

A Systematic Literature Review of the Experiences of Skilled South Asian
Migrant Women Employees

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Abstract

This systematic literature review explores the employment experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women in host countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The study aims to address two central research questions: (1) What barriers do skilled South Asian migrant women face in seeking suitable employment after migration? and (2) How do skilled South Asian migrant women navigate and overcome these work barriers? Using a structured search strategy guided by the keywords 'skilled,' 'South Asian,' 'migrant women,' 'job,' and 'seek,' relevant peer-reviewed articles published in English between 2010 and 2025 were systematically identified across major academic databases. Following PRISMA guidelines, a total of 47 peer-reviewed articles were selected for inclusion in this review. Studies were included if they focused on primary research related to the employment experiences of skilled migrants from South Asian countries, specifically: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Excluded were grey literature and non-employment-related studies.

The synthesis reveals multiple, intersecting barriers, including the devaluation of foreign credentials, limited recognition of prior experience, gendered discrimination, and structural barriers within host-country labour markets. Cultural expectations and family responsibilities further constrain employment participation and advancement. Despite these challenges, skilled South Asian migrant women employ a range of adaptive strategies such as reskilling, professional networking, volunteering, and leveraging ethnic and community connections to re-enter the workforce or attain professional recognition. The review highlights the complexity of their integration journeys, emphasising the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and migration in shaping personal and labour market outcomes.

The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of global talent mobility, offering insights for policymakers, employers, and professional bodies to develop more inclusive credential recognition systems, culturally responsive employment support, and equitable workplace practices. By identifying both barriers and navigation strategies, this review provides a foundation for future empirical research and practical interventions aimed at improving employment equity for skilled migrant women from South Asia.

Keywords: Skilled migrant women, South Asia, employment barriers, job seeking, navigation strategies, labour market integration

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which, to a substantial extent, has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Maha Khan

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction chapter provides an outline of the dissertation and presents an overview of the research on the experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women. It sheds light on prior research on gender and migration and emphasises how fragmented the current research is. It highlights the need for a systematic literature review to synthesise current research and identify important themes and gaps. Additionally, this chapter outlines my motivation for conducting this research, presents the study's aim, and addresses the research questions explored in this study. The structure of the dissertation and the expected contributions of the research are summarised at the end of the chapter.

1.1 Foreword

This research is motivated by my personal experience as a skilled South Asian migrant woman navigating the New Zealand job market. I never thought that having dusky skin and being a South Asian female would put me at a disadvantage in the job market, resulting in low-scale jobs. I faced significant challenges in finding a job despite having prior work experience and relevant qualifications, which I subsequently recognised as systemic barriers that many skilled immigrant women face in similar circumstances. These experiences sparked my interest in thoroughly researching and identifying themes and broader patterns affecting skilled South Asian migrant women in host countries.

Skilled migration has become a cornerstone of economic and demographic policy in developed countries, including New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom (Chiswick, 2011; Hawthorne, 2014; McDonald & Worswick, 2015). These countries increasingly rely on highly educated migrants to address labour shortages and drive innovation (Migration Advisory Committee, 2022; Nathan, 2014; OECD, 2020a; Zikic, 2015).

Globally, the number of skilled migrants continues to rise, with women playing a significant role in international labour mobility (International Labour Office, 2024; Kofman &

Raghuram, 2004; McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024). Nevertheless, their labour market integration remains problematic in the host nations (Sambajee & Scholarios, 2023; Webb et al., 2013; Yeoh et al., 1999), often influenced by the intersection of gender, ethnicity and migration status that results in hierarchical disadvantage in employment outcomes (Anthias, 2013; Kofman, 2004; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016).

Women make up nearly half of all international migrants. Among these migrants, women from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan) represent a significant demographic, with a global share of female migrants of approximately 48.1% in 2020 (International Organisation for Migration [IOM], 2023), often arriving with advanced qualifications and professional experience. Despite their potential, they often face systemic barriers that hinder full participation in the workforce (Kalyanaraman, 2016). It is crucial to gain an understanding of these dynamics for both scholarly research and developing inclusive policies and practices that maximise the potential of migrant talent (International Labour Organization, 2021; OECD, 2020a).

Based on my experience, I began researching to understand whether challenges faced by other skilled South Asian migrant women had been studied. In recent years, although research on migration and gender has been expanding, few attempts have been undertaken to conduct a systematic review. Due to the lack of a cohesive framework in existing research on the intersection of gender, ethnicity and migration, our understanding of migrant literature remains fragmented rather than comprehensive. This gap highlights the need for a systematic literature review that synthesises current knowledge, identifies themes and gaps, and provides a framework for future empirical research specific to skilled South Asian migrant women as existing studies often overlook their unique challenges (Kalyanaraman, 2016; Purkayastha, 2005a; Salsabeel & Leera, 2025; Syed et al., 2020; Yazdankhoo et al., 2025b).

Therefore, conducting a systematic literature review is my first step in the research journey to develop a framework for future primary research, particularly in addressing my interest in understanding the experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women.

1.2 Background

Migration is broadly defined as the movement of individuals across national borders, often resulting in a permanent change of residence (Toney & Bailey, 2014). This process is driven by diverse motivations, including economic aspirations (Susanto & Sulaiman, 2022), the desire to escape adversity or oppression (Global Forum on Migration and Development, 2023), and the pursuit of cultural exchange and personal fulfilment (Mariyono et al., 2025). As Toney and Bailey (2014) emphasise, migration involves navigating political and labour market barriers and significantly influences population distribution and contributions.

Migration is a two-way process that transforms both the origin and host countries. Migrants often seek an improved quality of life, enhanced work-life balance, skill development, and upward social mobility (Adedeji, 2021; Verkuyten et al., 2018; Zikic, 2015). While both home and host nations benefit from migration (Tunon & Baruah, 2012), the host nation gains advantages such as increased labour supply and overall economic growth (Aguila et al., 2012; Borjas, 1989; Zikic, 2015). The home nations, however, benefit primarily through remittances and reduced unemployment (Aguila et al., 2012; Gevorkyan, 2021), where migrants face a range of challenges in accomplishing their goals or securing suitable jobs shaped by social, economic, environmental and political factors (Wickramasekara, 2002), including lack of expertise in the local labour markets, discriminatory employer practices, restricted access to social networks, and language barriers (Wang et al., 2018).

To better understand these dynamics, it is essential to examine the broader challenges that migrants face across various contexts. Migration is a complex process that profoundly affects societies and encompasses both voluntary and involuntary movement driven by factors

such as economic opportunity, safety, and personal fulfilment. Within the broader discourse of migration, gender and ethnicity are identified as crucial elements that impact individual experiences (Scholten, 2022). According to Hermele (2021), migration affects not only the individuals who move but also their families and communities. Recently, the global number of international migrants is estimated at around 304 million, reflecting the growing scale and significance of migration worldwide (United Nations, 2024).

Many migrate to pursue economic advantages such as better job opportunities and career advancement prospects (Glaesser & Cooper, 2014; Pedraza, 1991). However, securing employment during the initial transition phase in a new country is often more challenging than anticipated (Van Tonder & Soontiens, 2014). Despite advancements such as inclusive policies and integration programmes in host nations, migrants still encounter difficulties and hardships (Kanas & Kosyakova, 2024; Ressia et al., 2017b; Solano & De Coninck, 2023).

These general challenges are further complicated when gender is a key factor in migration experiences. Although migration provides opportunities for social and economic advancement, men and women migrants face typical difficulties, such as risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse in the host countries (Piper, 2009). Recent developments, including changes in international economic and geopolitical landscapes and legislative changes, have contributed to increased diversity in global migration patterns (Kwilinski et al., 2022). However, the social and economic outcomes of migration differ by gender, with men and women experiencing different social and economic costs and benefits (Degani & De Stefani, 2020; Piper, 2009).

Among the diverse experiences of migrant women, those of skilled South Asian migrant women remain remarkably underexplored and warrant closer examination. Women, in particular, encounter unique challenges influenced by societal norms, legal frameworks, and access to resources (UN Women, 2024). Their experiences are underrepresented in migration

literature, highlighting a significant gap in understanding the specific difficulties they encounter in the workplace and the strategies they employ to overcome them (Hwang & Beauregard, 2022; Kōu & Bailey, 2017). The intersection of gender, ethnicity, and professional identity often compounds the challenges for these women, affecting job market integration and career progression in host countries (Sokoloff, 2008).

To analyse these layered experiences, intersectionality offers a valuable theoretical framework. It provides a lens for understanding how overlapping social identities, such as race, gender, and class, interact to shape lived experiences (Acker, 2006; Lutz et al., 2016). Discriminatory practices embedded in immigration policies further marginalise ethnic minority women (Brah, 2005). Scholars increasingly acknowledge the complex interplay between ethnicity, gender, and migration, noting that factors such as class, occupation, and geographic location significantly influence outcomes (Harnois & Ifatunji, 2011; Kim, 2020).

These theoretical insights help contextualise the practical challenges faced by skilled South Asian migrant women in professional environments. They often face gender and ethnic discrimination, difficulties in credential recognition, language barriers, and cultural dissonance between home and host countries (Arnita, 2022; Cause, 2023; Jezoriek, 2024; Noe-Bustamante et al., 2022). These challenges are exacerbated by immigration systems when they favour male-dominated fields (Colakoglu et al., 2018), devalue prior work experience, and restrict access to diverse social networks (Meares, 2010). Additionally, tied visa statuses and domestic responsibilities further limit women's professional mobility (Purkayastha, 2005b).

Despite these barriers, the multilingual skills and unique cultural backgrounds of skilled migrant women can be valuable assets for employers seeking global perspectives (Grimaldi et al., 2022; Vertovec, 2023). Addressing systemic obstacles and connecting these women's potential to inclusive workforce strategies benefits both migrants and host societies (Guo, 2015; Manuti, 2020; Wrench, 2016).

Although diversity and inclusion are increasingly emphasised in contemporary workplaces, scholarly attention to the complex challenges faced by skilled South Asian migrant women remains limited (Handa, 2003; Neupane, 2024; Purkayastha, 2005a; Showunmi et al., 2016). This gap underscores the need for deeper understanding of their experiences within the broader migration discourse (Gaetano & Yeoh, 2010).

The proportion of skilled migrants in advanced economies is rising (Zhang & Lucey, 2019), yet international management scholarship has only recently begun to explore their gendered experiences, challenges and strategies (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Cerdin et al., 2014; Ressia et al., 2017b; Van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2012). Research indicates that highly skilled migrant women encounter more obstacles entering the workforce than their male counterparts (Liversage, 2009), underscoring the need for a focused inquiry into their experiences.

1.2. Prior Systematic Literature Reviews

This dissertation builds upon existing systematic literature reviews that highlight the issues faced by skilled South Asian migrant women. While prior systematic literature reviews have examined expatriates' experiences, few have solely focused on skilled migrants (Farashah & Blomquist, 2022). To integrate findings across disciplines such as psychology, sociology, ethnic and migration studies, a large body of literature analysis has been conducted.

Tharenou and Kulik (2020) explored how skilled migrants socialise after finding work in developed countries. Drawing on research on corporately assigned and self-initiated expatriates, Shirmohammadi et al. (2019) examined qualification-matched employment (QME) across disciplines, focusing primarily on management and organisation journals with a narrow scope.

Although systematic reviews on skilled migrant women are limited, recent scholars have started to examine their experiences. While focusing on structural mechanisms rather than gendered lived experiences, Van Riemsdijk and Basford (2021) proposed a multi-level

framework for workplace integration in Norway's oil and gas sector. In their study, Kubiciel-Lodzińska and Maj (2021) provided essential insights into labour market integration by analysing overqualification and deskilling among migrant women working in Poland's aged care industry.

More integrative methods have emerged in recent years. Yazdankhoo et al. (2025) highlighted how systemic barriers and intersecting identities, including gender, ethnicity, and migrant status, actively influence the professional development of skilled migrant women. In her study of the work-life experiences of highly skilled Asian women in Anglophone nations, Kalyanaraman (2016) identified key issues, including identity negotiation, job search stress, and deskilling. Skilled migrant women often follow contingent career pathways, influenced by compromises and family obligations shaped by traditional gender norms in both their home and host societies (Tharenou, 2024). Farashah et al. (2023) developed a multifaceted framework in their systematic literature review on the perceived employability of skilled migrants.

Despite these contributions, research often ignores how their intersecting identities affect employment across countries and occupations. Despite their economic potential, skilled South Asian migrant women remain largely invisible in migration and labour policy frameworks. This synthesis highlights the need for more in-depth studies that emphasise the barriers, navigation strategies, and intersectional analysis of the employment experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women. This approach aligns with the current study's aim of creating inclusive support networks and advocating labour market strategies that let these women succeed personally and professionally in their host nations. Table 1 presents a summary of prior systematic literature reviews that have examined migrant South Asian women, highlighting their scope, focus, and key contributions.

Table 1 *Prior systematic literature reviews of migrant South Asian women*

Author	Study Title	Scope and Focus
Shruti Kalyanaraman (2016)	Contextualising highly skilled South Asian migrant women as workers	Examines career trajectories and job search experiences for on-the-job experiences of highly skilled Asian migrant women in USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand
Farashah & Blomquist (2023)	Perceived employability of skilled migrants: A systematic review	Reviews 88 studies on skilled migrants' employment experiences globally
Farashah & Blomquist (2022)	Work experiences of qualified immigrants: A review of theoretical progress	Analyses theoretical approaches to studying migrant employment
Yazdankhoo et al. (2025)	Migrant women navigating the intersection of gender, migration, and career development: A systematic literature review	Systematic review of career development and vocational psychology for migrant women
Tharenou (2024)	Dashed hopes or delayed met expectations? Skilled migrant women's qualification-matched employment	Examines whether skilled migrant (SM) women achieve qualification-matched employment (QME) and how they do so
Tharenou & Kulik (2020)	Skilled migrants employed in developed, mature economies: From newcomers to organisational insiders	Investigates how skilled migrants transition from newcomers to organisational insiders in host countries
Shirmohammadi, Beigi, and Stewart (2019)	Understanding skilled migrants' employment in the host country: A multidisciplinary review and a conceptual model	Synthesises multidisciplinary research on SMs' qualification-matched employment and proposes a conceptual model
Kubiciel-Lodzińska & Maj (2021)	High-skilled vs. low-skilled migrant women: The use of competencies and knowledge-theoretical and political implications: An example of elderly care sector in Poland	High vs. low-skilled migrant women
Van Riemsdijk & Basford (2021)	Integration of highly skilled migrants in the workplace: A multi-level framework	Workplace integration

Despite offering fundamental insights, these prior reviews highlight a glaring knowledge gap about the intersectional employment experiences of professional South Asian migrant women. To overcome that gap, this dissertation synthesises previous research and offers a framework that brings together their unique sociocultural and professional realities.

1.3 Research Purpose and Questions

Skilled South Asian migrant women often face challenges while seeking relevant work and, in the workplace, such as language barriers, cultural biases and discrimination, which can hinder their assimilation and professional growth in their host countries (Guo, 2015; Iredale, 2005; Man, 2004; Suto, 2009). It is essential to understand their lived experiences and identify the factors that can influence their success, thereby supporting effective integration and career fulfilment. Understanding this can help create an inclusive work environment and targeted interventions to address systemic barriers.

This research examines the challenges faced by skilled Asian women in their host countries and the strategies they employ to overcome them. By conducting a systematic literature review, this study aims to examine and highlight many challenges encountered by skilled South Asian migrant women. The goal is to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women and encourage the development of support systems that promote their professional success and well-being.

