

## Introduction

Traditionally, immigrant integration has been measured through “objective” economic and demographic factors (Ballarino, 2018). More recently, scholars of migration have applied subjective experiences as indicators of integration (Paparusso, 2019; Shen & Kogan, 2020). Subjective indicators offer insight into immigrants’ experiences “centred on personal judgments and criteria, not on criteria deemed important by others” (Paparusso, 2019, p. 493). In this Icelandic study, we analyse immigrants’ perceptions of the quality of life and satisfaction with services in their municipality of residence, as well as their trust in institutions in the receiving society. We are particularly interested in how immigrants’ language skills (self-reported proficiency in English and Icelandic, and frequency of Icelandic use) relate to perceived community quality of life and institutional trust, in comparison with other demographic, economic, and social factors. While self-reported language proficiency provides an estimate of immigrants’ language skills, self-reported language use has been shown to be a valuable measure of immigrants’ communicative competence and confidence in their linguistic abilities (Leonardi, 2020).

The first subjective indicator in focus in this study is community quality of life, understood as overall satisfaction with life in one’s municipality of residence, as well as satisfaction with employment opportunities, access to language courses, cultural activities, sports and recreational activities, religious services, and health services. The second subjective indicator we investigate is immigrants’ trust in public and political institutions (Police, Parliament, Labour Unions, the Directorate of Labour, Schools, and the Health Care system).

We ask: What demographic and social factors are associated with community quality and life, and institutional trust? What is the role of immigrants’ language skills and language use in perceived community quality of life and trust in institutions?

The relationship between acculturation and immigrants’ trust in institutions is complex. The phenomenon described as the “integration paradox” indicates that more structurally acculturated migrants are more critical of the receiving society (Schaeffer & Kas, 2023; Verkuyten, 2016). Therefore, the third question addressed in this article is: Is there evidence of the ‘integration paradox’ in Iceland?

Our study advances the literature on immigrants' experiences in receiving communities in three ways:

Firstly, we investigate how immigrants' linguistic profile relates to their perceived community quality of life and trust in institutions, an issue that previous studies have been unable to explore beyond speculations. Secondly, we explore whether immigrants' proficiency in and use of the language of the receiving society are a deciding factor in their perceived quality of life and trust in public institutions. Thirdly, in addition to the official and majority language of the receiving society, we consider the role of the *lingua franca* English. In countries where English is widely spoken, English facilitates interactions with municipal services and political and public institutions, potentially shaping immigrants' experiences with these institutions and their trust in them.

Iceland presents a unique context for studying immigrant integration for a variety of reasons: There has been a considerable increase in immigration to Iceland in recent years (OECD, 2024), the Icelandic language is held in high regard in the country (Hoffmann & Holm, 2025), and Iceland is considered a high-trust society (Vilhjálmsdóttir & Kristinsson, 2018) with a high quality of life (Sataøen, 2021).

We discuss the literature on immigrants' perception of community quality of life and trust in institutions in the receiving society and provide an overview of recent developments in Iceland and the government's immigration policies. Then, we provide details on our survey data and methods and present the results of two binomial regression analyses. We discuss our results in the context of the international literature and the developments in Iceland and reflect on the implications of our findings for policymakers.

### **Trust and community quality of life in the Icelandic context**

Factors such as Iceland's rapid economic recovery after the 2008 economic crisis, the low unemployment rate, and a stable welfare state (Rúnarsdóttir & Vilhjálmsson, 2015) have led to steady increases in immigration to Iceland in recent years. In 2000, immigrants comprised 3% of Iceland's population, while in 2025 this number had grown to 17.4%

according to Statistics Iceland's definition of an immigrant as a person born abroad whose parents and grandparents were born abroad (Statistics Iceland, 2025). Most immigrants in Iceland are from Poland (33% of the total immigrant population), followed by Lithuania (7%), Romania (5%), Latvia (4%), and Ukraine (3.5%) (Government of Iceland, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2023, p. 13).

Iceland is considered a high-trust society, and its inhabitants overall express high levels of life satisfaction (Berggren & Bjørnskov, 2020; Vilhelmsdóttir & Kristinsson, 2018). However, a 2018 study by Vilhelmsdóttir and Kristinsson found that trust in public institutions remains high in Iceland but has not recovered from the 2008 economic crisis (Vilhelmsdóttir & Kristinsson, 2018). Immigration has gained increasing attention from policymakers in Iceland. Although the country's migration policy had not been updated since its publication in 2007, new policy documents addressing migration issues have been released in consecutive years (Government of Iceland, 2023; 2024). Prior studies on immigrants in Iceland show that they tend to occupy more precarious positions than native-born populations across areas such as employment, housing, inclusion, and well-being (Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2024).

One of the most persistent challenges in immigration issues in Iceland is the segregated labour market: Immigrants are often employed in lower-status jobs and labour segments where native workers are less present, and many immigrants are overqualified for their current profession (OECD, 2024). Immigrants in Iceland face challenges participating in the Icelandic-speaking community (Skaptadóttir & Innes, 2017) and accessing resources and opportunities to learn and practice Icelandic (Hoffmann et al., 2021). Even though provision of Icelandic as a second language courses is expanding considerably in recent years, one example is the opportunity to study Icelandic as a language online at the University, ideologies of purism and authenticity prevail and are, for example, expressed in a low tolerance towards non-standard versions of the language (Hoffmann & Holm, 2022).

