (capital area vs. non-capital area), membership in clubs, associations and societies, satisfaction with the courses, and income did not significantly interact with proficiency in Icelandic. Most surprisingly, the number of courses taken also had no significant relation to perceived proficiency in Icelandic.

5.4 Satisfaction with Language Courses

There were 12% (N=240) of participants who had attended Icelandic courses and who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the courses. In order to compare satisfied with dissatisfied individuals we excluded those participants who indicated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Among all participants who had taken language courses, there were 46% (N=891) of participants who were very dissatisfied or rather dissatisfied, while 20% (N=392) were rather satisfied or very satisfied. Figure 6 illustrates the distribution.

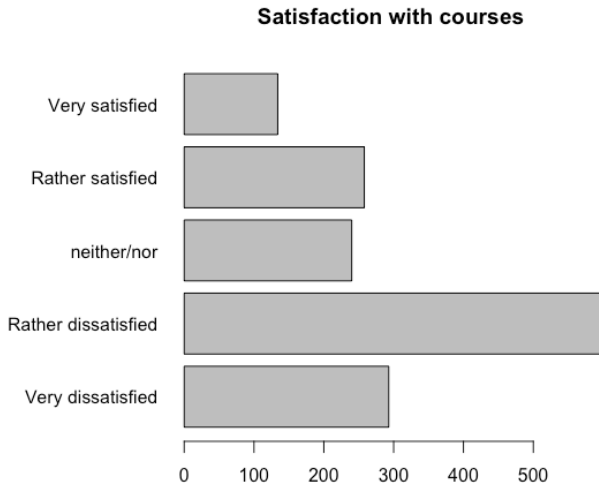


Figure 6: Satisfaction with courses with number of participants on the x-axis and satisfaction with courses on the y-axis.

The results from the logistic regression for determining factors that influence satisfaction with courses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression analysis for determining factors that influence satisfaction with Icelandic courses

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
Length of stay	0.113529	0.057616	1.970	0.048790 *
Age	-0.041123	0.119842	-0.343	0.731494
Female vs. male	-0.348416	0.142466	-2.446	0.014461 *
Central and Eastern Europe vs. Western Europe, Nordic Countries, and North America	0.086913	0.160650	0.541	0.588500
Other regions vs. Western Europe, Nordic countries, and North America	0.410140	0.212290	1.932	0.053362 .
Matriculation exam vs. primary school or vocational training	0.126097	0.208783	0.604	0.545869
University degree vs. primary school or vocational training	0.427472	0.203764	2.098	0.035916 *
Other education vs. primary school or vocational training	0.118691	0.331388	0.358	0.720222

Capital area	-0.214370	0.126676	-1.692	0.090593 .
Membership in clubs and associations	-0.018237	0.106156	-0.172	0.863597
Frequency of using Icelandic	0.068909	0.013948	4.940	7.79e-07 ***
Contacts	0.005927	0.034312	0.173	0.862860
Income	0.049195	0.071247	0.690	0.489888
Intended length of stay	-0.039886	0.040353	-0.988	0.322940
Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1 (Dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1) Null deviance: 2067.1 on 1522 degrees of freedom Residual deviance: 2022.8 on 1508 degrees of freedom AIC: 2052.8 Number of Fisher Scoring iterations: 4				

Satisfaction with language courses

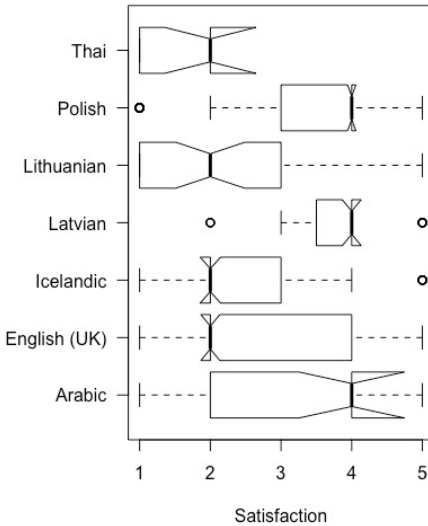


Figure 7: Boxplots for satisfaction with Icelandic courses by language in which the survey was answered.