For this research, two research questions have been formulated as follows:

- RQ1. What barriers do skilled South Asian migrant women face in seeking suitable employment after migration?
- RQ2. How do skilled South Asian migrant women navigate and overcome these work barriers?

1.4 Research Significance

The academic community and society would greatly benefit from a deeper understanding of the challenges that skilled South Asian women encounter while seeking relevant employment opportunities. Firstly, by bringing attention to these difficulties, this research will help advance the academic debate around migration, gender studies, and diversity in the workplace. This research will help scholars understand how gender, ethnicity, and migratory status interact in this context. As a further incentive, lawmakers, employers, and community groups can utilise the findings of this study to inform the development of more inclusive workplaces and policies that facilitate the employment of skilled South Asian migrant women in relevant roles and support their career advancement. The findings may enhance economic development, social cohesion, and individual well-being by fully utilising this group, provided society acknowledges and addresses the obstacles they face. In summary, this research may help skilled South Asian women find more welcoming and equitable workplaces in their host nations.

1.5 Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the background of the research, introduces prior research, and presents the aim of the study by detailing the research question, while also addressing my motivation for conducting this study.

Chapter 2 outlines the research methodology adopted for the systematic literature review. This chapter further discusses the sources used to find the journal articles, the criteria for selecting relevant literature, the details and the characteristics of the included studies, and how they are categorised and synthesised based on the findings. Additionally, it highlights the process of conducting a systematic literature review. Lastly, it provides detailed information on a thematic analysis employed to interpret the data.

Chapter 3 presents the research findings derived from thematic analysis and highlights the key themes identified in the study. Chapter 4 presents the discussion of these findings in relation to the existing literature. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the overall conclusion of the dissertation, synthesising key insights and providing suggestions for future research directions and practice.

In conclusion, this study seeks to address a critical gap in migration and contribute to a broader understanding by examining the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and professional migration. By focusing on the experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women, it highlights the systemic barriers they face and the strategies they employ to navigate these challenges. This review would enhance our understanding of the employment-related difficulties encountered during the initial transition in host countries, as well as the adaptation strategies employed to achieve personal and professional integration. The insights gained may inform the development of inclusive policies and workplace practices that support the assimilation of skilled migrant women into host communities. Ultimately, this research contributes to building more equitable and inclusive societies by informing policy, promoting diversity in the workforce, and encouraging further academic inquiry into the experiences of underrepresented migrants.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design used in this study. It presents the research methodology, explains its rationale and relevance, and justifies the use of a systematic literature review. The following section examines the philosophical background and clarifies the dissertation's aim by outlining its ontological, epistemological, and paradigmatic stances. Finally, the chapter details the steps used to conduct the study, collect data, and the methods for analysing and synthesising that data.

2.1 Philosophical Background

According to Davies and Fisher (2018), the research design is (explicitly or implicitly) positioned within a research paradigm that the researcher determines best suits the research. The researcher's stance on ontology, epistemology, and research paradigm determines the philosophical framework (Gray, 2021; Scotland, 2012).

Ontology refers to a system of thought that reflects how individuals conceptualise reality, what they believe exists and how they interpret the nature of being (Gray, 2021). It is not confined to perceiving ideas as facts but includes assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations about what constitutes reality. A researcher's ontological perspective can be realist or relativist (Gray, 2021). The realist ontology is a process of identifying a single truth, which serves as the basis of reality in life (Gray, 2021). On the contrary, relativist ontology is an approach shaped by multiple realities, including an individual's thoughts, experiences, and perspectives, which support various interpretations of the same things (Gray, 2021). This research study adopts a relativist ontological stance, examining how individuals interpret reality. Due to the differences in demographics, experiences, gender, and other factors, people's perception of social situations forms multiple perspectives of reality. Different perspectives and situations can yield distinct realities (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Gray, 2021). Integrating such an ontological perspective was the foundation for constructing an epistemology for the analysis.

This study compiles research on the various experiences and barriers faced by skilled South Asian migrant women seeking relevant employment opportunities, and how they navigate these challenges after relocating to their host country. The idea that different people have diverse experiences after migrating to a new host country, shaped by their values and beliefs, is the primary driving force behind this research. This underpins the decision to adopt a relativist position.

Before considering epistemology, it is important to clarify the overall reasoning approach, as this shapes how knowledge will be constructed. According to Gray (2021), there are two primary methodological approaches: deductive and inductive. A deductive approach enables researchers to formulate a hypothesis based on a pre-existing theory, collect data, test the hypothesis, and then interpret the results. The purpose of this method is to validate or refine theoretical claims by moving from the general to the specific (Gray, 2021). On the other hand, an inductive approach begins with collecting data in the form of facts and case studies, which are analysed to identify themes pertinent to the research topic or question. To generate new theoretical ideas, this exploratory strategy is frequently employed (Gray, 2021; Saunders et al., 2009).

In this study, an inductive-deductive technique is used in combination. The systematic literature review, informed by current theoretical viewpoints, reflects a deductive approach. By examining empirical data from secondary sources that document the real-life experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women, the study employs both inductive and deductive analysis simultaneously. The study's thematic analysis of these narratives aims to identify patterns and produce insights that can contribute to future development. Therefore, inductive thinking enhances the analytical process even though the overall design is deductive.

The deductive approach frequently dominates in the context of systematic literature reviews, which aim to assess earlier research methodically, synthesise existing knowledge

organised around predetermined research questions and theoretical frameworks (Gray, 2021; Saunders et al., 2009). Deductive reasoning is reflected in this process, which aims to organise and interpret data in accordance with accepted ideas and beliefs. As a result, this study employs a deductive approach, beginning with prior research on migration, gender, and labour market integration to organise and interpret findings from empirical studies.

An inductive approach can be used in systematic literature reviews during the data analysis of empirical literature (Gray, 2021). An inductive approach is employed in this study to identify recurring themes or highlight gaps or underexplored areas in the empirical literature from secondary sources related to skilled South Asian migrant women, which document their views and lived experiences as migrants. As Silverman (2021) notes, inductive research employs in-depth reading to determine themes, concepts, patterns or models by interpreting the raw data.

Research conducted by various authors to explore different aspects of reality is the foundation of this study. Once a significant amount of data is collected, the researcher analyses it to find themes and patterns. This research emphasises exploring the analytical themes emerging from secondary data, which is grounded in the relativist ontological view of many realities. The subjectivist ontological perspective upon which it is based challenges the epistemological perspective between researchers and research contexts.

Epistemology is a process for understanding and explaining what we know, how we know it, and what we believe constitutes knowledge, while ensuring that the knowledge is both sufficient and legitimate (Ahmed, 2008; Crotty, 1998). It establishes the basis for knowledge claims and analyses what constitutes knowledge while identifying the nature of the interaction between the enquirer and what is known. The researcher becomes a discoverer, constructor, or interpreter of expertise based on their choice of epistemology (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Constructivism is a form of knowledge that is developed through social and human interaction

between people (Ahmed, 2008; Davies & Fisher, 2018). It fosters knowledge by critically engaging with and synthesising the perspectives of multiple authors, rather than generating or influencing primary data (Gray, 2021). This research employs a constructivist method, despite being secondary research, as it enables the researcher to investigate the experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women seeking employment when they relocate to a host country and identify common themes in migrant research.

The choice of research paradigm is a crucial element that researchers must consider when defining their research methodology (Gray, 2021). According to Grant and Giddings (2002), a research paradigm is a collection of values used to interpret the ontology, epistemology, and truth. A paradigm is a researcher's perspective on knowledge, encompassing how it is best acquired, which in turn creates a path for conducting research (Booyesen et al., 2018; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Petty et al., 2012). Numerous paradigms have emerged from different research schools; positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory are among the most popular (Grant & Giddings, 2002). This study is positioned within an interpretive paradigm, guided by a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology. The interpretivist paradigm was most suited for this investigation, as it aligns with the philosophical belief that reality is socially and contextually constructed and that knowledge emerges through interpretation. In the context of a systematic literature review, this involves synthesising and critically engaging with the interpretations of multiple authors, rather than relying solely on primary data. It aligns with my dedication to understanding how meaning is constructed in specific social and cultural contexts (Grant & Giddings, 2002). According to Pringle and Booyesen (2018), this paradigm is ideal for constructionist epistemology since it considers the possibility of various realities and builds knowledge from the participant's viewpoint.

The primary objective of this research is to understand previous studies conducted on what is known about the experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women finding work after

they move to the host nation. This research may help support skilled South Asian migrant women by identifying their challenges in securing relevant jobs and their potential solutions. Building on this philosophical foundation, the research design was selected.

2.2 Research Design: Systematic Literature Review

A systematic literature review was employed as the research approach for this study to answer the previously developed research questions. A systematic literature review is a thorough examination of the body of research that has already been done on a particular topic using a reliable and objective approach to find, select, appraise, synthesise, and critique the pertinent literature, uphold the principles of transparency and bias while strengthening the body of knowledge (Gough et al., 2017; Pettricrew & Roberts, 2006; Thomas & Harden, 2008; Williams Jr et al., 2021). By evaluating prior research, a systematic literature review enables researchers to make judgements about the current state of knowledge, identify areas that need more study, and highlight potential research directions for the development of the literature on a particular subject (Liao et al., 2017; Siddaway et al., 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003).

This study employs a systematic literature review, as it provides an unbiased, comprehensive, and transparent synthesis of prior research. It follows rigorous protocols that reduce bias and improve reliability, unlike traditional reviews, which frequently depend on the subjective selection and partial presentation of studies to support a researcher's viewpoint (Baumeister, 2012; Briner & Denyer, 2012; Rousseau et al., 2008). They incorporate sources that meet inclusion and exclusion criteria (Okoli, 2015). According to Gough et al. (2017), systematic reviews employ strict coding and synthesis protocols, transparently identify relevant studies, justify inclusion or exclusion criteria, explicitly define review boundaries, and evaluate the quality of research. Ultimately, to make the accumulated evidence more accessible and valuable for future research, they assist in identifying, evaluating, and summarising findings from all relevant studies (Staples & Niazi, 2007).

This dissertation reviews past research to investigate the work-related obstacles experienced by skilled South Asian migrant women, thereby contributing to the expanding body of knowledge. This method provides a strong basis for formulating future research and qualitative inquiry by synthesising relevant findings from earlier investigations (Liao et al., 2017). It aims to enhance our understanding of the challenges faced by these skilled South Asian migrant women in their job search in the host country and the adaptation tactics they employ to navigate these challenges. The introduction to this review includes a table (Table 1) that summarises previous systematic literature reviews on the subject, providing readers with a concise overview of the existing research and highlighting any gaps that this dissertation aims to address. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform the development of practices that facilitate the personal and professional integration of individuals into host communities.

Denyer and Tranfield (2009), Briner and Denyer (2012), and Rousseau et al. (2008) suggested a structured method used in this study to conduct a systematic literature review on skilled South Asian migrant women (see Table 2 below). The researcher established the boundary of systematic literature reviews, including the research objective, scope, and questions. Then, using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, relevant studies on skilled South Asian migrant women were found and chosen. Data extraction, coding, and analysis from selected literature formed the third step. The researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the results to identify essential insights. The review concluded by outlining current gaps in the literature and suggesting avenues for further investigation. The following sections provide detailed coverage of each step.

Table 2 *The steps of conducting a systematic literature review*

Step	Description	Location in Dissertation
Step 1	Define the scope and framework of the review	Chapter 1 (Section 1.4)
Step 2	Comprehensive search for relevant literature and identify them	Chapter 2 (Section 2.1)
Step 3	Structure and analyse the collected data	Chapter 2 (Section 2.4)

Step 4	Synthesise key findings from the reviewed literature	Chapter 3
Step 5	Draw implications and outline future research directions	Chapters 4 and 5

2.3 Research Method

This study examines primary empirical research, including both qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as secondary data sources such as published journal articles. For qualitative research based on secondary data, a comprehensive and transparent selection of empirical literature guided by systematic review techniques is required (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Thomas & Harden, 2008). The initial review encompassed all forms of literature to ensure an in-depth understanding of the experiences and issues faced by skilled South Asian migrant women. However, only empirical studies, which collected real data such as surveys, interviews, and case studies, were included in the final review. Evidence-based insights that captured lived experiences, coping mechanisms and barriers were given preference.

To maintain methodological thoroughness and ensure that it only captures observable and documented experiences, conceptual literature was excluded from the primary analysis. However, to provide theoretical support and facilitate the interpretation of empirical findings, conceptual contributions were presented in the discussion sections.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and common themes across the included studies. In the context of this systematic literature review, thematic analysis involved synthesising both qualitative insights and interpretations of quantitative findings reported by the authors, rather than analysing raw numerical data. For qualitative studies, themes were drawn from authors' reported interpretations, narratives, and participant quotations. For quantitative studies, thematic analysis involved synthesising patterns identified through statistical trends, such as reported barriers and employment outcomes and integrating these with qualitative insights. This approach enabled the identification of recurring barriers and

strategies, highlighting similarities and differences in the experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women. Using thematic analysis within a systematic literature review, therefore, provides a structured way to categorise and interpret findings across methodological traditions, enabling the development of broader analytical themes that reflect the varied realities documented in the literature. The next part outlines the specific steps employed to gather and select the secondary data used in this study, following the establishment of the methodological framework.

2.3.1 Data Collection

Secondary data research, which involves exploring data already collected and/or synthesised by other researchers for the same or different reasons, when they do not interact directly with the participants, formed the foundation for the data gathering procedure (Houghton et al., 2013). A careful selection of empirical literature and systematic review methodology was applied when working with the secondary data (Thomas & Harden, 2008). To interpret the themes underlying the primary research question, it is important to identify relevant articles.

To maintain relevance and accuracy, this research utilised literature published between 2010 and 2025. Firstly, an electronic search for relevant journal articles was conducted using EBSCO and SCOPUS, two databases recognised for their comprehensive, peer-reviewed, and multidisciplinary coverage of academic and international publications. I selected these platforms due to their accessibility via the Auckland University of Technology's online library as well as their relevance to my research focus, skilled migrant women and their experiences, which are covered in a variety of fields, including business, management, social science, and human resources (Lehtovaara & Jyrkinen, 2021; Sweileh, 2024). It is essential to take a multidisciplinary approach because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by skilled migrant women in various settings. EBSCO and

SCOPUS provided the most effective and relevant access to empirical studies within the limits and time frame of this study, even when other databases, such as Web of Science and ProQuest, were considered.

The study followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure reproducibility and transparency in the selection of articles (Page et al., 2021). The identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of studies were documented using the PRISMA framework, which offers a comprehensive summary of the selection process for the final collection of publications (Page et al., 2021). Figure 1 outlines the step-by-step process, including the PRISMA, followed during the data collection phase. An electronic search for relevant journal articles was conducted using carefully selected keywords to identify relevant literature that addresses the research question. Abstracts and titles were reviewed to assess suitability and relevance to the research question. The study's scope may have been limited due to time constraints. Still, the use of reliable databases, relevant keywords, and a structured method ensured that we included high-quality, relevant literature.

The keywords used to search for the articles were extracted from the research question. Initially, I used the keywords “Barriers,” “Skilled Migrant,” “Asian Women,” and “Employment” on Google Scholar, and I found 16,800 articles. However, this combination included articles that were far from my selected research premises.

I then conducted the search with the main keywords “skilled,” “migrant,” “employment,” and “find.” The keywords used are mentioned in Table 3. I used various combinations of the search key terms from Table 3 in each search iteration to find relevant journal articles. Based on the following key terms, this search technique employed a range of vocabulary and terms which were used interchangeably: "skilled," "experienced," "expat," "immigrant," "employment," "search," "access," and "relevant."