### **Literature review: Community quality of life, institutional trust, and their relation to immigrants' linguistic profiles**

Subjective factors of integration, such as community quality of life and trust in institutions, provide insights into integration beyond economic and demographic measures and have the potential to provide a rich understanding of immigrants' experiences and interactions in receiving communities (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Arcand et al., 2020).

### **Language and immigrants' perception of community quality of life**

Measurements of perceived community quality of life often include factors such as "housing, education, government, healthcare, employment, religion, public safety, retailing, transportation, and leisure" (Sirgy & Young, 2008, p. 81). Immigrants tend to report lower perceived community quality of life than long-term residents.

Social capital has been shown to be positively related to immigrants' perceived quality of life. Putnam (2000) distinguishes between bonding and bridging social capital, with bonding capital meaning positive ties to people who are like yourself and bridging social capital as positive ties to people who are unlike yourself (Putnam, 2000). A third type of social capital is linking social capital, which can be defined as "trust towards authority and formal institutions" (Chu et al., 2018, p. 474). For example, in Iceland, a study comparing the psychological well-being of Polish and Asian immigrants with their native peers found that non-natives reported lower life satisfaction and greater distress, because immigrants experienced more challenging socioeconomic conditions and limited access to social support (Rúnarsdóttir & Vilhjálmsón, 2015, p. 580).

An internet field experiment comparing the experiences of Polish and Icelandic people on the housing market found that "Polish men in fact face a more difficult situation on the rental housing market than others", hindering immigrants' mobility (Björnsson et al., 2018).

Factors that have been associated with higher satisfaction with immigrants' life satisfaction among immigrants are social embeddedness in the receiving society, safety and security, economic factors, demographic factors, and acculturation, which is often measured via language skills (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Angelini et al., 2015; Barillé, 2024; Choi et al., 2019; Lindner et al., 2020). Studies found a strong association between language skills in the

receiving country's language and satisfaction with life in one's place of residence, which has been explained by the fact that language skills facilitate labour market integration and support social embeddedness in communities (Pletneva, 2019). Prior studies indicate that employment opportunities are crucial for immigrants' perceived quality of life (Paparusso, 2019; Shen & Kogan, 2020).

Drawing on the research presented above, we propose that skills in the receiving country's language might be positively associated with a perceived high quality of life in one's place of residence. We hypothesize that stronger proficiency in the official language of the receiving country (Icelandic) is associated with a higher perceived quality of life in the community (H1) (Angelini et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2019). We also propose the following secondary hypotheses: Immigrants' economic position is positively associated with higher perceived community quality of life (H1.1; Amit, 2009; Paparusso, 2019; Shen & Kogan, 2020), and more frequent social contact with long-term residents of the receiving society is associated with higher perceived community quality of life (H1.2; Arpino & de Valk, 2017; Wilkes & Wu, 2019).

Given the opportunities afforded by the lingua franca English in places where it is widely spoken, access to the labour market and educational and work opportunities (Henry, 2016), we further hypothesize that better English skills are associated with perceived higher quality of life in immigrants' community of residence (H2).

Educational level had both positive and negative effects in prior studies: education increases immigrants' employment opportunities, enhancing life satisfaction (Paparusso, 2019), but a higher educational level also carries a higher risk of underemployment, which can lead to a lower perceived quality of life in the community.

### **The integration paradox: Are more integrated immigrants less trustful in institutions?**

Trust in institutions means that "citizens assess public institutions as promise-keeping, accountable, efficient, competent, caring, predictable, open, transparent, fair and honest"

(Kaasa & Andriani, 2022, p. 46). Trust in institutions has been understood through two main approaches: the institutional performance approach, which sees trust as a function of how well institutions perform, and the social trust approach, which views institutional trust as an extension of the trust individuals place in others (Kaasa & Andriani, 2022). Immigrants' trust in institutions is thus shaped by both the quality of services provided by institutions and immigrants' cultural background.

Many studies find that acculturation is associated with lower trust in institutions: Migrants' initial confidence in receiving country institutions decreases "the more acculturated immigrants are to mainstream society, whether this is measured with longer residence in the host country, generational status [...], or language and citizenship" (Röder & Mühlau, 2012, p. 789). While language thus provides access to institutions and favours interactions with society, it has a limited negative effect on trust in institutions (Arcand et al., 2020; Michelson, 2003; Röder & Mühlau, 2012).

The phenomenon of more acculturated migrants turning away from the receiving society rather than becoming more oriented towards it is called the 'integration paradox' (Schaeffer & Kas, 2023; Verkuyten, 2016). The integration paradox has been explained by increased exposure and comparison to majority-group members, increased awareness of exclusionary discourses and practices, and heightened sensitivity to discrimination due to higher education, and feelings of frustration due to relative deprivation (e.g., the feeling to be disadvantaged in comparison to other groups (Schaeffer & Kas, 2023; Verkuyten, 2016). In Iceland, a study among Polish immigrants found that those with better Icelandic skills perceived more discrimination in the media and felt treated worse (Ólafsson & Zielińska, 2010, p. 83), suggesting that advanced language skills can be associated with greater awareness of exclusionary discourses.

Our review of the literature on immigrants' trust in institutions and the concept of the integration paradox shows that immigrants' trust in institutions tends to decrease over time of residence and with higher proficiency in the language of the receiving society (Michelson, 2003; Röder & Mühlau, 2012). We, therefore, hypothesize that immigrants' proficiency in Icelandic is associated with lower reported trust in public and political institutions in Iceland (H3).

## **Hypotheses**

To summarize: Based on the literature reviews and the discussion of the case of Iceland, we derive the following hypotheses:

H1: Immigrants' self-reported proficiency level in Icelandic and frequency of using Icelandic are related to higher perceived community quality of life.