Satisfaction with language courses was higher for individuals who stayed longer in Iceland, who used Icelandic more frequently, male participants as opposed to female, and those who had higher education. As a trend, those living outside of the capital area were more satisfied with language courses and individuals who came from Asia, Africa, Central and South America and other places, were more satis-

fied with the courses compared to people from Western Europe or Nordic countries. In order to investigate this trend further, we looked at the distribution between groups according to the language in which the participant took the survey in order to further differentiate the subgroups of participants. Figure 7 indicates that people answering in Arabic were more satisfied than people answering in other languages, whereas participants answering in Thai or Lithuanian were particularly dissatisfied.

Age, memberships in clubs, organizations or associations, social contact with Icelanders, and income did not significantly affect satisfaction.

6. Discussion

The aim of the present study is to answer the research questions: a) Which demographic, social, and economic factors determine Icelandic proficiency among immigrants in Iceland?; b) What are the factors contributing to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of immigrants with language courses in Iceland?; and c) How are language proficiency and satisfaction with language courses related to immigrants' socio-cultural and economic involvement and inclusion in Icelandic society (e.g. social contacts, participation in local associations, and income)?

Overall, the results of our study are broadly in line with previous research about immigrants' language acquisition (Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, and Sweet 2018; Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Kristen, Mühlau, and Schacht 2015). However, it is noteworthy that the number of language courses attended has no relevant effect on language proficiency, which is a result that does not appear as clearly in other studies. This result has implications for our understanding of how formal language training and language proficiency are linked. Results indicate that, in relation to social factors, formal language training has a comparatively small influence on immigrants' self-reported proficiency. Another implication of our study is that we find evidence for a link between Icelandic proficiency and social integration, but not economic integration when economic integration is measured as income.

6.1 Icelandic proficiency

The results relating to language proficiency need to be interpreted considering the circumstance that we measured Icelandic language proficiency as self-reported language proficiency, which is only a limited indicator of actual language proficiency (Edele, Seuring, and Kristen, 2015). However, our results are broadly in line with prior studies because most factors associated with exposure, efficiency, and economic incentives (Chiswick and Miller 2001) turned out to be relevant predictors of self-reported language proficiency in the presented case of Iceland.

In accordance with the model developed by Chiswick and Miller (2001), our results show that most *exposure factors* were related to a higher proficiency in the language of the receiving society. A longer length of stay in Iceland and more social contacts with Icelanders are positively linked to higher levels of Icelandic proficiency. These results are also in line with prior quantitative research in Iceland indicating that the length of stay in Iceland had a positive effect on language proficiency (Ólafsson and Meckl 2013). More exposure to the language in terms of daily interactions in Iceland was, however, associated with lower self-reported proficiency in Icelandic. This result is contrary to the assumption that a higher frequency of using the language is related to being more proficient in the language. Finding a possible reason for this result could be a question for further research. One explanation might be that both language proficiency and language use were measured through self-reported language proficiency. This might reflect participants' confidence in their abilities to use the language rather than their actual language use. Another considerable result relating to exposure to the language was that we found no link between numbers of Icelandic courses attended and self-reported Icelandic proficiency. In this respect, our data differs significantly from previous research which showed that language courses are positively linked to the acquisition of language skills, even though the effect is generally reported to be relatively small (Esser 2006; Hoehne and Michalowski 2016). The number of language courses attended might not tell the whole story of immigrants' language proficiency. Some immigrants might have attended multi-

ple courses but have no exposure to the language outside of the classroom. Social networks might have a larger effect on immigrants' Icelandic proficiency than the number of courses; immigrants who were more exposed to the language (longer stay in Iceland, more frequent use of Icelandic) were more satisfied with the Icelandic courses.

As expected, based on Chiswick and Miller's (2001) model, our results further reveal a positive link between efficiency factors and higher proficiency in the receiving country language. A higher level of education and younger age were positively linked to higher proficiency in the receiving country language, a result which has also been found in prior studies in other countries (Asfar et al. 2019; Chiswick and Miller 2001; Kristen et al. 2015; Van Tubergen and Wierenga 2011).

Our results regarding *economic incentives* are partially in accordance with the model developed by Chiswick and Miller (2001). Income level did not affect immigrants' self-reported language proficiency, which is contrary to Chiswick and Miller's (2001) result that wealthier migrants did report higher proficiency in the language of the receiving society. This result has two implications. Firstly, language skills do not necessarily lead to better employment opportunities, recalling Heinemann's (2017) description of the link between language skills and economic integration as a "shaky promise." Secondly, migrants today take their decisions to learn or not learn languages on a global market and, especially for some migrants employed in higher income jobs in international companies, learning the local language might not be perceived as crucial.