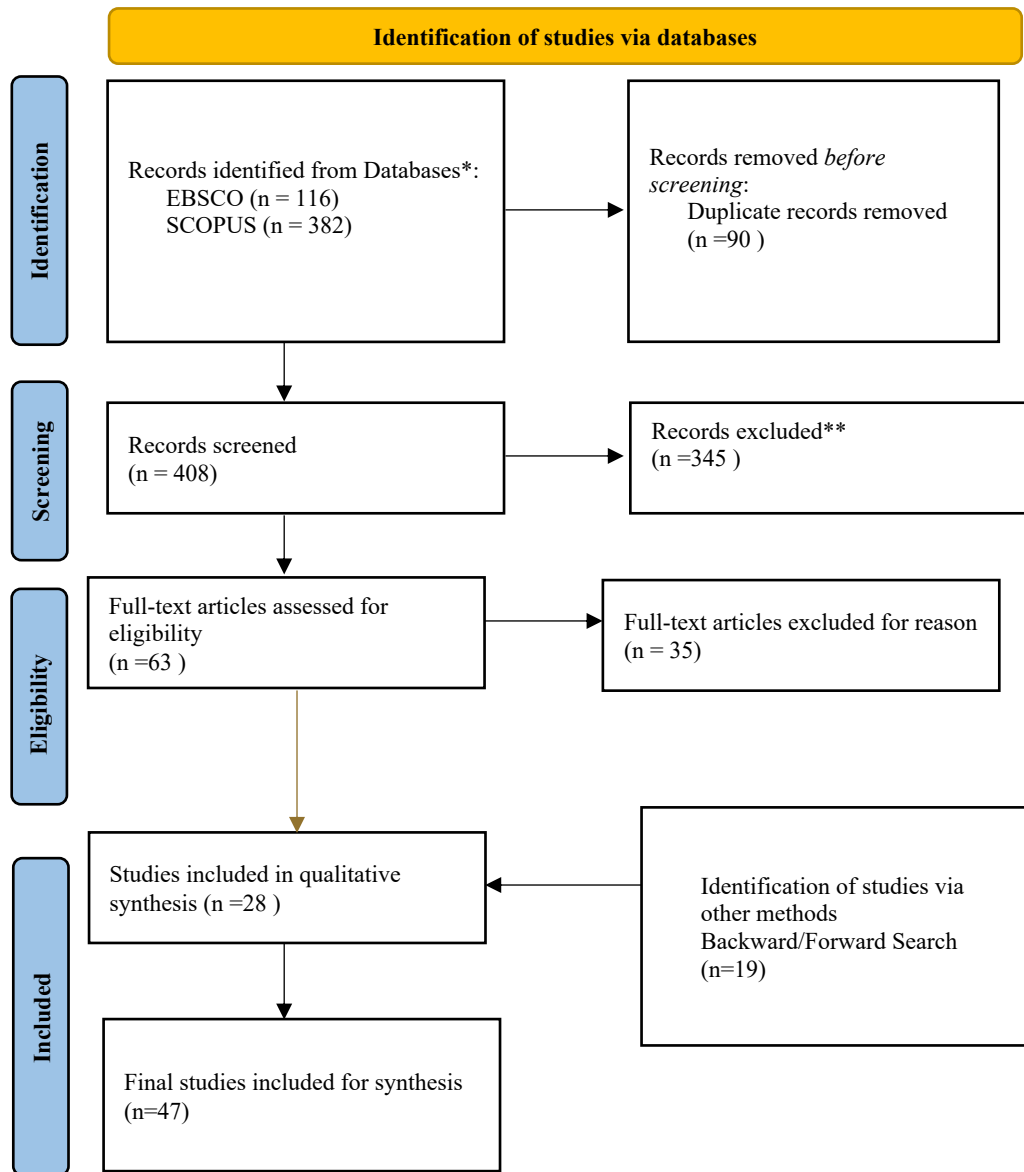
To find article titles and abstracts that contain the search phrases "skilled," "migrant," "job," and "seek," the Boolean operator "AND" was used. The truncation symbols and Boolean and proximity operators employed were unique to the searched database. When searching for specific keywords that contained search terms (profession*, expat*, migrant*, immigrant*, foreign*, seek*, search*, find*, apply*, look*, opportunit* and hunt*), the asterisk symbol (*) was placed at the end of each keyword to produce several variations of results. The second key search searched for synonyms using the Boolean operator 'OR' (skilled OR qualified OR profession* OR experienced, migrant* OR immigrant* OR expat* OR foreign*, job OR employment OR labour OR labor OR profession OR occupation OR livelihood, seek* OR search* OR find* OR apply* OR look* OR opportunit* OR access OR relevant OR satisfaction OR hunt*).

Table 3 *List of Keywords*

	Skilled	Migrant	Job	Seek
Keywords	Qualified Experienced Profession	Immigrant Expatriate Foreign	Employment Labour Labor Profession Occupation Livelihood	Search Find Apply Look Opportunity Access Relevant Satisfaction Hunt

Therefore, the final search string used in the search engine was: ((skilled OR qualified OR profession* OR experienced) W/N/3 (migrant* OR immigrant* OR expat* OR foreign*) AND (job OR employment OR labour OR labor OR profession OR occupation OR livelihood) W/N/3 (seek* OR search* OR find* OR apply* OR look* OR opportunit* OR access OR relevant OR satisfaction OR hunt*)). The search string resulted in a primary result of 498 articles (382 from SCOPUS and 116 from EBSCO).

Figure 1 A PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the steps for searching and selecting relevant articles. Adapted from Page et al. (2021)



Secondly, after the primary results were obtained, the next step was to screen the articles for their relevance to the research topic. I downloaded and imported each search result into EndNote X9, where the screening process took place. The titles and abstracts of the journal articles were reviewed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria mentioned in Table 4 below. Having identified the sources and search strategy, the next step involved applying explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and quality of selected studies.

2.3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Several criteria were used to determine which publications would be included in the data for this study. The first criterion was the selection of journal papers authored in English and published between 2010 and 2025 (including both years). The selected articles included peer-reviewed articles; grey literature (such as working papers and reports) was not considered to ensure high quality. Any articles that did not have “skilled migrant” in their title or abstract were excluded. For this research, the term “skilled migrant” was used interchangeably with degree-based professions, such as Engineers, Nurses, Doctors, Teachers, IT professionals, and Accountants, when screening articles.

It also used the synonyms qualified, professional, experienced, and foreign-trained for inclusion. This allowed the research to include all skilled migrants who had migrated based on their skills and qualifications. Articles that focused solely on migrants from the following South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and who moved to host countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America, were included. All the articles selected were primary research, and I excluded all secondary research. The 63 articles that met the aforementioned criteria were shortlisted after 345 articles were identified and eliminated.

Table 4 *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication in English	Full texts were not available
Published between 2010- 2025	Did not provide a reliable information to answer the research question
Published in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals	Grey Literature (e.g., working papers, industrial reports, government documents, etc.) where the rigour demanded of academic studies may not be required
“Skilled Migrant” in Title or abstract	Not “Skilled Migrant” in Title or abstract

Migrants from the following South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka Migrants moving to Host country: United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United States of America	Exclude migrants from all other countries and all other host countries mentioned in inclusion criteria
Primary research	Secondary research
	Not related to employment or employment challenges/barriers/opportunities of skilled migrants

Thirdly, reading the complete full-text articles helped refine the list further, ensuring it effectively addresses the research questions. Later, a manual search was conducted, and journal articles were searched both forward and backward to identify cited works. Reference lists were also examined to create a comprehensive body of literature (Webster & Watson, 2002).

Examining an article's references at the conclusion is a quick and effective way to find relevant studies. However, the search may have missed specific articles because there are no universal standards for selecting and assigning the keywords. Articles that included information on qualified migrant professionals were also incorporated into the research later, rather than just those focusing on the broader term, skilled migrants. Due to these exclusions, some journal articles relevant to the skilled migrant context may have been overlooked, despite the aim of gathering all of them. Finally, 47 articles were selected for this systematic literature review.

2.4 Data Analysis

After the final 47 articles were selected, the data analysis began. Data analysis interprets, synthesises, and generates new insights relevant to the research focus through a structured methodology that breaks down enormous datasets into smaller, manageable units (Gray, 2021). Among qualitative techniques, thematic analysis is widely recognised for identifying, examining, and recording patterns in data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Analysing

data is not a linear process, but an iterative one where you continuously go back and forth between data and interpretation. Applying cognitive processes is necessary for thorough data processing and evaluation, which allows the identification of emerging themes. Rich and rigorous accounts of the data are provided via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

This study employed inductive and deductive thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2014) method to analyse past primary empirical literature. Existing theoretical frameworks and data on gender, migration, and labour market integration served as a guide for the deductive element, informed initial codes and theme structures. The inductive method allowed themes to emerge naturally from the data, ensuring that the findings were grounded in the experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women, rather than being imposed by pre-existing researchers' bias. Their recurrence assessed the prevalence and importance of themes across several studies. By demonstrating that the themes represent recurring patterns throughout the literature, this approach emphasises the authenticity and credibility of the synthesis, which aligns with the ideas presented by Braun and Clarke (2014) and Gibbs (2018).

First, the data analysis process began by importing all the selected journal articles into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software that assists in structuring and organising the qualitative data (Welsh, 2002). The first step involved *familiarising myself with the available data* by reading and re-reading the articles. While reading, I highlighted key points, issues of potential interest, and methods used, as well as their structural composition, and made reflective notes linked to my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The reflective notes provided a foundation for creating codes and nodes in NVivo. For example, my notes captured recurring expressions of frustration over credential recognition, which subsequently influenced the development of the Foreign Credential Devaluation code (created by me). Additionally, I encountered narratives describing underemployment despite high qualifications; I noted these

as potential indicators of Skill Underutilisation, thus coded them accordingly. Similarly, I found that local experience was mentioned several times, which led to the development of the Local Experience code (created by me). In the same way, how migrant women's experiences are based around gendered norms and expectations were highlighted numerous times, which developed the Gendered Expectations and Gendered Norms codes.

Next, the second step involved reviewing the initial list of ideas that emerged from the dataset to aid in generating inductive codes. A node is NVivo's way of organising references about particular concepts or ideas. Similar concepts from different journal articles were grouped into nodes, enabling me to manage data systematically across sources. To correctly categorise and code relevant passages under the proper thematic labels, additional nodes were created as I progressed through the readings. I focused on the fundamental primary research presented in the journal articles, including the methodology, analysis, results, and conclusions. I excluded the introduction and literature review portions to preserve my analytical focus. To ensure that data was organised systematically, coding and reading were done simultaneously. For instance, passages addressing family expectations and career decisions were tagged under family responsibilities, illustrating how cultural norms and expectations intersect with professional goals. This enabled me to capture nuanced patterns in the career trajectories of skilled South Asian migrant women, such as gendered labour market barriers and family expectations. This was systematically recorded thanks to this iterative procedure.

Raw data is broken down into concise, meaningful codes representing the essence of the text (Braun & Clarke, 2014). To reduce the overwhelming volume of data, coding was employed to present it in a more understandable format (Gray, 2021). These codes were developed through an iterative exploration process, driven by data. For instance, to reflect the difficulties in finding suitable employment, I grouped passages detailing the employment

difficulties faced by skilled South Asian migrant women into classifications such as deskilling and devaluation. Similarly, to reflect the discrimination migrants faced due to their strong accents, I grouped them into classifications such as Accent Discrimination. Codes were refined, merged, and documented with explanations to maintain clarity and prevent confusion. Repeated readings ensured saturation and comprehensive coverage of recurring patterns, ensuring that no details were missed. As a result, several of the examined articles have multiple codes. An excerpt is displayed below in Table 5 to demonstrate how I completed the initial coding.

Table 5 *Data extract with codes*

Data Extract	Code
<p>Skilled migrants often face <u>gender discrimination</u> and have the <u>dual burden of managing paid employment alongside domestic responsibilities</u>, affecting their <u>career aspirations</u>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Discrimination • Dual Burden • Paid Employment • Domestic Responsibilities • Career Aspirations
<p><u>Employers</u> were not averse to exposing such <u>preferences</u>, often explicitly demanding that respondents' <u>cultural traits, such as accents and ethnic names</u>, be <u>changed to qualify for the job</u>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer Preference • Employer Bias • Accent Discrimination • Ethnic Name Discrimination • Cultural Conformity • Assimilation pressure

Subsequently, the third phase aimed to collate the coded data into *broader themes*. A theme is a collection of codes or categories derived from data that pertain to a precise meaning. To make the list of codes more understandable and transparent, the next step was to combine the familiar and repetitive codes (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Capturing all of the key patterns described in the articles and determining which codes fall under which themes was a time-consuming and challenging procedure. The codes were compiled into themes as the analysis progressed, reflecting both barriers and navigation strategies. For example, Skill Devaluation, Skill Underutilisation, and Deskilling were grouped together under the overarching theme of Barriers to Employment. Similarly, codes such as Motivation, Flexibility, Adaptability, and Resilience formed themes that reflected navigation strategies. NVivo's mind-mapping tools

supported the visualisation of thematic relationships, enabling connections between themes, such as Adaptation Strategies, with sub-themes capturing identity work. Themes were then developed by combining the original codes (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Nevertheless, the codes that did not belong to any of the basic themes were kept in a temporary group named “miscellaneous themes.” These were later refined or combined with other codes or themes when the process evolved.

In step four, *themes were reviewed* and refined to ensure coherence with coded extracts and the overall dataset. Those that did not fit the dataset were discarded. The fifth step involved *developing and labelling themes*. Each theme was assigned a short, memorable title to help readers understand the concept. Using literature and my ideas, I developed titles for the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2014). For example, Discrimination emerged as a theme that captured the experiences of ethnic, racial and cultural discrimination, along with stereotyping, just to name a few. The final stage is the most crucial, as it involves writing a report where the analysis is documented (Braun & Clarke, 2014). This is where themes were contextualised with illustrative examples tied to skilled South Asian migrant women, demonstrating how they navigate complex socio-economic landscapes while striving for professional integration.

Chapter Summary

To conclude, this chapter established the methodological foundations of the study by outlining its philosophical positioning, research design, and analytical procedures. The research was situated within a relativist ontology, a constructivist epistemology, and an interpretivist paradigm, acknowledging that multiple realities shape the employment experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women. A systematic literature review was justified as the most rigorous and transparent approach for synthesising existing knowledge, using defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, PRISMA guidelines, and structured search strategies across major databases. An inductive–deductive reasoning approach guided the review,

supported by thematic analysis to identify patterns across qualitative and quantitative studies. NVivo facilitated coding, theme development, and synthesis of findings. The chapter's detailed procedures laid the foundation for presenting the thematic outcomes of the review in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Findings

The philosophical underpinnings of this research were described in the previous chapter, providing an overview of the research paradigm, ontology, and epistemology (Grant & Giddings, 2002). The research design, data collection methods, and thematic analysis, using Braun and Clarke's (2014) process, were also discussed.

The following section provides an overview of the data and findings from the systematic literature review on skilled South Asian migrant women and their experiences in the host country, focusing on the barriers they face and how they navigate these challenges. A thematic framework that captures the experiences of these skilled South Asian migrant women has been developed through data synthesis, drawing upon qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method empirical studies. The main themes and subthemes found through a thematic coding process form the framework of this chapter.

This chapter presents the findings in two parts, organised around the research questions. The first part (Section 3.2) addresses Research Question 1, which examines the barriers skilled South Asian migrant women face when seeking suitable work in the host country. The second part (Section 3.3) addresses Research Question 2, which explores the strategies these women use to navigate these barriers.