H1.1 Immigrants' economic position is positively associated with higher perceived community quality of life.

H1.2 More social contact with natives of the receiving society is associated with higher perceived community quality of life.

H2: Self-reported proficiency level in the *lingua franca* English is associated with more satisfaction with the community quality of life.

H3: Higher self-reported proficiency level in the language and more frequent use of the language of the receiving society are related to less trust in institutions of the receiving society, because studies show that more acculturated immigrants report lower levels of trust in institutions ("integration paradox").

## **Data, variables, and methods**

### ***Data collection***

This research draws on data derived from an online survey conducted amongst immigrant participants in Iceland (N=2,139) in 2018, using both convenience and snowball sampling methods. The University of Akureyri Research Centre (RHA) facilitated the distribution of the questionnaire through language schools and social media, and it was available in

Icelandic, English, Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Arabic, Russian, and Thai. In certain regions, the survey was also distributed through local contacts with strong ties to immigrant communities.

Participants received written information about the study's purpose, confidentiality, and the anonymity of the collected data. No personal identifiers, such as names, were collected. Given Iceland's small population, additional precautions were taken to ensure anonymity. For example, participants were asked to indicate their world region of origin rather than a specific country.

### ***Outcome variables***

#### *Perceived community quality of life*

To measure immigrants' satisfaction with life in their community of residence in Iceland, we used a variation of the satisfaction with life scale (Diener, 1985), the most common way to measure life satisfaction, by asking the following question about immigrants' satisfaction with specific aspects of their life in the receiving society: "How satisfied are you with the following where you live?" with the sub-questions a) Your employment opportunities b) Access to language courses, c) Access to cultural activities, d) Access to sports and recreational activities, e) Access to religious services, and f) Access to health services. And we also asked: "On the whole, how satisfied are you with living in your municipality?"

All these questions were answered on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant "very dissatisfied" and 5 meant "very satisfied". Missing values were replaced with 3, meaning "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied". To build an ordinal variable characterising satisfaction, we summed the Likert scores of the answers to all of the satisfaction questions, forming a composite score of perceived community quality of life in the new area of residency. Internal consistency of this new variable was moderate, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.6 (CI [0.57-0.63]).

#### *Trust in institutions*

Six items were used in measuring participants' trust in public and political institutions in

Iceland. We asked the question: "How much trust do you have in the following institutions in Iceland?" Participants were asked to rate their trust in a) the police, b) Parliament, c) Labour Unions, d) Job centres (the Directorate of Labour, e) Schools in Iceland, and f) the health care system. This question was measured on a 5-point scale where 1 meant "No trust at all" and 5 meant "A lot of trust". Missing data were replaced with the value 3, which meant "Neither much nor little trust". A trust-in-institutional variable was formed by summing up the Likert scores of the answers to these 6 questions. Cronbach's alpha of this variable was 0.75 (CI [0.73-0.77]).

### ***Independent variables***

#### *Demographics*

We examined the following independent variables: length of stay in Iceland (with the following answer options: never lived elsewhere, less than one year, 1-2 years, 3-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-20 years, more than 20 years), age (answer options grouped by 18-25, 26-40, 41-66, 67 and older), gender (female and male), place of residence in Iceland (capital region, rural region), and region of origin (Western Europe, Nordic Countries, Northern America, Central America, South America, Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa). Due to the small number of participants from Central America and South America, we combined these two groups.

#### *Language*

Language skills were assessed using two factors: self-rated proficiency and language use. We asked participants to rate their proficiency in Icelandic and English (both measured on a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 = "don't speak it" to 5 = "fluent"). Use of the Icelandic language was assessed as the frequency of consuming Icelandic news and current affairs programs in Icelandic media (with the following answer options: every day or almost every day, once or twice a week, once or twice every two weeks, one a month, never or almost never), and frequency of using Icelandic in the following situations: at work, at the doctor, at home with friends, shopping (all measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = "very unlikely" to 5 = "very likely"). Missing data were replaced with the value 3, which meant "neither likely nor unlikely". We then created a sum score for the use of Icelandic by summing the five sub-

questions. The resulting score had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 (CI [0.81-0.83]).

### *Social embeddedness*

Social contacts with Icelanders were measured by asking the questions "Have you a) invited Icelandic friends to your home? b) been invited by Icelandic friends to their home?" (4-point scale from 1 = "never" and 4 = "many times"). We summed the scores for these two questions and used this visit rating as an indicator of social contacts because, in the Icelandic context, being invited to the homes of long-term residents is an appropriate indicator of well-established social contacts with members of the receiving community. The resulting score had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 (CI [0.82-0.85]). We further investigated experiences of discrimination using the following items: a) "People have made fun of my accent", b) "I have been treated in an unfriendly manner in a shop or supermarket", c) "I have not been hired for a job because of my background", d) "I have been paid less than my Icelandic co-workers for the same kind of work". Those factors were measured on a 6-point scale from 1 = "never" to 6 = "very frequently," and the answers were summed up to form a variable indicating discrimination to be included in the model. The internal consistency of this discrimination variable was rather low, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.63 (CI [0.6-0.65]).

### *Economic factors*

We used the following items to measure economic factors: Level of education (primary school, vocational training, matriculation exam, university degree, other), employment status (full time, part time, not working, parental leave), monthly income per person before tax (< ISK 200,000 (EUR 1,370); ISK 200,000-399,000 (EUR 2,733); ISK 400,000-599,000 (EUR 4,102); ISK 600,000-899,000 (EUR 6,157); ISK 900,000-

1,199,000 (EUR 8,212); and ISK 1,200,000+). The average monthly income for individuals in Iceland is ISK 416,000 before tax at the time this survey was conducted (Statistics Iceland, 2019).