While the economic incentive income was not linked to language proficiency, a longer intended stay in Iceland did positively influence immigrants' self-reported language proficiency. This result indicates that those who intend to settle permanently tend to invest more into learning the language of the receiving society and is in accordance with prior quantitative research in Iceland (Ólafsson and Meckl 2013) as well as international studies (Chiswick and Miller 2001, 394). We found that female migrants reported higher language skills than male migrants, as has also been reported in some prior studies (Ólafsson and Meckl 2013; Van der Slik et al. 2015). One possible explanation of this result, considering our other findings that a longer intended length of stay was related to higher skills in the re-

ceiving country language, could be explained by prior studies among migrants from Poland and the Philippines in Iceland which showed that in the case of both countries “female immigrants were more likely to move permanently to Iceland than men” (Skaptadóttir and Garðarsdóttir 2021, 31).

Thus, based on the analysis of factors influencing language proficiency, we conclude that our results partially confirm the frequently repeated notion that language skills are linked to increased integration into the host society (Adamuti-Trache et al. 2018; Chiswick and Miller 2001; Kristen et al. 2015), but only with respect to socio-cultural integration and exposure to the receiving society (e.g. length of stay). As income and language proficiency were not linked while intended length of stay (another economic incentive) and proficiency were, our results do not indicate a clear link between economic incentives and language proficiency.

6.2 Satisfaction/ dissatisfaction with courses

Our data on satisfaction with Icelandic language courses has already been analyzed by Sölvason and Meckl for a report published in 2019. This report shows that immigrants in Iceland tend to be rather dissatisfied with the Icelandic language courses they attended (Sölvason and Meckl 2019). A potential explanation for the dissatisfaction with the language courses could be derived from the lack of relation between the number of Icelandic courses and self-reported language proficiency. It is plausible to assume that if language courses do not lead to language acquisition students will report dissatisfaction with the courses.

Other factors that might explain people’s dissatisfaction with language courses are structural and systematic characteristics of the education system for Icelandic as a second language. Among these factors are the structure of the courses and the lack of government overview on language training in Iceland in comparison to other places (Innes and Skaptadóttir 2016; Innes 2020). This might potentially affect the quality of the courses. Similarly, the teacher factor is worth considering, as not all teachers of Icelandic as a second language for adult students have received pedagogical training (Innes 2020).

Another aspect might be the timing of language course attendance, which has been found to be crucial to the effectiveness of language courses (Hoehne and Michalowski 2016). We did not ask when participants attended courses in our study, i.e., whether it was shortly after moving to Iceland or later. This represents one of the limitations. However, the model of language education funding in Iceland is organized in such a way that students have to pay for courses up front and are sometimes eligible for reimbursement through their unions. This might impact the effectiveness of language training. Specifically, migrants who may not be able to afford to sign up for language courses soon after arriving will miss out on the benefits of attending courses early. As prior research on immigrants' satisfaction with language courses was conducted among students who received free language training (Reichenberg and Berhanu 2018), it might be insightful to investigate to what extent course fees determine students' expectations, as well as their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the courses.

In addition to the structure of the system to teach Icelandic as a second language, another possible explanation for immigrants' dissatisfaction with Icelandic language courses could be possible frustration arising from trying to enter the Icelandic speaking community. This has been shown to pose a challenge for immigrants in Iceland (Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017). Negative experiences entering the speaking community might affect immigrants' rating of their experiences with language courses and investment in learning the language of the receiving society (Norton and Toohey 2011).

This confirms prior studies indicating that more exposure to the language is linked to more satisfaction with language courses (Reichenberg and Berhanu 2018). When looking at specific groups, we found a trend that participants from Asia, Africa, Central and South America and other places tended to be more satisfied with the courses compared to people from Western Europe or Nordic countries. Further follow-up on this tendency revealed that that participants answering in Lithuanian and Thai were particularly dissatisfied whilst participants answering in Arabic were particularly satisfied. This indicates a need for further research into possible reasons for dissatisfaction / satisfaction among these groups.

The results presented in this study demonstrate that language courses in Iceland do not seem to address the needs of immigrants in Iceland. This confirms the notion that formal language training (i.e., whether an immigrant has attended courses and how many) is very limited as an indicator whereas other factors, such as socio-demographic factors are more significant indicators.