Each part begins with a summary table that maps the themes, subthemes/codes, and authors (year) drawn from the PRISMA-screened literature and data.

3.1 Overview of Datasets and Study Types

The dataset included empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals relating to migrant women's experiences in finding relevant employment in a new country and navigating these challenges. These studies were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 4 (see Methodology chapter). The review incorporated qualitative studies (in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographies capturing lived experiences), quantitative

studies (surveys and statistical analyses measuring employment outcomes, discrimination, and integration indicators), and mixed-method studies (combining qualitative insights with quantitative validation). A summary of the reviewed studies is provided in Table 6.

Table 6 *Summary of reviewed studies*

Study Type	Number of Studies	Methods
Qualitative	32	Interviews, focus groups, ethnography
Quantitative	9	Surveys
Mixed Methods (Qualitative and Quantitative)	6	Combined surveys and interviews
Total	47	

The studies span multiple countries, with a focus on migrants from the following South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It focuses on host countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America, where migrants move to for several reasons, including better lifestyle and economic prospects.

3.2 Research Question 1: Barriers to finding employment

The themes and subthemes identified for Research Question 1 are Gendered Power and Roles, Structural Barriers & Credential Devaluation, Social & Cultural Barriers, Discrimination & Hiring Bias and Information & Network Gaps. These are displayed in Table 7, which provides a structured overview of the key concepts emerging from the analysis. It lists each central theme alongside its subthemes and illustrative codes, and includes the authors cited for these concepts based on the systematic review. By presenting this information, the table sheds light on the barriers discussed in the following narrative, reducing repetition and signalling the analytical depth behind the findings

Table 7 RQ1 - Barriers: themes, subthemes, codes, and key authors

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Authors (Year)
Gendered Power and Roles	Patriarchal structures, gendered norms, and traditional roles	Spousal authority; male breadwinner expectations; gendered division of labour; dual burden	Syed et al. (2020); Ressia et al. (2017a, 2017c); Phan et al. (2015); Pio & Essers (2014); Ressia (2010); Biswas et al., (2024); Maitra (2017); Banerjee & Phan, (2014)
	Motherhood penalty	Career interruption; limited childcare support; reduced flexibility	
	Gendered bias	Inequality; unequal division of domestic labour	
Structural Barriers & Credential Devaluation	Credential devaluation, barriers and deskilling	Non-recognition; re-accreditation costs; over/under-qualification; skill underuse	Nardon et al. (2022); Singh & Mutum (2024); Ressia et al. (2017a, 2017b, 2017c); Zikic & Klehe (2021); Anisette & Trivedi (2013); Hari et al. (2024); Zikic et al.(2010); Hari (2013); Friesen (2012, 2016); Almeida & Fernando (2017); Banerjee & Phan (2014); Subedi & Rosenberg (2017); Collins & Reid (2012); Datta Roy & Lavery (2017); George et al. (2012); Gowan & Teal (2013); Okafor & Kalu (2024); Webb (2015); Turin et al. (2023); Farivar et al. (2022); Adhikari & Melia (2015); Caidi et al. (2024); Almeida et al. (2019); Mahmud et al. (2014); (Rajendran et al.(2017, 2020); Oreopoulos (2011); Yu et al., (2019)
	Lack of local experience	Mistrust foreign experience; exclusion; employer preference	
	Recruitment decision-maker bias	Unconscious screening bias; recruitment gatekeeping	
	Policy gap	Weak employment policies	
	Labour precarity	Survival jobs; low wage; temporary contracts	
	Financial constraints	High costs of retraining; lack of sufficient funds	
Social & Cultural Barriers	Family responsibilities within migrant communities	Care burden; reliance on extended family for care; constrained work availability	Phan et al. (2015); Ressia et al. (2017a, 2017c); Syed et al. (2020); Rajendran et al. (2017, 2020); Adhikari & Melia (2015);

	Cultural expectations within migrant communities	Spousal gatekeeping; community stigma; social pressure	Caidi et al. (2024); Nardon et al. (2022); Almeida et al. (2015, 2019); Mahmud et al. (2014); Janusch (2015); Friesen (2016); Gowan & Teal (2013); Webb (2015); Yu et al., (2019); Farivar et al. (2022); Collins & Reid (2012); Datta Roy & Lavery (2017); Biswas et al., (2024); Nardon et al. (2022)
	Cultural differences in the host workplaces	Cultural fit pressures; role conflict; weak social inclusion	
	Social isolation and support gaps	Lack of social support; absence of community support; isolation	
Discrimination & Hiring Bias	Identity-based and stereotyping	Ethnic or racial bias; cultural bias, stereotyping; religious bias	Oreopoulos (2011); Almeida et al. (2015, 2019); Yu et al. (2019); Gowan & Teal (2013); Jhagroo (2016); Killian & Manohar (2016); Pio & Essers (2014); Turin et al. (2023); Okafor & Kalu (2024);); Ressia et al. (2017a, 2017c); Biswas et al., (2024); Caidi et al. (2024); Rajendran et al. (2017, 2020); Subedi & Rosenberg (2017); Annisette & Trivedi (2013); Banerjee & Phan, (2014); Hari (2013); Maitra (2017); Zikic & Klehe (2021); Almeida & Fernando (2017); Mahmud et al. (2014)
	Systemic employment discrimination and hiring bias	Racialised evaluations; employment discrimination	
	Accent bias	Accent issues	
	Language and communication barriers	Problems using language; difference in communication styles; fluency struggles	
	Gatekeeping through names	Name based screening	
Information & Network Gaps	Lack of information and orientation	Unclear employment pathways; unclear settlement information; outdated information	Caidi et al. (2014, 2024); Nardon et al. (2022); George et al. (2012); Rajendran et al. (2017); Webb (2015); Turin et al. (2023); Datta Roy & Lavery (2017); (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012; Zikic et al., 2010); Biswas et al., (2024)
	Limited networks and mentorship	Weak social capital; scarce mentoring, lack of social and community networks	
	Limited government support	Inadequate settlement and employment initiatives	

3.2.1 Gendered Power and Roles in Migration Contexts

Gender is a central phenomenon shaping migrant women's work experiences. This section explores how gendered power operates across domestic and professional spheres, intersecting with migration status and ethnicity. Gender stereotypes, particularly the male breadwinner/female carer model, remain ingrained and often become more pronounced after migration (Ressia et al., 2017a; Syed et al., 2020). Research reveals how patriarchal structures, cultural expectations, and institutional barriers constrain women's employment choices, while highlighting acts of resistance and negotiation, which will be covered in the next section on navigating the challenges. The subthemes below show how gendered power is exercised in homes (Pio & Essers, 2014; Syed et al., 2020).

Patriarchal Structures, Gendered Norms, and Traditional Roles

To understand gendered roles among migrant households, it is essential to understand the patriarchal structures and cultural norms that shape them. In a patriarchal system, women are expected to prioritise caregiving and domestic responsibilities, while men are viewed as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers (Syed et al., 2020). These expectations persist after migration, with women often assuming the role of caring for children and in-laws, while juggling emotionally and physically demanding routines, such as rising early to cook before work while husbands are away at work or pursuing upskilling (Ressia et al., 2017a; Syed et al., 2020). Although these norms are found in other cultures, they are more pronounced in South Asian countries (Syed et al., 2020).

Employment decisions in many South Asian households often require spousal consent, thereby reinforcing male authority and limiting women's independence (Syed et al., 2020). Despite women's financial contributions, traditional norms surrounding domestic work rarely shift, leaving women to perform double shifts, a paid job followed by unpaid domestic labour (Syed et al., 2020). Migrant women do not stop working after returning from work (Syed et al.,

2020). Migration may change the location of employment, but it does not always change the gendered division of labour (Syed et al., 2020).

These traditional gendered norms and expectations also influence the mobility of women in the labour market. Career progression is hindered due to limited access to affordable childcare and the cultural expectation that women provide primary care (Ressia et al., 2017a). To gain local experience and build networks, skilled migrant women are often forced to work in feminised sectors, including childcare, cleaning, housekeeping, and food services, or take any available job (Ressia et al., 2017a). Labour markets offering flexible or part-time work align with cultural norms, such as prioritising family and being available for childcare, further reinforcing these patterns.

While some husbands support their wives' employment, they rarely share domestic responsibilities, leaving women overworked with restricted opportunities (Ressia et al., 2017a; Syed et al., 2020). Consequently, employment adds to rather than replaces their unpaid labour (Ressia et al., 2017a; Syed et al., 2020). Collectively, the evidence suggests that gendered expectations are strong but not fixed, as migration can open doors to leadership and agency. Women's labour supply, employment choices, and professional advancement continue to be shaped by cultural ideas surrounding the ideal of the good mother and wife, as well as the default allocation of family and childcare responsibilities (Ressia et al., 2017a; Syed et al., 2020).

Motherhood Penalty

Motherhood intensifies migrant women's employment challenges by limiting their ability to continue and advance in paid work. Limited social support and access to affordable childcare assistance, particularly during the early childhood years, often force many individuals to reduce their hours or decline opportunities (Ressia et al., 2017a). Women with young children often prioritise their families over their careers, constrained by motherhood, as

reflected in narratives of turned-down opportunities and reduced working hours (Ressia et al., 2017a).

Flexible work arrangements help balance caregiving, but they come at the cost of income and career advancement (Syed et al., 2020). Women are expected to manage sick days and caregiving interruptions. This reinforces stereotypes of being less dependable by employers (Syed et al., 2020). Cultural norms of the good mother-wife normalise women's adjustments and create guilt around work ambition (Syed et al., 2020). One woman described this imbalance as a motherhood penalty, where men's higher incomes justified women's increased domestic labour. "It's their 'ehsaan' (favour) on us that they are letting us work; our pay is little compared to theirs, so I do more domestic chores to fill the gap" (Syed et al., 2020, p. 134). Many respond by working part-time or postponing promotions to maintain stability in their family lives, which limits leadership opportunities, networks, and seniority (Ressia et al., 2017a; Syed et al., 2020).

This penalty extends beyond wages; it reflects structural childcare gaps, spousal authority, and cultural expectations that demand women maintain their flexibility. Women often internalise norms that prioritise caregiving and seek spousal approval for career decisions (Syed et al., 2020). These dynamics are particularly pronounced among South Asian women, reinforcing traditional gender norms and shaping what appears to be women's own choice (Syed et al., 2020).

Gendered Bias

Migrant women face gender bias in host communities when seeking employment in new countries through systemic exclusion and undervaluation of their abilities. Despite experience in male-dominated fields such as IT or engineering, many are redirected into feminised or low-status occupations, such as childcare or cleaning (Ressia, 2010). Ethnic

minority women are more likely to experience bias. For instance, South Asian women in Canada report twice as many cases of unfair treatment as other women (Biswas et al., 2024).

Employment programmes often overlook women's previous qualifications, eroding their confidence and limiting their ability to capitalise on their existing experience (Maitra, 2017). Theories such as social capital and gender roles explain how cultural expectations and structural barriers intersect to marginalise women's skills (Phan et al., 2015).

These biases, along with cultural norms, prevent women from utilising their abilities to their full potential, advancing in careers, and limiting their leadership opportunities, thereby sustaining discrimination in the workplace (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Maitra, 2017; Syed et al., 2020).

3.2.2 Structural Barriers and Credential Devaluation

This theme highlights institutional challenges that skilled South Asian migrant women face when entering the workforce. Despite years of experience and education, migrants, as a result of structural barriers, often face deskilling, underutilisation of skills, and marginalisation. These barriers are embedded in the structures and norms of the labour market across many Western host countries.

Credential Devaluation, Licensing Barriers, and Deskilling

Skilled migrant women face an interplay of foreign credential devaluation (Zikic & Klehe, 2021), licensing barriers (Collins & Reid, 2012; Friesen, 2012) and deskilling (Rajendran et al., 2020; Ressia et al., 2017a; Singh & Mutum, 2024), which not only restrict access to suitable employment but also collectively erode their professional identity and hinder their full integration into roles aligned with their expertise.

Foreign qualification devaluation occurs when migrants' degrees and other qualifications are not recognised or undervalued, forcing them into costly and time-consuming re-accreditation processes (Nardon et al., 2022; Zikic & Klehe, 2021). In Australia, even when

migrants meet language and entry requirements, employers demand local credentials, framing non-recognition as a market-driven issue (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013; Webb, 2015). Qualification recognition plays a crucial role in career planning and progression (Zikic & Klehe, 2021). This non-recognition leads to career delays (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Gowan & Teal, 2013), financial hardships, and, in many cases, forced career changes and loss of professional identity (Friesen, 2016; Gowan & Teal, 2013; Hari et al., 2024; Zikic et al., 2010).

The non-recognition of foreign credentials, the lack of centralised evaluation systems, and bureaucratic hurdles often force migrants to abandon their original careers (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Ressia et al., 2017c; Zikic & Klehe, 2021). A Pakistani migrant reported that his foreign qualification was not accepted without a solid rationale (Okafor & Kalu, 2024). Employers' preference for local credentials limits migrants' career opportunities, as foreign qualifications are often undervalued in countries like Australia and Canada, preventing skilled migrants from fully utilising their potential (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Gowan & Teal, 2013; Hari, 2013; Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017).

Licensing barriers intensify the issues by requiring migrants to undergo additional testing or retraining to legally practice in regulated professions such as healthcare, engineering, and education (Collins & Reid, 2012; Turin et al., 2023). The accreditation process is often lengthy and expensive (Collins & Reid, 2012; Hari et al., 2024; Syed et al., 2020; Zikic & Klehe, 2021; Zikic et al., 2010). As Nardon et al. (2022) report, many migrants find these costs unaffordable, leading to the postponing or abandonment of careers. These processes are often bureaucratic and inconsistent across regions (Collins & Reid, 2012; Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017), and financially burdensome, particularly for women who face additional childcare responsibilities (Ressia et al., 2017b). Credentialism serves as a gatekeeping mechanism, particularly in regulated roles, thereby reinforcing professional closure (Friesen, 2012; Ressia et al., 2017a; Turin et al., 2023; Zikic et al., 2010). Additionally, migrants often turn to survival

jobs to cover their living expenses and finance recredentialing (George et al., 2012; Hari, 2013). Migrants in medicine and engineering find it more challenging for their qualifications to be recognised compared to those in technology sectors, where employers are more receptive (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Banerjee & Phan, 2014b; Caidi et al., 2024; George et al., 2012).

Together, devaluation and licensing barriers result in deskilling, where highly qualified individuals are forced into roles below their expertise. Underemployment and the “taxi driver” phenomenon occur due to the high costs of licensing and rigorous procedures (Gowan & Teal, 2013). Farivar et al. (2022) describe this as brain waste, a disconnect between immigration policies that select highly skilled migrants and labour markets that fail to recognise their credentials, especially common in feminised and regulated sectors. Migrants report experiencing emotional strain, identity loss, and stigma, and often avoid social interactions within their communities as they navigate downward mobility (Friesen, 2016; Hari et al., 2024; Maitra, 2017; Palic et al., 2023; Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017). Academics faced dilemmas, choosing between intentional deskilling into stable non-academic roles or enduring extended precarity (Hari et al., 2024). Women in science, technology, engineering, and medicine, as well as nursing, often face exclusion from growth opportunities, networking, and career advancement, and are frequently assigned basic tasks unrelated to their prior training (Adhikari & Melia, 2015; Caidi et al., 2024; Syed et al., 2020).