### *Interdependence between perceived community quality of life and institutional trust*

We also included the variable "institutional trust" for the regression analysis investigating

life satisfaction, and the variable “perceived community quality of life” for “institutional trust” for the “community quality of life” variable, respectively, to investigate how these factors interact.

### **Statistical test**

We fitted two binomial logistic regression models using the R function `glm()`, with median splits of the two outcome variables. While multiple regression is not appropriate for ordinal outcome variables, we chose to dichotomize the outcomes rather than use ordinal regression because the original ordinal nature is not preserved in the composite score. Ordinary regression can produce misleading results due to “floor” and “ceiling” effects, which is the main reason that dichotomizing an ordinal variable is a common practice, although this solution certainly has other disadvantages, such as lower predictive power (Fernandez et al., 2019).

The regression model to measure factors predicting perceived community quality of life included the factors length of stay in Iceland, age, gender, origin, place of residence in Iceland, level of education, employment status, income, self-reported Icelandic proficiency, self-reported English proficiency, use of Icelandic, use of Icelandic media, contact to Icelanders, experiences of discrimination, and trust in institutions in the receiving society.

The regression model to measure factors predicting trust in institutions included the factors length of stay in Iceland, age, gender, origin, place of residence in Iceland, level of education, employment status, income, self-reported Icelandic proficiency, self-reported English proficiency, use of Icelandic media, contact to Icelanders, experiences of discrimination, and life satisfaction.

Because we conducted two regressions, we correct the critical p-value for multiple comparisons. After Bonferroni correction, the critical p-value is  $<.025$ .

To further characterize the relation between satisfaction, trust, language use, and discrimination, we performed a Spearman correlation between the assessed variables; the coefficients are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Variable cross-correlations

	Icelandic	English	Use of Icelandic	Contact to Icelanders	Discrimination	Trust
<b>Life satisfaction</b>	r=0.16 p<.001	r=-0.03 p=.119	r=-0.19 p<.001	r=0.11 p<.001	r=-0.2 p<.001	r=0.41 p<.001
<b>Icelandic proficiency</b>		r=0.09 p<.001	r=0.65 p<.001	r=0.47 p<.001	r=0.01 p=.755	r=0.1 p<.001
<b>English proficiency</b>			r=-0.17 p<.001	r=0.2 p<.001	r=0.07 p<.001	r=-0.03 p=.228
<b>Use of Icelandic</b>				r=0.36 p<.001	r=-0.08 p<.001	r=0.15 p<.001
<b>Contact to Icelanders</b>					r=-0.04 p=.044	r=0.11 p<.001
<b>Discrimination</b>						r=-0.33 p<.001

## Results

### *Recruited sample and exclusion of missing and ambiguous data*

We obtained 2211 responses from immigrants in Iceland. After excluding participants who did not indicate their age (N=12) or gender (N=8), 10 participants were over 66 years old (5 female), 625 between 41 and 66 years old (407 female), 1284 between 26 and 40 years old (854 female), and 274 between 18 and 25 years old (193 female). Because the oldest group was small, we merged the two oldest groups.

As the focus of this study is on the experiences of first-generation immigrants whose language-learning journeys differ to second-generation immigrants, we excluded participants who participated as immigrants but have never lived elsewhere than in Iceland (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), or proficiency in Icelandic (N=19). Because some participants omitted more than one piece of this information, this resulted in a sample of N=2089, which we included in the further analyses.

We grouped participants who did not indicate their level of education (N=15) into the "other" education category.

*Sample characteristics*

Table 2 provides background information on the included survey respondents.

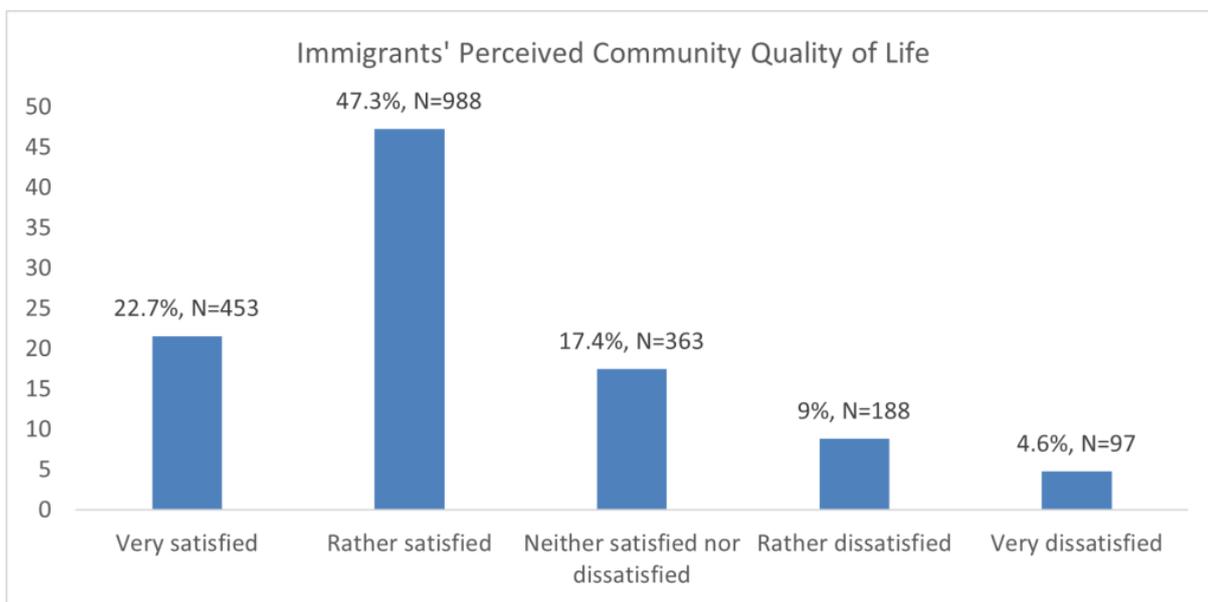
**Table 2** Background information survey respondents