6.3 Limitations

The data for this study has been collected in 2018. The results therefore primarily reflect the opinions of participant at that time and, thus, do not necessarily reflect immigrants' language proficiency and attitudes towards language courses in 2023. Additionally, it has been argued in prior research that self-reporting of language skills is an insufficient measure of language proficiency (Edele, Seuring, and Kristen 2015). However, this method is well established and especially practical for large-scale studies, even though the extent to which it accurately represents language proficiency remains debatable (Adamuti-Trache et al. 2018). An important limitation is also that the question about the number of language courses attended by immigrants was misunderstood by some respondents and should be clarified in further research. Another limitation of our study is that we did not collect data on the time frame when participants attended Icelandic courses and where they took them. Our discussion and conclusion, therefore, can only give an indication of Icelandic courses in Iceland in general, not a certain type of courses.

7. Conclusion

Immigration to Iceland has increased significantly in recent years. Since 2007, language proficiency has been a criterion for permanent residence and citizenship in Iceland. It is therefore of relevance to investigate factors determining self-reported language proficiency and satisfaction with language courses among immigrants in Iceland. The main contribution of our study is that we show that factors influencing self-reported language proficiency and satisfaction with

courses are broadly in line with other studies, but that there are noteworthy differences to other studies, such as the finding that the number of language courses attended has no relevant effect on immigrants' self-reported language proficiency. In light of the challenges immigrants report facing when learning and using the language, language courses deserve more attention from policy makers, since they play a crucial role during the integration of immigrants, and they also provide a forum for immigrants to acquire social contacts and obtain information about life in the receiving country.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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ÚTDRÁTTUR

Forspárþættir um ánægju / óánægju með íslenskunám og málakunnáttu meðal fullorðinna innflytjenda á Íslandi

Að tileinka sér tungumálið er oft álitinn mikilvægur þáttur í inngildingunni innflytjenda að nýju samfélagi. Könnuð var íslenskukunnátta og ánægja með tungumálanámskeið meðal innflytjenda á Íslandi og byggt á gögnum ($N=2.139$) sem safnað var árið 2018. Tvíliðaáðhvarfsgreining sýnir að kunnátta í íslensku helst í hendur við jákvæð félagsleg samskipti við Íslendinga ($z=7.028$, $p=0$) en ekki tekjur. Niðurstöður eru að hluta til í samræmi við niðurstöður í öðrum löndum: Útsetning fyrir tungumálinu (lengd dvalar á Íslandi: $z=12.436$, $p=0$; notkunartíðni íslensku: $z=-12.418$, $p=0$) og ástundun (aldur: $z=4.003$, $p=0$; menntun: $z=4.044$, $p=0$) eru viðeigandi forspár um tungumálakunnáttu á Íslandi. Enn fremur er greint frá því að innflytjendur á Íslandi séu fremur óánægðir með íslenskunámskeið, því mat þeirra er að námskeið sem í boði eru taki ekki tekið mið af íslenskukunnáttu þeirra á hverjum tíma.

Lykilord: tungumálanám; innflytjendur; inngilding innflytjenda; íslenska; ánægja með tungumálanámskeið

ABSTRACT

Predictors of satisfaction / dissatisfaction with Icelandic language course and Icelandic proficiency among adult immigrants in Iceland

Acquiring the language of the receiving society is often considered a central aspect of immigrants' integration into a new society. We investigate predictors of self-reported Icelandic proficiency and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with language courses among immigrants in Iceland, drawing on data (N=2,139) collected in 2018. Our results of a binomial regression analysis are rather consistent with studies conducted in other countries and the model developed by Chiswick and Miller (2001): Exposure factors (longer stay in Iceland, more social contacts to Icelanders) and efficiency (younger age, higher level education) were relevant predictors of Icelandic language proficiency among immigrants in Iceland. However, economic incentives were only partially linked to Icelandic proficiency. Income level was not associated with language proficiency, but a longer intended stay in Iceland was linked to a higher Icelandic proficiency. This indicates that language proficiency was more closely associated with social contacts and embeddedness in the receiving society than with income. The number of language courses attended was not linked to immigrants' self-reported Icelandic proficiency, which might indicate that formal language training has a comparatively smaller influence on Icelandic language proficiency than other factors.

Keywords: second language acquisition; language proficiency; inclusion of immigrants; Icelandic; satisfaction with language courses