Employer hiring logic exacerbates deskilling. Migrants are often rejected for being overqualified or advised to downplay credentials to avoid disqualification (Turin et al., 2023; Webb, 2015). This results in altered résumés, as seen amongst Indian accountants in Canada and teachers in Australia (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013; Webb, 2015). These strategies highlight employers' risk aversion and unfamiliarity with foreign systems (Almeida et al., 2019). Employers' prioritisation of local experience and formal qualifications over transferable skills disadvantages migrants (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Almeida et al., 2019; Mahmud et al.,

2014). In Australia, migrant women were disproportionately employed in lower positions, reflecting systemic deskilling and underutilisation (Rajendran et al., 2020; Ressa et al., 2017a; Singh & Mutum, 2024).

Overall, these overlapping barriers, credential devaluation, licensing barriers, and deskilling form a structural cycle that delays career progression, damages well-being, and limits migrants' ability to utilise their human capital fully.

Lack of Local Experience

Employer preference for local work experience over foreign expertise creates a chicken-and-egg dilemma. Migrants need local experience to secure employment yet cannot gain it without a job. This requirement often overshadows formal qualifications and extensive international experience, acting as a gatekeeping mechanism in hiring (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013; Oreopoulos, 2011; Yu et al., 2019). Employers justify this as a substitute for cultural fit, familiarity with local laws, and tacit knowledge, but it systematically disadvantages new hires from other countries and contributes to underemployment. Employment location is as important as the work itself, with foreign experience devalued (Oreopoulos, 2011; Yu et al., 2019).

A Canadian résumé experiment highlights this bias (Oreopoulos, 2011). Call-back rates dropped by 5.1 percentage points when applicants' work experience was entirely international, and by 2.5 percentage points when most experience was foreign, but their most recent employment was in Canada. Listing all experience with Canadian employers increased call-backs to 11% (Oreopoulos, 2011). This highlights a policy-practice mismatch, as immigration systems prioritise global credentials, while employers prioritise local experience (Webb, 2015). Migrants with prestigious backgrounds, such as those from the Big Four auditors, reported being rejected for senior roles due to a lack of local experience (Yu et al., 2019). Similarly,

recruiters often valued low-skilled Canadian jobs over senior-level roles abroad (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013).

The dilemma extends beyond professional roles. Even manual jobs seem to require Canadian experience, as seen in cases of former bank managers working in convenience stores (Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017). Engineers, despite credential recognition, identified a lack of Canadian experience as a significant obstacle (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013; George et al., 2012). In Australia, female migrants reported similar struggles, describing themselves as overqualified and underexperienced in the host country (Rajendran et al., 2017; Ressia et al., 2017a).

Employers often equate local experience with tacit knowledge, especially in accounting, whereas IT roles are more accessible due to global credential standardisation (Almeida & Fernando, 2017). Women in the science, technology, engineering and medical fields reported unclear demands for Canadian experience (Caidi et al., 2024). Visible minorities face stricter inspections, and women encounter intersectional barriers, such as family responsibilities and limited networks (Syed et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2019). To overcome these challenges, migrants often accept temporary jobs and rely on informal networking, whereas structured early work placements have been shown to improve outcomes (Caidi et al., 2014; Singh & Mutum, 2024; Yu et al., 2019).

Recruitment Decision-Maker Bias and Cultural Capital

Recruitment decision-makers are responsible for shaping employment outcomes for skilled migrants. Their decisions are influenced by personal opinions, biases, organisational norms, and structural barriers, such as local experience requirements and credential recognition. These biases often intersect with assumptions about cultural fit and professionalism, reinforcing systemic exclusion.

Recruitment decision-makers determine which qualifications and experiences are valued or dismissed, exercising authority over who is included or excluded from organisations

(Almeida et al., 2019). Employers often favour candidates who reflect dominant cultural norms, mistakenly equating similarity with suitability. Hiring decisions are more reliable when candidates exhibit familiar traits (Almeida et al., 2019). For example, non-Western attire may be perceived as a lack of professionalism, which can affect perceptions of suitability for senior roles (Almeida et al., 2019).

Religious biases also influence recruitment. Negative media narratives associate Islamic clothing with security concerns, which can influence employer attitudes (Almeida et al., 2019). Almeida et al. (2019) note that obvious religious affiliations may impact trust-building during interviews. These biases are not isolated but embedded in organisational practices, reinforcing systemic exclusion.

These biases are built into how organisations work, not just about individual people being unfair, but part of a bigger system. Employers prefer candidates who appear and behave locally, thereby increasing barriers for migrants. Hiring practices that prioritise sameness hinder diversity and reinforce structural disadvantages (Gowan & Teal, 2013). These biases extend beyond hiring to promotion and performance evaluation, indicating a broader pattern of inequity.

Policy Gap

Skilled migrants are disadvantaged due to the gap between meso-level labour market realities and macro-level migration policy frameworks. At the macro-level, immigration systems prioritise formal education and technical certifications, whereas employers in host nations value soft skills, cultural familiarity, and local experience (Almeida & Fernando, 2017). This policy-practice misalignment undermines the objectives of skilled migration programmes, placing migrants in precarious positions. Turin et al. (2023) note that the lack of coordination between different levels of government, regulatory bodies, and employers exacerbates credential devaluation and non-recognition. Reduced institutional support worsens these

challenges. For example, the closure of Canada's Overseas Qualifications Unit in 2015 eliminated a key resource for credential recognition and employment advocacy (Webb, 2015), leaving many migrants without guidance in navigating complex processes.

Policy gaps extend beyond employment services to governance structures. At the meso level, governance structures lack inclusivity. Migrants seeking civic engagement often encounter boards and leadership bodies that do not accurately reflect the diversity of the community of which they are part. One organisation acknowledged it was predominantly peopled by an Anglo-Saxon board and they made it known of their need for representative recruitment (Webb, 2015). Such governance gaps reinforce institutional exclusion in addition to limiting migrants' ability to influence decisions that impact their integration.

These macro- and meso-level gaps have cascading effects at the micro-level, as discussed in earlier sections, resulting in underemployment, deskilling, and social marginalisation. Survival jobs and costly retraining become coping mechanisms, while human capital remains underutilised (Ressia et al., 2017c).

Labour Precarity

Labour precarity refers to the low-paying, temporary jobs that many skilled migrants accept to survive while navigating structural barriers. These outcomes reflect structural constraints rather than individual failure (Hari et al., 2024; Ressia, 2010). To gain local experience and meet local needs, migrants often take low-paying jobs with limited career progression (Yu et al., 2019). Examples include highly educated women working in low-skilled jobs in hospitals, supermarkets, and hospitality, for example, a Bangladeshi bank reconciler employed as a supermarket client service representative, and Indian teachers working in catering or housekeeping (Ressia, 2010). A former production engineer completed a security course to secure a job, indicating a financial need rather than a career development goal

(Rajendran et al., 2017; Ressia, 2010). Migrants' professional reintegration is often postponed or hindered, and these sacrifices may not be short-term but long-term (Rajendran et al., 2017)

Precarity is particularly gendered. Many women prioritise financial survival over self-actualisation to support their families financially by engaging in non-professional occupations (Ressia et al., 2017c). A qualified paralegal was employed in a supermarket, while a trained civil engineer took on work in childcare (Ressia et al., 2017c). These compromises led to stress, low self-esteem, and careers described as delayed or reversed (Nardon et al., 2022; Ressia et al., 2017c). Some pursued costly retraining with uncertain returns or intentional deskilling to obtain stability (Syed et al., 2020; Hari et al., 2024).

Immigrant academics exemplify the highly skilled precariat; despite advanced degrees, they are often confined to temporary or informal teaching/research roles (Hari et al., 2024). The psychological toll is severe; migrants often experience despair and identity confusion as they navigate between hope for professional reintegration and sadness over the underutilisation of their human capital (Nardon et al., 2022; Zikic et al., 2010).

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints hinder skilled migrants' ability to pursue professional re-entry, fulfil licensing requirements or switch careers. These challenges often intersect with labour precarity (see previous section) and structural barriers such as local experience (see previous section) and credentials' recognition (see previous section).

The high cost of certification, extra classes, tests, and bridging programmes are often unaffordable, particularly when both partners require re-credentialing (Ressia et al., 2017a). For international medical graduates, alternative careers frequently require unpaid volunteer work or short-term courses, which many cannot afford. Even with financial aid in Ontario, long-term repayment discourages enrolment (Turin et al., 2023). Family obligations restrict simultaneous career advancement for both partners (Turin et al., 2023).

Rising living costs in Australia are forcing many migrant women into low-paid roles to sustain their household income (Syed et al., 2020). Paid employment provides financial relief and family stability, but it also reinforces underemployment. Financial hardship amplifies professional loss and reinforces vulnerability (Hari et al., 2024).

3.2.3 Social and Cultural Barriers

Social and cultural barriers affect how migrants integrate into host labour markets. Family obligations, cultural norms, social isolation, a lack of social support, and cultural differences are some of the barriers that exist. Studies provide evidence of how these characteristics interact with immigrant status and gender to limit prospects for professional advancement and continuity. Some of the obstacles lie in the migrant communities, some in the host communities.

Family Responsibilities within Migrant Communities

As noted earlier, family responsibilities often compel women to prioritise family obligations over their professional goals. The caregiving responsibilities, high childcare costs and cultural expectations around gendered norms and restrictive immigration policies continuously limit migrant women's time for networking, reskilling, and job searching.

Women migrants, even those with high qualifications, are expected to perform the vast majority of childcare and household duties (previous section) (Phan et al., 2015; Ressia et al., 2017a, 2017c; Syed et al., 2020). The absence of extended family support and the high cost of paid care for children in the host country force women to accept temporary, low-salaried jobs or withdraw from the workforce. Due to family obligations, women often have fewer hours available to search for suitable employment (Ressia et al., 2017c; Syed et al., 2020).

Ressia et al. (2017) discovered that while men's careers continued mostly uninterrupted, women often postponed employment to prioritise family obligations. Additionally, immigration policies that restrict visits from caregiving relatives exacerbate these constraints

(Phan et al., 2015; Ressia et al., 2017b). Employer accommodations that acknowledge non-linear career paths, affordable childcare, and immigration flexibility for visiting caregivers can systematically prevent migrants from taking on work commensurate with their qualifications and experience (Nardon et al., 2022; Phan et al., 2015; Ressia et al., 2017b; Syed et al., 2020).

Cultural Expectations within Migrant Communities

Cultural expectations influence how family obligations are allocated, portraying caregiving and household chores as a woman's moral duty. Many women internalise the idea that they must retain the roles of wife and mother, regardless of their profession, associating being a good mother-wife with abandonment of their career, thereby creating a dual burden (Phan et al., 2015; Syed et al., 2020). Household ideology reinforces this as women undertake settlement tasks while men work. The male breadwinner and female carer model remains prevalent, with women accepting flexible or downscaled positions as a fair trade-off due to income disparities (Phan et al., 2015; Ressia et al., 2017a; Syed et al., 2020).

Normative expectations vary across different religions, social classes, and migration histories. Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrants expressed a higher commitment to male breadwinner norms than Indian participants, who leveraged prior work experience to renegotiate roles (Phan et al., 2015; Syed et al., 2020). Those women living with their in-laws report patriarchal decision-making and role surveillance, while migration eliminates traditional support systems, increasing pressure (Syed et al., 2020).

Migration re-traditionalised roles by eliminating most extended family support. In countries of origin, class privilege allowed outsourcing domestic labour, concealing gender contracts (Phan et al., 2015). Despite performing unpaid labour along with employment, some women view domestic responsibilities as identity-affirming (Ressia et al., 2017b).

Cultural expectations increase care responsibilities, permit unequal labour divisions, and normalise career compromises, interacting with class, religion, and migration stages to produce varied outcomes (Phan et al., 2015; Ressia et al., 2017a, 2017c; Syed et al., 2020).

Cultural Differences in Host Workplaces

Cultural differences in host workplaces often redefine merit as a cultural fit rather than as technical competence. Hiring and promotion decisions often privilege candidates who align with local norms of communication and assertiveness. At the same time, migrants may interpret repeated rejections as a sign of incompatibility with local cultural norms (Yu et al., 2019). Employers often use local experience as a substitute for cultural fit, favouring those who display comfort through body language and small talk (Almeida et al., 2015). Concerns about assertiveness and communication with clients often create greater barriers than technical skills, reinforcing assimilation pressure (Mahmud et al., 2014).

Beyond recruitment, integration requires cultural fluency and an understanding of implicit norms surrounding initiative, teamwork, and feedback (Friesen, 2016). For example, informal verbal requests may signal enforceable deadlines, and self-promotion is valued for performance evaluations. Nepali nurses and foreign-trained teachers face unfamiliar routines and classroom dynamics (Adhikari & Melia, 2015; Janusch, 2015). This highlights the need for mentored practice and guided onboarding rather than individualised shortcomings (Adhikari & Melia, 2015; Friesen, 2016).

Cultural identity also influences access to informal networks, which are critical for career progression (Gowan & Teal, 2013). Career advancement often depends on after-hours interactions, such as banter or client entertainment, which can disadvantage those unable or unwilling to participate (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Rajendran et al., 2017). Migrants from culturally similar contexts integrate more quickly than those from distant ones, such as India and Bangladesh (Mahmud et al., 2014). While some engage in identity work to minimise

differences, adaptations reflect structural gatekeeping that penalises divergence from dominant norms (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Maitra, 2017; Webb, 2015; Yu et al., 2019).

Recruiters' perceived risks further restrict migrants' access to employment, as unfamiliar qualifications and non-Western experience are often deemed less credible (Almeida et al., 2019). Ethnocentrism reinforces narrow definitions of fit, though exposure to diverse teams can broaden evaluative frames and reduce stereotyping (Farivar et al., 2022). Overall, cultural differences function as gatekeeping mechanisms in hiring and advancement (Almeida et al., 2015; Almeida et al., 2019; Gowan & Teal, 2013; Yu et al., 2019).

Interactional cues serve as filters for recruiting and promoting individuals (Almeida et al., 2015; Mahmud et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2019). Additionally, organisational unwritten rules and collaboration are learned informally on the job, disadvantaging newcomers (Adhikari & Melia, 2015; Friesen, 2016; Janusch, 2015).

Social Isolation and Support Gaps

Migration often severs everyday connections, increasing loneliness, limiting job search time, and reducing access to informal networks (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Phan et al., 2015; Rajendran et al., 2017; Ressia, 2010). Geographic isolation, a lack of cultural anchors, and limited co-ethnic communities, especially in rural areas, increase acculturative stress and prompt job exits to reunite with family (Collins & Reid, 2012; Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017). Border closures due to the pandemic eliminated restorative trips home, increasing stress (Biswas et al., 2024).

The pandemic intensified isolation by delaying hiring, cancelling interviews and shifting interactions online. Virtual networking lacked the social capital and cues needed to interpret norms, undermining trust and confidence and reinforcing feelings of exclusion (Nardon et al., 2022). Digital tools supplemented but could not replace embodied networking, which remains critical for credibility and opportunity (Nardon et al., 2022). Organisational

practices can increase social isolation. Migrants often mask their differences and reduce their visibility in social settings to conform to dominant norms (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Yu et al., 2019). Those who assimilate report fewer barriers, but this shifts the adaptation burden onto individuals.

Social support, both emotional and practical, is a fundamental facilitator of labour-market integration (Phan et al., 2015). Yet, newcomers often lack access to networks, knowledge of hiring practices, childcare, information, and references (Rajendran et al., 2017; Ressia et al., 2017c). Decreased community links and opaque hiring norms compound disadvantage, creating layers of complexity for new migrants (Ressia et al., 2017c; Webb, 2015). In countries of origin, affordable childcare was standard, but in the host country, childcare is expensive and scarce, forcing women to exit the workforce (Phan et al., 2015). Women's settlement experiences improve more with each additional assistance than those of men, indicating a higher marginal need brought on by care responsibilities (Phan et al., 2015). Immigration laws that limit short-term family visits further reduce informal care (Phan et al., 2015).