	Answer option	Percentage	N
<b>Length of residence in Iceland</b>	< 1 year	9.3	194
	1–2 years	21.5	449
	3–5 years	22.3	465
	6–10 years	18.7	390
	11–20 years	24.2	506
	20+ years	4.1	85
<b>Age</b>	18–25 years	12.5	261
	26–40 years	59.4	1241
	41 and older years	28.1	587
<b>Gender</b>	Female	66.6	1391
<b>Area of residence in Iceland: Capital Area vs. outside of Capital Area</b>	Capital Area	53.0	1108
	Western Europe, Nordic Countries, North America	21.4	448
<b>World region of origin</b>	Central or Eastern Europe	66.3	1386
	Asia	5.9	124
	Africa	1.9	39
	Central and South America	1.5	31
	Other	2.9	61
	<b>Education</b>	Primary school	3.6
Vocational training		12.1	252
Matriculation exam		30.3	634
University degree		49.1	1025
Other		4.9	102

*Perceived community quality of life*

Figure 1 shows the distribution of satisfaction with life among the immigrant population in

the receiving municipality, demonstrating that 70% reported being very or rather satisfied with life in their municipality of residence. Appendix 1 shows participants' reported level of perceived community quality of life with different aspects of life in their place of residence. Our combined satisfaction variable had a minimum of 9, a maximum of 35, a median of 23 and a mean of 23.1. We dichotomized the variable using a median split (values < 23 vs. values > 23).



(Fig.1)

Table 3 provides background information on participants' perceived community quality of life.

**Table 3** Participants' perceived community quality of life

	<b>Answer option</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Your employment opportunities</b>	Very satisfied	20.5	429
	Rather satisfied	32.6	678
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	22.2	463
	Rather dissatisfied	18.0	375
	Very dissatisfied	6.9	144
<b>Access to language courses</b>	Very satisfied	21.5	450
	Rather satisfied	35.1	734
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	22.6	471
	Rather dissatisfied	13.9	291
	Very dissatisfied	6.9	143
<b>Access to cultural activities</b>	Very satisfied	18.4	384
	Rather satisfied	32.4	677
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	25.8	539
	Rather dissatisfied	15.3	320
	Very dissatisfied	8.1	169
<b>Access to sports and recreational activities</b>	Very satisfied	29.6	619
	Rather satisfied	37.6	785
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	21.5	449
	Rather dissatisfied	8.1	171
	Very dissatisfied	3.1	65
<b>Access to religious services</b>	Very satisfied	14.9	311
	Rather satisfied	21.3	444
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	56.0	1170
	Rather dissatisfied	4.5	94
	Very dissatisfied	3.4	70
	Very satisfied	15.8	331
<b>Access to health services</b>	Rather satisfied	34.6	722
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	21.7	453
	Rather dissatisfied	19.5	408
	Very dissatisfied	8.4	175

Table 4 shows participants' linguistic profile.

**Table 4** Participants' linguistic profile

	Answer option	Percentage
<b>Self-reported Icelandic proficiency</b>	Don't speak it	12.8
	Rather poor	33.4
	Neither poor nor good	25.1
	Rather good	19.9
	Fluent	9.1
<b>Self-reported English proficiency</b>	Don't speak it	3.9
	Rather poor	8.0
	Neither poor nor good	12.4
	Rather good	30.8
	Fluent	44.8
<b>Frequency of using Icelandic</b>	Very likely	33.1
	Rather likely	18.4
	Neither likely nor unlikely	12.6
	Rather unlikely	16.4
	Very unlikely	19.6
<b>Frequency of using Icelandic media</b>	Every day or almost every day	30.1
	Once or twice a week	23.7
	Once or twice every two weeks	11.1
	Once a month	9.2
	Never or almost never	25.8

Table 5 shows participants' involvement in the Icelandic labor market and Icelandic society.

**Table 5** Participants' involvement in the Icelandic labour market and Icelandic society

	Answer option	Percentage	N
<b>Employment status</b>	Full-time	74.9	1565
	Part-time	12.7	266
	Not working	9.8	204
	Parenting	2.6	54
<b>Income</b>	Less than 200.000 ISK	9.8	205
	200.000 – 399.000 ISK	48.0	1002
	400.000 – 599.000 ISK	29.5	617
	600.000 – 899.000 ISK	10.4	217
	900.000 – 1199.000 ISK	1.4	29
	1.200.000 ISK or more	0.9	19
<b>Frequency of inviting Icelandic friends</b>	Never	19.1	399
	Once or twice	16.8	351
	A few times	33.9	709
	Many times	29.1	607
<b>Frequency of being invited by Icelandic friends</b>	Never	21.1	441
	Once or twice	19.1	399
	A few times	33.1	691
	Many times	25.8	540