Support gaps also affect employability. Migrants rely on volunteering or additional credentials to secure references, as employers may prioritise these over foreign qualifications (Rajendran et al., 2017; Webb, 2015). Addressing these barriers requires affordable childcare, bridging programmes with mentoring and sponsorship, and employer-led placements (Nardon et al., 2022; Phan et al., 2015; Rajendran et al., 2017; Ressia et al., 2017c; Webb, 2015). Isolation restricts access, and addressing this requires organisational strategies that create inclusive social events, as well as structural connectors such as mentorship and community hubs (Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017; Gowan & Teal, 2013; Nardon et al., 2022; Phan et al., 2015). Social isolation and a lack of support co-occur, exacerbating disadvantage.

3.2.4 Discrimination

Migrants continue to face discrimination and bias in the workplace, including language bias, cultural exclusion, and racial stereotyping. These biases frequently enter hiring processes, organisational cultures, and social interactions, leading to structural obstacles to inclusion and equal opportunity. This theme examines the following: name discrimination; accent discrimination; ethnic, racial, and cultural bias; stereotyping; employment discrimination; discriminatory hiring bias; and systematic bias.

Identity-Based Bias and Stereotyping

Ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious bias in employment operates through stereotyping fit logics that privilege dominant identities while disadvantaging those marked as other. These biases shape outcomes across the employment cycle, from shortlisting, interviewing, onboarding and promotion by interpreting visible and audible identity markers (names, accents, dress, religious practice) as signs of competence or compatibility (Almeida et al., 2019; Oreopoulos, 2011; Pio & Essers, 2014; Yu et al., 2019). In some countries, when organisations are dealing with white clientele, recruiters often view such markers as client-fit liabilities. For example, white Australian decision-makers were more likely to question the suitability of South Asian candidates (Almeida et al., 2015). Candidates from non-Western backgrounds were disadvantaged, as employers reportedly use cultural signs to judge ability and fit more frequently (Oreopoulos, 2011). Visible minorities face pressure to assimilate to fit dominant norms (Yu et al., 2019). Cultural misalignment or social compatibility, rather than performance, determines growth (Gowan & Teal, 2013).

A key mechanism is the cultural-fit heuristic, which often outweighs skills when migrants' values, communication styles, or social interests diverge from dominant norms. This logic drives credential discounting, with foreign qualifications being devalued on the assumption rather than demonstrated differences in quality (Almeida et al., 2019). Similarly, communication styles are often misunderstood, with directness being interpreted as pushiness

and soft-spoken behaviour being perceived as a lack of confidence. This leads to exclusion from informal networks and limited access to leadership opportunities (Almeida et al., 2019; Pio & Essers, 2014). Visible markers of faith and culture, such as hijabs, often attract competence doubts shaped by negative media narratives, especially in client-facing roles and low-diversity settings (Almeida et al., 2015; Almeida et al., 2019).

Bias intensifies intersections of identity. Migrant women with visible and cultural identities encounter compounded scrutiny of competence and fit (Pio & Essers, 2014). Migrants report pressure to assimilate by altering their appearance or modifying names or accents, as seen in the subthemes of Gatekeeping Through Names and Accent Bias (Jhagroo, 2016). Foreign teachers in New Zealand were discouraged from speaking their native language and pressured to change to fit cultural norms (Jhagroo, 2016). However, not all stereotypes are negative. Positive racialisation, such as framing Indian professionals in the United States as a model minority in IT, can confer advantages while reinforcing racial hierarchies and obscuring other barriers (Killian & Manohar, 2016).

These dynamics highlight that exclusion is not about individual deficits but about structural norms that reward cultural conformity over inclusion (Killian & Manohar, 2016). These biases are embedded in organisational systems (see the next subtheme, Systemic Employment Discrimination). Biases shape outcomes at every stage of the employment process, determining who is hired, who progresses, and who remains excluded (Yu et al., 2019; Almeida et al., 2019).

Systemic Employment Discrimination and Hiring Bias

Discrimination is embedded in workplace standards, hiring practices, and organisational policies, creating barriers despite formal equality measures, particularly for migrants from non-Western countries (Turin et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2019). Bias extends beyond recruitment into everyday interactions. Migrants frequently report undervaluation, exclusion

from informal networks, and subtle or overt harassment, which erode their morale and limit their advancement (Okafor & Kalu, 2024; Ressia et al., 2017a). Intersectionality compounds these challenges. Migrant women face multiple constraints in their social and professional mobility. Highly skilled Indian women in Canada report cultural isolation and inequitable treatment, echoing broader integration (Biswas et al., 2024; Okafor & Kalu, 2024).

The outcomes include underemployment, temporary roles, and financial strain, while societies experience the underutilisation of migrant skills. This represents both a moral issue and an economic loss (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Gowan & Teal, 2013). Perceptions of discrimination vary, with some attributing employment challenges to market conditions or personal readiness, suggesting that family support, agency, and cultural framing play a role (Caidi et al., 2024; Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017).

In hiring practices, Western standards and entrenched norms strongly influence recruiter behaviour, making it difficult to challenge exclusionary practices (Almeida et al., 2019). Bias operates through terms like team compatibility, communication style, or professional demeanour to mask prejudice against candidates who do not conform to dominant norms (Turin et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2019). Prior negative experiences are often applied to entire ethnic groups (Oreopoulos, 2011). These practices reinforce hierarchies that privilege credentials from the Global North and disadvantage those from the Global South (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013; Banerjee & Phan, 2014).

For how these systemic norms are operationalised into everyday judgments through stereotypes and fit, see the sub-theme of Identity-based Bias and Stereotyping. For first-contact filters, refer to the section on Gatekeeping Through Name and Accent Bias. For how discourse norms act as gatekeepers beyond tests, see the section on Language and Communication Barriers.

Accent Bias

Accent bias shapes hiring, workplace integration, and advancement by treating accent as a proxy for competence and cultural fit, intersecting with race and ethnicity to reinforce inequality (Almeida et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2019). This works alongside positive racialisation, which portrays some migrants as highly skilled, creating advantages in sectors like IT, while penalising heavy accents in client-facing roles (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Almeida et al., 2015; Killian & Manohar, 2016). In accounting and similar fields, recruiters often deem a heavy accent as a poor cultural match, which can limit career growth and client interaction (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Almeida et al., 2015; Hari, 2013). Indian ICT professionals exemplify how strong accents are perceived as a sign of incompetence (Almeida et al., 2015). A migrant noted that accent is an absolute factor in promotions, along with one's culture and country (Hari, 2013, p. 202).

Beyond selection, organisations subtly encourage immigrants to “whiten” their speech and adopt Western norms, a form of unpaid cultural labour that normalises racist assumptions and devalues language diversity (Maitra, 2017). Consequences include underemployment, exclusion from professional networks, and heightened performance scrutiny, requiring individuals to start from scratch to prove their competence (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Yu et al., 2019). Some employers have been reported to ask applicants to modify their accents to sound more British or American, which reflects a low tolerance for linguistic diversity (Yu et al., 2019). However, immigrant decision-makers tend to evaluate accented candidates fairly, highlighting the importance of representation in leadership

In short, accent bias is identity-based gatekeeping that overrides evidence of qualification, fluency, and anticipates client discomfort (Oreopoulos, 2011). Employers also value local communication styles beyond testable proficiency, see the Language and

Communication barriers section below (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Zikic & Klehe, 2021).

Language and Communication Barriers

Employers often prioritise communication skills, such as confidence, client-facing interaction, tact, and cultural fit, over standardised tests. English language tests alone cannot reassure recruiters about an individual's ability (Almeida & Fernando, 2017). These expectations are occupation-specific; accounting requires ambiguity and relationship management, whereas IT can be more flexible when technical skills are strong (Almeida & Fernando, 2017). Migrants struggled with cultural references (Hari, 2013) and informal communication (Gowan & Teal, 2013), which affected their collaboration and interviews (Oreopoulos, 2011). Australian interviewees mentioned repeating answers and difficulty understanding due to language barriers (Mahmud et al., 2014). Employers similarly stress spoken and written proficiency. In engineering, language is a significant barrier, including technical jargon, vocabulary, and tone in emails (Friesen, 2012).

Screening for recruitment embeds language and cultural assumptions. Foreign-sounding names tend to attract fewer callbacks, as employers often assume poor language and communication skills (Oreopoulos, 2011). Some migrants are perceived as quiet or reliant on emails, which hinders rapport and professional integration. Overall, communication acts as a gatekeeper; proficiency does not necessarily indicate job quality, and alignment with local discourse norms privileges those already socialised into them (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Gowan & Teal, 2013; Mahmud et al., 2014; Oreopoulos, 2011; Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Migrants invest in learning the language and adopting the discourse to demonstrate cultural fit and progress. These barriers, combined with a lack of information about job pathways, make it harder to match skills to roles. An accent that differs from broader communication skills can be misinterpreted as incompetence, thereby intensifying exclusion (see Accent Bias) (Almeida et al., 2015; Hari, 2013).

Gatekeeping through Names

Name discrimination is a form of ethnic and cultural bias in the labour market. Names represent identity and trigger assumptions about ethnicity, language, and cultural fluency, leading to undervaluation or exclusion even when qualifications are equal (Almeida et al., 2015; Oreopoulos, 2011). Résumés with ethnic-sounding names receive fewer callbacks than those with Anglo-Saxon names, particularly in organisations serving white clientele. This is because employers interpret names as indicators of possible cultural misalignment or communication difficulties (Almeida et al., 2015).

Many migrants feel pressured to westernise their names to improve job prospects (Jhagroo, 2016; Pio & Essers, 2014; Yu et al., 2019). An Indian received no interview calls until adopting an English sounding name (Jhagroo, 2016). Another migrant was advised to change "Jose" to "Joe" for acceptability (Yu et al., 2019). Similarly, another migrant Indian woman admitted that she deliberately adopted an Anglo-Saxon name to avoid potential stereotyping (Pio & Essers, 2014). These experiences reflect a broader discomfort with ethnic diversity and a preference for cultural conformity (Jhagroo, 2016; Pio & Essers, 2014; Yu et al., 2019).

Bias often intersects with appearance and accent. Recruiters sometimes avoided shortlisting ethnic names to avoid pronunciation difficulties (Almeida et al., 2015; Gowan & Teal, 2013). Such gatekeeping practices limit workplace diversity and reinforce systemic exclusion. Like accent bias, name bias signals that success requires cultural conformity, rather than valuing differences (see Accent Bias).

3.2.5 Information Gaps and Support System Barriers

Structural barriers are embedded in the government, labour market, and organisational systems that fail to provide clear guidance, resources, and support, rather than due to individual shortcomings. Migrants struggle with unclear information, limited networks, a lack of

mentorship, and inadequate government programmes, which collectively make it challenging for them to secure employment that matches their expertise and qualifications. The following subthemes provide details about such barriers.

Lack of Information and Orientation

Skilled migrant women describe job seeking as "being in a maze with lots of ways out but wearing a blindfold", describing an environment defined by opaque systems and fragmented guidance rather than individual deficits (Nardon et al., 2022, p. 119). They report experiencing repeated unsuccessful online applications and uncertainty about which platforms are most suitable (Nardon et al., 2022). The pandemic intensified these challenges, as relationship building and social capital formation all moved online. Establishing a network, finding resources due to limited information (Hari et al., 2024; Palic et al., 2023), and connecting with people were not easy tasks (Nardon et al., 2022). These experiences highlight that the challenge is not just about finding jobs but about navigating an unfamiliar and disconnected information environment.

Policy and information gaps span multiple levels. Government agencies provide basic settlement support, industry bodies offer limited guidance on credential recognition, and employers rarely make pathways transparent, resulting in a mismatch between official narratives and lived realities (Caidi et al., 2024). Government websites are often static, lacking accurate and actionable details, and push newcomers to rely on informal online forums, which results in uneven and inconsistent outcomes (Caidi et al., 2014; Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017). Migrants believed their lives would have changed if they had been provided with the correct information and guidance (Caidi et al., 2024). This shows that the problem is not a lack of resources, but rather their poor organisation.

These sectoral examples show that these gaps are systemic, not incidental. In Canada, international medical graduates reported being unaware of alternative careers, success rates,

and the difficulties associated with licensing (Turin et al., 2023). Migrants wasted time, money, and energy on unnecessary steps (Turin et al., 2023). Similarly, in Australia, inconsistent orientation, unclear curriculum information, and varying English standards hindered the integration of foreign-trained teachers (Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017). Beyond missing facts, migrants need orientation to new information practices and communities that share knowledge, without which many must learn through costly trial and error (Caidi et al., 2024). In short, scattered policies, generic resources, and a lack of direction prolong underemployment and delay professional re-entry.

Lack of Networks and Mentorship

Networks and mentorship convert qualifications into real job opportunities. They develop credibility, decode workplace norms, and open hidden job markets. However, when supports are absent, employment outcomes become narrow (Ressia et al., 2017a). Migrants often depend on ethnic communities for assistance that supports their well-being; however, this assistance frequently fails to lead to roles that match their qualifications (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012; Zikic et al., 2010). The structural gaps prompt migrants to rely on informal coping strategies instead of formal career pathways.

The pandemic further restricted access. Indian women in Canada mentioned the absence of networking opportunities, particularly virtual interactions during the pandemic. Another study emphasises the importance of networking to find jobs within your educational background (Biswas et al., 2024), while employers tend to value insider referrals over formal applications. These statements demonstrate that networking is a need rather than an option (Zikic et al., 2010).

Mentorship, which offsets weak networks, is scarce and poorly structured. Migrants seek accessible mentors because one-size-fits-all advice from a website cannot accurately reflect the diverse journeys of individuals (Caidi et al., 2024). Internationally trained medical

graduates highlighted a lack of coaching/mentoring supports, limited or inaccessible bridging programmes, and inequities tied to funds or geography (Turin et al., 2023). Many spent years that were misdirected, which depleted their funds and morale (Turin et al., 2023).

Gendered family obligations further limit time, mobility, and visibility in professional networks, thereby compounding exclusion (see the previous section) (Nardon et al., 2022). Where structured pathways exist, for example, targeted placement for engineers, transitions are clear; where they do not, for example, for international medical graduates, they remain opaque and individual navigation is needed (Turin et al., 2023). Limited networks and ad-hoc mentorship hinder the advancement of skilled migrant women, leading to slow progress and exacerbating credential underutilisation, a problem that job portals or websites alone cannot solve.

Limited Government Support

Government programmes intended to facilitate migrants' integration in various countries are poorly aligned with their needs. Women experienced limited government support in finding and/or retaining work, as well as delays in immigration proceedings, and in some cases, exclusion from emergency benefits, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, after job loss (Nardon et al., 2022). This exposes systemic shortcomings that are a blindspot for eligibility (Nardon et al., 2022).

Beyond temporary relief measures, Canada's three-pillar employment practices, settlement services, and immigration policy operate in silos, making them difficult for migrants to navigate (Caidi et al., 2024). This lack of coordination creates gaps in support, as services often taper off after initial settlement assistance, leaving migrants without sustained guidance for professional integration. Furthermore, occupation-specific pathways remain limited, which constrains opportunities for skilled migrants to re-enter their fields and fully utilise their expertise (Caidi et al., 2024). The fragmented nature of these systems not only prolongs

underemployment and deskilling but also signals structural barriers that hinder equitable labour market participation. Support varies by profession; for instance, engineers may access agencies that provide placements, whereas international medical graduates often lack organisations that offer alternative career options or guidance on upskilling. There is no follow-up or tracking by the government to assess needs or improve services, allowing problems to persist (Turin et al., 2023).