Table 6 shows participants' experiences of discrimination

**Table 6** Participants' experiences of discrimination

	Answer option	Percentage	N
<b>People have made fun of my accent</b>	Never	3.6	75
	Very rarely	5.4	113
	Rarely	16.7	349
	Occasionally	10.2	213
	Frequently	15.3	320
	Very frequently	48.8	1019
<b>I have been treated in an unfriendly manner in a shop or supermarket</b>	Never	2.5	53
	Very rarely	4.6	95
	Rarely	14.6	304
	Occasionally	10.4	217
	Frequently	17.1	358
	Very frequently	50.8	1062
<b>I have not been hired for a job because of my background</b>	Never	3.7	77
	Very rarely	4.9	103
	Rarely	8.4	175
	Occasionally	6.7	141
	Frequently	5.8	122
	Very frequently	70.4	1471
<b>I have been paid less than my Icelandic co-workers for the same kind of work</b>	Never	18.6	388
	Very rarely	14.8	310
	Rarely	13.4	280
	Occasionally	4.9	102
	Frequently	6.8	143
	Very frequently	41.5	866

### *Trust in institutions in the receiving society*

Our composite variable on trust in institutions in the receiving municipality amongst the immigrant population ranged from 6 to 30, with a median of 20 and a mean of 19.98. We dichotomized the variable using a median split (values < 20 vs. values > 20). Appendix 2

shows immigrants' levels of trust in different institutions.

Table 7 provides background information on participants' institutional trust.

**Table 7** Participants' trust in institutions

	<b>Answer option</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>The Police</b>	A lot of trust	29.4	615
	Rather much trust	32.2	673
	Neither much nor little trust	25.7	537
	Very little trust	8.8	183
	No trust at all	3.9	81
<b>Parliament (Alþingi)</b>	A lot of trust	7.0	146
	Rather much trust	18.3	382
	Neither much nor little trust	48.3	1008
	Very little trust	18.1	378
	No trust at all	8.4	175
<b>Job Centres (The Directorate of Labour)</b>	A lot of trust	11.4	239
	Rather much trust	24.7	515
	Neither much nor little trust	44.4	928
	Very little trust	12.7	266
	No trust at all	6.7	141
<b>The Labour Unions</b>	A lot of trust	21.0	438
	Rather much trust	32.7	684
	Neither much nor little trust	25.7	538
	Very little trust	13.9	291
	No trust at all	6.7	140
<b>Schools in Iceland</b>	A lot of trust	19.4	406
	Rather much trust	32.0	669
	Neither much nor little trust	37.6	786
	Very little trust	7.7	161
	No trust at all	3.2	67
<b>The Health Care System</b>	A lot of trust	12.5	262
	Rather much trust	25.3	528
	Neither much nor little trust	25.9	541
	Very little trust	23.1	482
	No trust at all	13.2	276

*Logistic regression for composite variable "perceived community quality of life"*

Table 5 shows the results of the logistic regression for factors moderating perceived community quality of life among immigrants in Iceland. The variables that had the strongest association with immigrants' perceived community quality of life were area of residence and trust in institutions. Immigrants living outside the capital area of Iceland indicated a higher perceived community quality of life than those living in the capital area. Higher trust in institutions in Iceland was associated with higher perceived community quality of life. More experience of discrimination was associated with lower perceived community quality of life. More use of Icelandic media was associated with higher perceived community quality of life. Immigrants originating in Central or Eastern Europe as well as Asia were less satisfied with the quality of life in their communities of residence than those from Western Europe, Nordic countries, and Northern America, but those from Central and Southern America were more satisfied than those from Western Europe, Nordic countries, and Northern America. Those using Icelandic more frequently were more satisfied with the quality of life in their place of residence. Duration, age, gender, level of education, self-reported Icelandic proficiency, income, social contact to Icelanders, and employment, did not moderate satisfaction with community quality of life significantly. A trend that was not significant after correcting for multiple testing was observable for self-reported English-proficiency, where people with higher proficiency were more satisfied.

**Table 8:** Regression analysis: Factors related to immigrants' satisfaction with life in their municipality of residence

	Estimate	Std.Error	z-value	Pr(> z )
<b>Length of stay</b>	.052	.052	1.001	.317
<b>Age</b>	-.146	.095	-1.542	.122
<b>Women vs. men</b>	-.098	.116	-.852	.394
<b>Origin</b>				
<i>Reference: Western Europe, Nordic Countries, Northern America</i>				
<i>Central or Eastern</i>				
Europe	.395	.137	2.889	.004
Asia	.841	.254	3.304	<.001
Africa	-.123	.369	-.335	.738
<i>Central and South</i>				
America	-1.157	.448	-2.581	.010
Other	.558	.322	1.733	.083
<b>Capital area vs. other</b>	1.052	.106	9.902	<.001
<b>Education</b>				
<i>Reference: Primary school</i>				
Vocational training	-.104	.309	-.336	.737
Matriculation exam	-.482	.287	-1.682	.092
University degree	-.469	.287	-1.637	.102
Other	-.326	.354	-.922	.357
<b>Employment status</b>				
<i>Reference: Full time</i>				
Part-time	-.257	.259	-1.612	.107
Not working	-.310	.175	-1.770	.077
Parenting	-.157	.327	-.479	.632
<b>Income</b>	.077	.063	1.210	.226
<b>Icelandic proficiency</b>	.060	.069	0.870	.384
<b>English proficiency</b>	.123	.057	2.153	.031
<b>Use of Icelandic</b>	.037	.013	2.892	.004
<b>Use of Icelandic media</b>	.090	.035	2.512	.012
<b>Visits to and from</b>				
<b>Icelanders</b>	-.020	.029	-.696	.487
<b>Discrimination</b>	-.039	.012	-3.253	.001
<b>Trust in institutions</b>	.178	.014	12.918	<.001