International comparison reveals similar patterns. With no discriminatory action policies for people from non-English speaking backgrounds in Australia, policies place a higher priority on selecting skilled migrants over enabling assimilation. The integration tasks are typically assigned to individuals rather than institutions (Rajendran et al., 2020). Orientation alone could not address bureaucratic systems and processes, nor could it mitigate the discrimination faced by migrant teachers (Collins & Reid, 2012). This shows that policies often overlook the support systems. They wrongly assume that just being chosen equates to success.

Fragmented short-term and generic programmes lead to migrants navigating complexity alone. Co-ordinated, long-term plans that connect employment, immigration, and settlement policies, backed by ongoing monitoring and tailored interventions, are necessary for a fundamental transformation. Many barriers exist within migrants' communities, host societies, and the intersection between the two, as reported in Research Question 1. The next section explores how skilled South Asian migrant women attempt to navigate these barriers, addressing Research Question 2.

3.3 Research Question 2: Strategies for Navigating Barriers

The themes and subthemes identified for Research Question 2 are Identity Work & Professional Self, Agency Strategies and Support Systems (Informal & Institutional). These are presented in Table 8, which provides an overview of how participants navigate the barriers

outlined in Research Question 1. The table offers a concise overview of the adaptive responses, identity work, and support mechanisms discussed in the detailed narrative that follows.

Table 8 RQ2 - Navigating the barriers: themes, subthemes, codes, and key authors

Theme	Subthemes	Codes / Illustrative Concepts	Authors
Identity Work & Professional Self	Navigating emotional impact	Flexible problem-solving, reflective thinking	Palic et al. (2023); Hari et al. (2024); Friesen (2016); Syed et al. (2020); Caidi et al. (2024); Pio & Essers (2014);
	Negotiating household power	Agency within households, re-negotiate roles within homes	Biswas et al. (2024); Okafor & Kalu (2024); Zikic & Klehe (2021); Subedi & Rosenberg (2017); Maitra (2017);
	Negotiating power at work	Asserting credibility; navigate power	Collins & Reid (2012); Gowan & Teal (2013); Yu et al.(2019); Annisette & Trivedi (2013); Almeida & Fernando (2017); Yip et al. (2024); Webb (2015); Killian & Manohar (2016);
	Transitional sensemaking in professional rebranding	Rebrand; reposition identity	
	Cultural assimilation	Adapt; adjust behaviour; align to host country culture	
Agency Strategies	Career re-entry & strategic positioning	Accepting lower-level jobs; volunteering; redefining career goals	George et al. (2012); Ressia et al. (2017a, 2017b); Yu et al. (2019); Webb (2015); Zikic & Klehe (2021); Singh & Mutum (2024); Hari (2013); Mahmud et al. (2014); Janusch (2015); Turin et al. (2023); Adhikari & Melia (2015);
	Network building & referrals	Networking; leveraging social capital; reference utilisation; informal channels	Subedi & Rosenberg (2017); Caidi et al. (2024); Nardon et al. (2022); Banerjee & Phan (2014); Ressia et al. (2017c,2017a); Yip et al. (2024); Zikic & Klehe (2021); Zikic et al. (2010);
	Skill development & credential recognition	Upskilling; retraining; further study; accreditation strategies	Guerrero & Rothstein (2012); Almeida et al. (2015); Rajendran et al. (2020, 2017); Turin et al. (2023); Freisen (2012,2016); Killian & Manohar
	Information navigation	Online learning; online search; job portals; social media	
	Resilience	Proactivity; adaptability; self-motivation; self-regulation & persistence	

			(2016); Maitra (2017); Palic et al. (2023); Pio & Essers (2014);
Support Systems (Informal & Institutional)	<p>Informal support systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Community groups and social connections: Building bridges to local knowledge –Family support: Enabling time and flexibility for career planning –Peer mentoring: Translating knowledge into action <p>Institutional Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Employment programmes, career counselling and training –Bridging, programme and work placement –HR processes and exposure to diversity –Information support and language support –Mentorship programme 	<p>Social network; family assistance; peer mentorship; community support; ethnic network</p> <p>Settlement services; inclusive HR practices and policies; placements, career counselling; language classes; mentorship; practices</p>	<p>George et al. (2012); Maitra (2017); Harrap et al. (2022); Banerjee & Phan (2014); Okafor & Kalu (2024); Singh & Mutum (2024); Caidi et al. (2024); Biswas et al. (2024); Rajendran et al. (2020); Almeida & Fernando (2017); Almeida et al. (2015, 2019); Webb (2015); Yu et al. (2019); Rajendran et al. (2020); Ressia (2010); Syed et al. (2020); Singh & Mutum (2024); Zikic & Klehe (2021); Nardon et al. (2022); Palic et al. (2023); Guerrero & Rothstein (2012); Janusch (2015); Turin et al. (2023); Farivar et al. (2022)</p>

3.3.1 Identity Work and the Professional Self

Identity work refers to the ongoing process through which individuals construct, maintain, and adapt their sense of self in response to changing circumstances (Gunasekera et al., 2025). In migration research this often centres on professional identity, which is the part of self-concept tied to one's occupation, qualifications, and professional roles (Reissner & Armitage-Chan, 2024). Professional identity shapes how migrants perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others in the labour market, making it particularly vulnerable during migration due to credential devaluation, licensing barriers, and cultural mismatches (Barua & Maheshwari, 2025; Gunasekera et al., 2025).

While identity work can feel like an obstacle, bringing anxiety, uncertainty, and feelings of loss, it also serves as a critical resource for navigating barriers. Migrants actively engage in strategies such as rebranding themselves, seeking recognition for qualifications, and balancing family responsibilities to maintain their professional identity and integrate into new systems (Caidi et al., 2024; Friesen, 2016; Hari et al., 2024; Palic et al., 2023; Syed et al., 2020). These experiences demonstrate that identity work is both a challenge and a valuable tool during settlement and career transitions.

Navigating Emotional Impact

Managing Future Uncertainty and Anxiety

The uncertainty about career paths and limited information created anxiety, often described as being in limbo or moving without a clear destination (Hari et al., 2024). Similarly, migrants faced the challenge of making decisions about their future with limited information, which makes career planning both necessary and stressful (Hari et al., 2024). These challenges and anxiety were compounded by unclear evaluation systems and the emotional strain of job seeking (Caidi et al., 2024; Friesen, 2016).

To navigate uncertainty and anxiety, migrant women adopted reflective thinking. Instead of feeling stuck, determined migrant women have carefully considered the multiple possibilities and made an effort to integrate (Hari et al., 2024). Migrant women looked inward to consider how to move forward, even when feedback was lacking, reframing challenges and adjusting their expectations (Caidi et al., 2024; Hari et al., 2024). The proactive mindset translated into small, strategic steps, including short-term teaching, research, or credentialing, to keep moving forward. Anxiety, while lowering confidence, also acted as a motivator, prompting resilience and identity work that kept future options open. Overall, uncertainty acted as both a barrier and a catalyst for resilience and proactive adaptation.

Dealing with Loss and Dissatisfaction

Migrants often experienced dissatisfaction when their previous careers and skills were undervalued due to structural barriers, such as credential devaluation and limited opportunities to utilise prior expertise (Okafor & Kalu, 2024; Zikic & Klehe, 2021). These experiences were intensified by intersectional factors, such as race and gender, which further undermined migrants' sense of value (Maitra, 2017).

To navigate these challenges, migrant women of colour were pressured to conform to Canadian norms through training programmes claimed to be superior (Maitra, 2017). While others pursued bridging programmes or alternative career pathways to regain a sense of competence (Caidi et al., 2024; Hari et al., 2024). Some leveraged volunteering and short-term roles to maintain professional engagement and prevent skill erosion, while others relied on informal networks for guidance and opportunities (Friesen, 2016; Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017). These actions illustrate how dissatisfaction, although emotionally taxing, often motivates migrants to take proactive steps, such as upskilling, credentialing, and networking, to preserve their professional identity and maintain future options.

Negotiating Household Power

Skilled migrant women often face household-level barriers where employment decisions are shaped by spousal gatekeeping, conditional permission to work, and cultural expectations that reinforce men's status as primary wage earners (Pio & Essers, 2014; Syed et al., 2020). Financial dependence and traditional norms limit women's autonomy, while intersectional pressures add complexity to these negotiations.

To navigate these challenges, women employ a range of strategies. Research highlights an ongoing process in which women navigate control and resistance, influencing their lives at home and at work (Pio & Essers, 2014; Syed et al., 2020). Spousal undermining illustrates how permission to work reinforces men's status as primary wage earners, with financial dependence limiting women's employment choices (Syed et al., 2020). Thus, many women use paid employment as a means of empowerment. Employment can shift these dynamics; economic contributions boost confidence and bargaining power, although gains remain fragile and contingent on broader structural changes (Syed et al., 2020). Rising costs prompt husbands to encourage women to work, often without sharing household chores and modifying cultural practices (Syed et al., 2020).

Women additionally respond through subtle negotiation or decisive action, such as pursuing work despite resistance or leaving relationships when independence is denied (Pio & Essers, 2014). One woman left her marriage when her desire for independence was denied (Pio & Essers, 2014). These stories illustrate that empowerment is a non-linear process of negotiation. As Pio & Essers (2014) and Zulfiqar (2024) argue, agency and control coexist, with paid employment acting as a catalyst for change, boosting self-esteem, marital peace, and negotiating power, despite structural barriers that prevent women from participating in the labour market. Migrants linked dual incomes to marital harmony and personal well-being.

Also, for skilled migrant women, employment was not only a financial necessity but also a source of self-worth and independence (Syed et al., 2020).

Negotiating Power at Work

Skilled South Asian migrant women often face barriers such as cultural stereotypes, implicit bias, and pressure to assimilate into Western workplace norms. These challenges can include assumptions about their competence, expectations to adopt Western attire and communication styles, and limited access to leadership roles (Pio & Essers, 2014). Against this backdrop, negotiating power becomes a critical strategy for asserting authority and redefining workplace norms. Negotiating power refers to the strategies employed by migrants to assert their authority in the workplace and resist being perceived as outsiders. Indian migrant women who worked as professionals reveal that some of them strategically used their gender and ethnicity rather than concealing it (Pio & Essers, 2014). One manager challenged the notion that Western attire is necessary for business success by maintaining an Indian appearance when interacting with male contractors and clients (Pio & Essers, 2014).

Asserting one's rights and legal knowledge was also important. Another refused to accept a subservient position. She studied New Zealand employment law and successfully took her supervisors to court (Pio & Essers, 2014). This action challenged intimidation and changed workplace relationships. To gain control over decisions and credibility on their own terms, other migrants launched their own businesses to avoid dependence on organisations that reinforced stereotypes of the "female Other" (Pio & Essers, 2014). This term, drawn from postcolonial and feminist theory, refers to the way dominant groups construct women, especially those from minority ethnic backgrounds, as outsiders or fundamentally different (Mohanty, 1988). By creating their own enterprises, these women resisted being positioned as the "Other" and asserted authority on their own terms (Pio & Essers, 2014).

Migrants react to cultural norms in various ways, often attempting to assert their authority while also trying to fit in or stand out. Migrants challenged stereotypes by showcasing their capabilities through visibility in ethnic attire, leadership positions, and legal action, rather than only trying to fit in. This challenges the idea that assimilation is the only path to success. Although cultural conformity can lead to opportunities (Yu et al., 2019), negotiating power demonstrates that migrants can also change the norms, influencing who can define competence (Pio & Essers, 2014).

Transitional Sensemaking in Professional Rebranding

Skilled migrants often encounter significant obstacles when entering new labour markets, including repeated job rejections, unfamiliar recruitment practices, and cultural expectations that conflict with their prior professional norms. These barriers create uncertainty and challenge their sense of identity, prompting many to engage in transitional sensemaking, a process of interpreting past achievements, present setbacks, and future aspirations (Palic et al., 2023). Professional rebranding then becomes the practical response, involving adjustments in self-presentation and communication to align with market expectations while maintaining authenticity (Palic et al., 2023). Many realised that repeated interview failures were due to a cultural mismatch rather than a lack of ability. As one put it, “I failed 150 times at interviews...cultural difference...we were told to be humble, and I do not think that plays a perfect role here” (Yu et al., 2019, p. 212). They changed conduct and appearance after learning that employers prioritise experience and confidence over degrees (Yu et al., 2019). Translational sensemaking occurs when migrants compare the norms of their home country with the rewards of the host country.

Rebranding often altered core identifiers of individuals. One Canadian participant removed her hijab to conform to market expectations, which increased social interaction (Caidi et al., 2024). Others pursued credential equivalency, such as Chartered Accountant/Certified

Public Accountant, to regain their professional identity (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013). Employers emphasised presentation and grooming in client-facing roles such as accountancy (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Yu et al., 2019). Teachers modified their professional ideas, teaching methods, and interactions as their identities evolved (Yip et al., 2024). Professional identity strengthened with stability, while insecurity weakened it (Yip et al., 2024). These changes demonstrate how people perceive their surroundings, experiment with new concepts, and refine their strategies over time.

Recruiters reinforced narrow norms of professionalism regarding the right fit (Almeida & Fernando, 2017). Certain sectors, such as accounting, imposed particularly stringent standards for grooming and professional appearance to ensure client trust and convey credibility (Almeida & Fernando, 2017). For example, candidates wearing traditional Muslim attire, such as the hijab, were often evaluated more negatively unless they provided stereotype-inconsistent information, highlighting how cultural markers influenced perceptions of ‘fit’ (Almeida & Fernando, 2017). Candidates were advised to maintain eye contact and tone down their accents (Maitra, 2017). Some migrants volunteer and build social capital to meet hidden recruitment expectations while gaining confidence (Webb, 2015; Yu et al., 2019). Successful rebranding sometimes led to stability and moved into co-breadwinner roles without identity loss (Killian & Manohar, 2016). However, adaptation is not linear. People often moved back and forth between strategies that conformed to fit in, authenticity based on sector demands, and feedback from employers and networks (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Yu et al., 2019).

Sensemaking served as a mental map, guiding risk assessment and preserving dignity in the face of uncertainty. It served as a guide for the agency to determine the extent of the rebranding effort (Palic et al., 2023). Ultimately, rebranding is the action, while sensemaking is a process that leads to it. The outcome is a negotiated identity balancing authenticity and

perceived competence (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Caidi et al., 2024; Killian & Manohar, 2016; Maitra, 2017; Palic et al., 2023; Webb, 2015; Yip et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2019).

Cultural Assimilation

Many employers place a higher emphasis on cultural fit than on qualifications, thus migrants feel pressured to change themselves and their behaviours to be accepted (Yu et al., 2019; Zikic et al., 2010). It is not just about migrants' experience but also about how they behave and present themselves. This often means learning how to blend into the culture (Yu et al., 2019). Many migrants adopt strategies to blend into the dominant culture, reshaping their professional identity and reinforcing the perception that cultural differences are a disadvantage (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Friesen, 2016).

Adapting goes beyond technical skills. To participate in conversations and prevent exclusion, women attempt to mimic local humour, communication styles, and even interests, such as adopting an Australian style of speaking and dressing to downplay their identity (Gowan & Teal, 2013). Some people find this process exhausting, while others appreciate certain aspects of the new culture (Gowan & Teal, 2013). Portraying cultural differences as an issue and presenting appearance and presentability as the key to employment, training programmes often serve to reinforce these pressures (Maitra, 2017). Although some women develop hybrid identities, there is still significant pressure to conform. Therefore, cultural assimilation reshapes professional identity and reinforces the idea that being different is a disadvantage, making it both a survival strategy and a cause of stress (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Friesen, 2016).