*Logistic regression for trust in institutions in Iceland*

Table 6 shows the results of the logistic regression for factors moderating trust in institutions in Iceland. The variables that had the strongest association with trust in institutions in Iceland were length of stay, area of residence, experiences of discrimination, and community quality of life. A shorter stay was associated with lower trust in institutions in Iceland. More experiences of discrimination were associated with less trust in institutions in Iceland. Higher perceived community quality of life in Iceland was associated with greater trust in institutions. Immigrants living outside Iceland's capital area showed less

trust than those living in the capital area. Participants from Central and South America reported higher levels of trust, but participants from Central or Eastern Europe reported less trust in institutions in Iceland reported lower levels of trust than immigrants from the Nordic Countries, Western Europe, and North America. Frequent use of Icelandic was associated with more trust in institutions in Iceland. Age, gender, level of education, employment, income, self-reported Icelandic proficiency, self-reported English proficiency, and visits to and from Icelanders did not significantly moderate trust in institutions. A trend was observed: those using Icelandic media more frequently reported less trust in institutions, and immigrants from Africa expressed less trust in institutions than immigrants from Western Europe, Nordic Countries, and North America, but this effect was not significant after correcting for multiple testing.

**Table 9** Regression analysis: Factors related to immigrants' trust in institutions in Iceland

	Estimate	Std.Error	z-value	Pr(> z )
<b>Length of stay</b>	-.203	.053	-3.851	<.001
<b>Age</b>	-.187	.095	-1.970	.049
<b>Women vs. men</b>	.115	.115	1.000	.327
<b>Origin</b>				
<i>Reference: Western Europe, Nordic Countries, Northern America</i>				
Central or Eastern Europe	-.319	.138	-2.312	.021
Asia	.012	.250	.048	.962
Africa	-.970	.444	2.184	.029
Central and South America	1.214	.482	2.518	.012
Other	.657	.340	1.935	.053
<b>Capital vs. other</b>	-.541	.108	-5.004	<.001
<b>Education</b>				
<i>Reference: Primary school</i>				
Vocational training	-.414	.319	-1.297	.195
Matriculation exam	-.227	.299	-.760	.447
University degree	-.389	.299	-1.298	.194
Other	-.065	.369	-.176	.861
<b>Employment status</b>				
<i>Reference: Full time</i>				
Part-time	.313	.163	1.918	.055
Not working	.282	.176	1.599	.110
Parenting	.561	.321	1.746	.081
<b>Income</b>	.028	.063	.444	.657
<b>Icelandic proficiency</b>	.034	.070	.484	.628
<b>English proficiency</b>	.015	.057	.268	.788
<b>Use of Icelandic</b>	.044	.013	3.366	<.001
<b>Use of Icelandic media</b>	.063	.035	1.790	.073
<b>Visits to and from Icelanders</b>	.031	.029	1.079	.280
<b>Discrimination</b>	-.101	.012	-8.307	<.001
<b>Community Life Quality</b>	.181	.014	12.822	<.001

## Discussion

In this study, we investigate factors associated with immigrants' perceptions of the quality of life in their community of residence and trust in institutions in the receiving society. We are particularly interested in how language skills in Icelandic and English and Icelandic use are associated with immigrants' perceived quality of life and trust in institutions of the

receiving society.

Our results show a positive association between immigrants' perceived community quality of life and their trust in institutions of the receiving society, potentially showing the importance of linking social capital, "trust towards authority and formal institutions" (Chu et al., 2018, p. 474), for immigrants' satisfaction with life in the receiving community. This association can be explained by the fact that when immigrants experience their local environment as safe and supportive, they are more likely to develop trust in the broader institutional structures (Chu et al., 2018). This trust can, in turn, enhance their sense of stability, belonging, and satisfaction with life in the receiving country (Chu et al., 2018).

Our findings indicate that it is an oversimplification of the integration process to declare language as the key to immigrants' satisfaction with life and trust in institutions in receiving societies: Structural and societal factors (perceived discrimination, place of residence in Iceland, and length of stay) have a significantly stronger association with perceived community quality of life and institutional trust than language-related factors. Based on prior studies, we hypothesized a link between self-reported language policy and immigrants' perceived quality of life in their communities of residence (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Angelini et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2019). Our study confirms this assumption (Hypothesis 1) only when language skills are measured through language use rather than reported language proficiency. Self-reported language proficiency is not associated with immigrants' perception of community quality of life and trust in institutions. However, more frequent use of Icelandic is positively associated with perceived community quality of life and trust in public institutions of the receiving country. This finding could be explained by the fact that language use is a more accurate way of measuring immigrants' linguistic ability than self-reported language policy. Another finding pointing towards better language skills being associated with higher perceived quality of life is that more frequent consumption of Icelandic news and current affairs programmes is associated with higher community quality of life.

The opportunities provided by English could explain the limited role of Icelandic skills in immigrants' perceived community of life and in their trust in institutions. In places where English is widely spoken, immigrants get by using a lingua franca rather than the local language (Henry, 2016). However, our findings do not confirm our hypothesis that self-

reported English proficiency is associated with higher life satisfaction or trust in the receiving society (H2), suggesting that English proficiency is not a central factor for life satisfaction in our data.

Contrary to studies indicating that higher trust in political and public institutions is associated with lower skills in the receiving country language (Michelson, 2003; Röder & Mühlau, 2012), we find a positive association between language proficiency and trust in institutions, but only when it was measured through language use, not self-reported language proficiency. We, therefore, cannot confirm the assumption that better Icelandic skills are associated with lower institutional trust (Hypothesis 3). Furthermore, a longer stay in Iceland is associated with more trust in Iceland, which would also be evidence against the “integration paradox”, indicating that more integrated migrants turn away from their community of residence rather than towards it. However, we see a trend in the data, with those using Icelandic media more frequently reporting less trust in institutions, which would be in line with the theory of the ‘integration paradox’ (Röder & Mühlau’s, 2012) and also reflects earlier findings that immigrants with better Icelandic skills perceive more discrimination in the media (Ólafsson & Zielińska, 2010). These findings suggest that the immigrants’ integration and inclusion in the receiving society is a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing both exposure to the language and culture of the receiving society and critical awareness and engagement with immigrants’ place of residence. Whether and to what extent an “integration paradox” can be observed in Iceland would be a topic worth exploring in further research.

When immigration discourses focus overly on language as a *sine qua non* of integration (Simpson & Whiteside, 2015), little room is left for considering other factors. Indicators strongly related to perceived community quality of life and trust in institutions were perceived discrimination experiences and place of residence in Iceland, as well as trust in quality of life and trust in institutions, respectively. Experiencing discrimination was associated with lower perceived community quality of life and less trust in public and political institutions, confirming prior studies showing how negative experiences in the receiving society impact immigrants’ perceived quality of life, often more than other factors (Arpino & de Valk, 2017; de Vroome et al., 2014). There may be a mediating effect of language skills on perceived discrimination, as observed in other studies (Schaeffer & Kas, 2023; Verkuyten, 2016), but we do not find evidence of this in our data.

Participants residing outside the Capital Area of Iceland reported a higher community quality of life in their municipality of residence than those living in the Capital Area, which could be explained by the advantages of small communities reported by immigrants in other studies (Barillé, 2024). However, those living in the Capital Area showed greater trust in institutions than those living outside the Capital Area of Iceland, a finding that could have multiple explanations but cannot be addressed in the present article.

Our findings do not confirm our secondary hypotheses that an improved economic position was associated with more satisfaction with life in the receiving society, because income, employment, and education did not moderate life satisfaction or trust. This result contrasts with Rúnarsdóttir and Vilhjálmsón's (2015) study among immigrant youth in Iceland, which showed that the main factor explaining the difference in life satisfaction between immigrants and natives was immigrants' lower social status. We, therefore, cannot confirm our secondary hypothesis (H1.1) that immigrants' economic position is positively associated with higher perceived community quality of life (Paparusso, 2019; Shen & Kogan, 2020).

Our findings further do not confirm our assumption that more social contacts to natives of the receiving society are associated with more life satisfaction (Arpino & de Valk, 2017; Wilkes & Wu, 2019) because we do not find that immigrants' social contacts with Icelanders are associated with their life satisfaction and their level of trust in the receiving society. We therefore cannot confirm our secondary hypothesis (H1.2) that more frequent social contact with natives of the receiving society is associated with higher perceived community quality of life (Arpino & de Valk, 2017; Wilkes & Wu, 2019).

Our findings indicated differences in immigrants' life satisfaction and trust across different countries of origin. We found that immigrants from Central or Eastern Europe, as well as from Asia, were less satisfied than those from Western Europe, Nordic countries, and North America. Participants from Central and South America reported higher levels of trust, but participants from Central or Eastern Europe reported less trust in institutions than immigrants from the Nordic Countries, Western Europe, and North America. Prior studies have shown that immigrants judge institutions "relative to the standards of their home countries" (Röder & Mühlau, 2012). This observation requires assessing the country of origin's situation as an additional factor when estimating the influence of several variables on satisfaction and trust, leaving room for future research in this respect.

### *Limitations*

Dichotomising the variables of interest (satisfaction and trust) makes it impossible to fully capture the full range of variance. However, we included multiple factors of different scales (nominal, ordinal, and interval), so logistic regression is the method of choice. It can furthermore be argued that self-reporting of language skills is an insufficient measure of language proficiency. However, this is also a well-established measure of language proficiency (Edele et al., 2015), allowing us to compare our findings with other studies using the same method. The self-reported proficiency reflects immigrants' trust in their ability to communicate, which may be more important than a formal language examination. Finally, we included Icelandic use as an additional measure of language proficiency. Use of Icelandic is likely to be more closely related to objectively assessed language skills than self-reported proficiency, but also has more practical relevance than objective measurements of language competence. Internal consistency for the variables describing life satisfaction and discrimination was questionable, and the variable for trust was just acceptable, limiting the conclusions based on these variables.

### **Conclusion**

Our findings encourage researchers and policymakers to consider that individual and structural circumstances, such as having experienced discrimination, have a stronger association with immigrants' perceived community quality of life and trust in institutions than immigrants' language skills in the language of the receiving society or the lingua franca English. Despite language skills undoubtedly impacting immigrants' experiences and well-being in receiving societies, our studies demonstrate that it is necessary to examine how language skills intersect with other factors and consider additional factors, such as experiences of discrimination, which can be less visible and more difficult to measure than language skills. Our findings thus have far-reaching implications for studies of immigration scholars and immigration policymakers in Europe and internationally, particularly in places where English is widely spoken, as they provide insights into the reality of immigrants' lives in these environments.

### **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Author contribution**

All three authors contributed significantly to the data collection and data analysis, as well as to writing and editing the document.

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