Cultural assimilation is a tool that enables migrants to demonstrate their cultural fit, which manifests through everyday tasks both inside and outside the workplace. Migrants adopted conversational norms, such as initiating dialogue with superiors, to reflect their comfort in flatter hierarchies (Yu et al., 2019). Many engaged in local topics to facilitate small

talk and increase involvement (Rajendran et al., 2017). Counsellors often advised immigrants to learn the Canadian way and adjust their habits to make them more suitable for the workplace (Maitra, 2017). Minor signs of belonging, such as simplified greetings, punctuality, and joining the organisational clubs are crucial (Friesen, 2012).

Professional adaptation involves translating qualifications into locally recognised competencies and acquiring cultural knowledge to align with market expectations (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012; Webb, 2015). Engineers' career outlooks broadened through Canada's strong focus on traceability and documentation to limit liability (Friesen, 2016). This reflects the value of local know-how, where Canadian experience is prioritised, often surprising seasoned migrants (Zikic et al., 2010). Migrants learnt to present themselves in localised ways to avoid seeming too un-Australian (Webb, 2015). Some enrolled in university while working part-time to get familiar with their culture, demonstrating that adaptation is often not cost-free (Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017). Overall, cultural adaptation improves access, legitimacy, and trust. Cultural fluency supports network building and referrals, a channel into the hidden job market.

3.3.2 Agency Strategies

Skilled migrant women utilise their agency to overcome structural barriers that hinder their access to equal employment opportunities. Women adopt strategies such as learning local norms, upgrading their skills and credentials, building networks and referrals, and accepting temporary roles as stepping stones to navigate these barriers and obtain equivalent employment (Ressia et al., 2017a). In the host country, this involves acquiring local know-how, which consists of learning how business is conducted, what experiences are considered trustworthy, and how to portray one's profile as a transferable currency (Webb, 2015; Zikic et al., 2010). While migrant women manage the risks of identity stress, precarity, and deskilling, these measures collectively create opportunities for advancement and re-entry (Adhikari & Melia, 2015; Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017).

Career Re-entry & Strategic Positioning

There are often significant challenges faced by skilled migrant women when re-entering their professions due to credential recognition issues, lack of local experience, and employer bias toward “local fit.” These barriers compel many to accept roles that fall far below their qualifications or explore alternative pathways (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Yu et al., 2019). Migrants regain their professional footing through short- and long-term adjustments to re-enter careers, such as accepting lower-level, survival roles to earn money, build positive references, and demonstrate adaptability. These low-wage and low-skilled short-term jobs help them gain local experience and can lead to entry-level positions closer to their field (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Yu et al., 2019). Many professionals deliberately work below their skill level and retrain for future opportunities (Ressia et al., 2017a). In fact, 28% of trained professionals in Australia change occupations after arriving (Ressia et al., 2017c).

Volunteering is another strategic entry point that creates local connections and references. One participant stated, “I started doing a lot of volunteer work that helped me get this job” (Hari, 2013). Volunteering also helped health professionals secure employment (Turin et al., 2023, p. 19) and, in Australia, led to first-time paid positions on campus or at conference involvement (Singh & Mutum, 2024; Yip et al., 2024). It also exposes migrants to workplace norms (Hari, 2013).

Women often redefine their career goals when unable to find employment that matches their skills. Some abandon past careers and pursue paths less dependent on credentials (Hari et al., 2024; Zikic & Klehe, 2021). For instance, a former academic transitioned into opticianry by applying their research skills and scientific knowledge to the technical aspects of eye care (Palic et al., 2023). However, this shift can be emotionally taxing, as one participant, a woman, described: “At some point in time, I decided there is no point. I need to start from the beginning” (Hari et al., 2024). Others strategically move to sectors with lower entry barriers,

such as IT certifications over lengthy degrees (Hari, 2013). When licensing is delayed or derailed, migrants often opt for alternative careers to meet their financial needs, which can erode their professional identity (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Hari, 2013; Syed et al., 2020).

Acceptance-as-strategy involves absorbing experiences and sharing them as a way of moving forward (Caidi et al., 2024). Redefining careers around transferable skills and realistic opportunities transforms uncertainty into agency (Caidi et al., 2024). Once a foothold is established, women advance by adapting their culture to enhance local understanding and acceptance.

Network Building and Referrals

Migrants often struggle to access formal recruitment channels due to limited local networks, unfamiliarity with hidden job markets, and employer reliance on referrals. These barriers make traditional applications less effective, particularly in sectors where insider recommendations strongly influence hiring decisions (Almeida et al., 2015; George et al., 2012). Networking becomes the primary mechanism for accessing opportunities, particularly in the hidden job market. Obtaining employer recommendations was the only job-search strategy among globally trained engineers that was significantly linked to landing suitable technical jobs, highlighting the importance of referrals (George et al., 2012). Small organisations rely heavily on word-of-mouth referrals (Almeida et al., 2015). Job seekers who networked more had a higher chance of securing a job if their connections held higher occupations and educational statuses, demonstrating both the size of the network and quality of its members matter (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012).

Women build networks through university activities, professional associations, and migrant-focused groups that connect them to decision-makers. Networking events often led to referrals or selections (Singh & Mutum, 2024). Informal profile distribution by recruiters also resulted in unannounced positions, demonstrating that it is who you know that can make a

difference. Migrants also reinvent careers by learning about new organisations and building networks to achieve new goals (Palic et al., 2023). Networking exposes people to workplace culture (Hari, 2013), and employment outside one's field was often an intentional strategy to build personal networks (Ressia et al., 2017a). Online forums facilitate horizontal networking among professionals (e.g., dentists relocating to Alberta), Canada, providing location-specific advice and social proof from peers who have successfully made similar moves, which builds confidence (Caidi et al., 2014).

The pandemic disrupted the building of social capital, particularly for women, due to remote work arrangements (Biswas et al., 2024). Social-informal inclusion at work correlated with job satisfaction and upward mobility (Rajendran et al., 2020). Applications may be sufficient in certain places, but others rely heavily on networking (Turin et al., 2023). Referrals and networking are essential to re-entering the employment market, not supplementary to it. It is foundational for career building, enabling the transformation of volunteer work and cultural fluency into insider access and long-term mobility.

Skill Development & Qualification Enhancement

The challenges of credential recognition issues and employer preferences for local qualifications limit access to professional roles and create pressure to demonstrate competence in ways that align with host-country norms (Ressia et al., 2017a; Yu et al., 2019). Upskilling and re-education are significant adaptation strategies that include language courses, short credentials, reskilling, and even repeating former tertiary studies or enrolling in postgraduate degrees (Ressia et al., 2017a). English proficiency and occupation-specific training were prioritised through online or part-time enrolment to accommodate care (Ressia et al., 2017a).

Bridging or training programmes translate foreign credentials into locally acceptable ones. In Canada, provincial programmes provide assessment, workplace exposure, exam preparation, language training, and individualised learning plans. Engineers leveraged these

for interviews or licensing (George et al., 2012). Teachers found full-time positions after completing a six-month bridging course leading to re-certification (Janusch, 2015). Engineering initiatives integrate professional socialisation with credentialing (e.g., P.Eng.) by teaching participants the implicit norms and expectations often referred to as the rules of the game (Friesen, 2012).

Targeted skill upgrades can serve as powerful catalysts at the micro level. For example, one engineer secured a position after training in a locally required software, illustrating how precise upskilling aligns with host-country labour market expectations (Mahmud et al., 2014). During hiring freezes, women utilised the lockdowns to take new online courses and keep résumés current (Biswas et al., 2024). Short programmes for language and presentation skills were also common (Rajendran et al., 2017). Some repeated their tertiary education to gain a local degree, for example, believing that accounting qualifications would lead to residency in Australia and a career in that profession (Yu et al., 2019).

Credential conversion was often essential to gain recognised institutional capital. Some migrants only obtained jobs after completing Canada-specific qualifications (Hari, 2013). As one explained, “When you get the certification, they have nothing else to tell you ... I just took a shortcut to avoid this Canadian experience” (Hari, 2013). Re-education was a key factor for Tamil women in the United States who had financially stable spouses, enabling smoother transitions (Killian & Manohar, 2016). Migrants sought to acquire local cultural and social capital, such as networks, licenses, and certificates, while others pursued further studies (Zikic et al., 2010). Enhancing qualifications and developing skills are context-matching investments that translate foreign human capital into locally credible signals. These strategies operate as a bundle, allowing skilled migrant women to translate their existing human and social capital into host-country value while preserving their professional identity and dignity (Friesen, 2012, 2016; George et al., 2012; Rajendra et al., 2020; Webb, 2015; Ressia et al., 2017).

Information Navigation

Skilled migrant women often face information gaps and uncertainty when navigating unfamiliar labour markets. Limited access to insider knowledge and hidden job opportunities creates confusion, and the overwhelming volume of online job postings can make it difficult to assess the suitability of a role (Caidi et al., 2024). Migrants utilise digital tools, including online forums, online searches, employment portals, social media sites, and virtual advice networks, to navigate the host country's labour market. These platforms reduce uncertainty, identify opportunities, and inform employment choices. Job searching online is a common strategy respondents use to look for jobs (George et al., 2012; Ressia et al., 2017b). Migrants often begin job hunts immediately after arrival, combining online searches with support from employment agencies (Hari, 2013). Researching job openings, descriptions, and prerequisites, as well as understanding professional environments, were common pre-arrival preparations (Caidi et al., 2024).

However, online searches can be overwhelming. Women expressed confusion and felt overwhelmed by information overload when comparing job postings with their qualifications, which hindered their ability to evaluate their own suitability for the roles (Caidi et al., 2024). Platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook facilitate success stories, enabling migrants to leverage their prior experience and overcome geographic gaps (Singh & Mutum, 2024). The platforms function as hidden job markets, where openings are shared informally through networks (Caidi et al., 2024).

Social media serves as both a job-search tool and a networking platform. Facebook groups and community forums offer unofficial leads and peer support, while social media companies like LinkedIn connect women with recruiters and display their qualifications (Singh & Mutum, 2024). Migrants value experiential insights over official channels, relying on peer-shared information (Caidi et al., 2024). A migrant stated, "Google is our best friend these days,

as you can read or hear about everyone's experiences and learn from them”, reflecting trust in informal sources (Caidi et al., 2024, p. 946).

Beyond job search, online forums and learning platforms support knowledge sharing and skill development. Migrants seek advice on credential recognition, licensing procedures, visa categories, and alternate careers (Caidi et al., 2024). These online spaces also provide emotional support and enable network formation among individuals with shared backgrounds, such as dentists relocating to Alberta (Caidi et al., 2024). They also act as a gateway to official websites and educational programmes.

Searching, networking, and learning are integral to the multi-layered strategy known as information navigation. While job portals and social media provide access to opportunities, online forums offer contextual knowledge and emotional support. Digital platforms empower skilled migrant women to exercise agency, reduce uncertainty, and bridge information gaps in unfamiliar labour markets.

3.3.3 Resilience

Migrants utilise internal resources, such as proactivity, planning, and adaptability, to create opportunities and navigate these challenges. Despite organisations undervaluing women's qualifications, these strategies show a change from coping to directing career paths (Maitra, 2017; Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Resilience emerges as a process of resistance and adaptation that empowers women to change their professional identities and, in some cases, their surroundings (Pio & Essers, 2014; Yip et al., 2024).

Self-regulation

Skilled migrant women often face persistent setbacks in job searches, cultural adjustment challenges, and systemic biases that create uncertainty and emotional strain. These barriers can lead to feelings of diminished professional identity and pressure to balance cultural obligations with career aspirations (Pio & Essers, 2014). Women rely on a strong sense of

purpose, viewing barriers as temporary and demonstrating willingness to reinvent themselves (Zikic et al., 2010). This inner drive helps them adapt their careers and goals to new environments (Friesen, 2016). As a participant in one study explained: "You have to adapt, different country, different language, different culture" (Palic et al., 2023, p. 401). Motivation and hope fuel resilience during transitions, while proactivity consistently improves outcomes. Proactive migrants plan their careers, seek opportunities, and evaluate options, thereby enhancing their quality of life (Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Strategies include deciding to make it work and actively seeking information (Rajendran et al., 2017), as well as broader career self-management techniques (Ressia et al., 2017b). Some launch businesses. "I started using my brain in terms of the business plan, and that was satisfying," one migrant stated (Webb, 2015, p. 278). According to one study, immigrant teachers conducted workshops and adopted innovative techniques, demonstrating agency as the power of people to act purposively and reshape practice (Yip et al., 2024).

Resistance also emerges as a strategy. Some women reject patriarchal norms entirely. Pio and Essers (2014) demonstrate that women negotiate these traditions by adapting or challenging them, retaining some aspects and rejecting others. Therefore, patriarchal norms are not fixed but constantly negotiated. Entrepreneurial women assert authority in male-dominated spaces, reshaping expectations while maintaining cultural commitments (Pio & Essers, 2014). These acts of independence, however, frequently coexist with a commitment to being a typical wife or homemaker, creating tension rather than a complete break from tradition. For example, a participant woman CEO in a study combined devotion and leadership, insisting that her choices were followed, ensuring a happy home (Pio & Essers, 2014). This reflects how autonomy in paid employment often coexists with the need to uphold unequal divisions of household chores, driven by cultural expectations or breadwinner responsibilities (Pio & Essers, 2014). These viewpoints, although less prevalent, underscore the complexity of bias,

the significance of personal agency and cultural framing and the reality that entrepreneurship or redefining identity rarely alter systemic norms (Pio & Essers, 2014).

Self-regulation and persistence in job searches are supported by adaptability and confidence in job-search skills (Singh et al., 2023). Proactive career planning predicts employment quality more precisely than search intensity alone (Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Women adapt to new professional norms with the help of flexibility often achieved through time and experience (Janusch, 2015). Settlement programmes encourage an entrepreneurial mindset and proactivity (Maitra, 2017). Women employ a variety of agency strategies such as adapting, resisting with assertiveness, or boldly rebelling (Pio & Essers, 2014).

Ultimately, skilled migrant women can regain control over their professions and overcome uncertainties through self-regulation, proactivity, and determination, with resilience emerging from a combination of their own inner strength and external opportunities (Maitra, 2017; Pio & Essers, 2014; Zikic & Klehe, 2021).

3.3.4 Support Systems: Informal and Institutional

Migrants utilise support systems, both informal (family, peers, ethnic, and professional communities) and institutional (employment programmes, bridging programmes, and settlement agencies), to navigate information, establish credibility, and access employment opportunities that match their skill level. Despite institutional barriers, these support systems help shape job search strategies, structure information flows, and occasionally manage access to employers, all of which improve employment quality and job satisfaction (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012).

Informal Support Systems

Peer mentoring, family relationships, and community connections are examples of informal support structures that are essential in helping skilled migrant women navigate the challenges of labour market integration (Caidi et al., 2024; Singh & Mutum, 2024; Syed et al.,

2020). The loss of pre-migration social capital and the lack of transparency in employment systems are offset by these support systems, which provide information, emotional support, and act as strategic enablers (Gowan & Teal, 2013).

Community Groups and Social Connections: Building Bridges to Local Knowledge

Migrants often lack direct access to local labour market norms and networks, making it harder to navigate job searches and recruitment practices. Ethnic networks and community groups are the first point of contact for immigrants to understand local labour market norms. Online research is often used together with peer recommendations as part of pre-arrival preparation. Migrants asked friends and other contacts about the market and felt that it optimised finding a job (Caidi et al., 2024).

Social capital and the right connections facilitate job opportunities for individuals who have left their country (Singh & Mutum, 2024; Webb, 2015). This is a gateway to employment, where local knowledge and perceptions of whether migrants fit in are more important than a purely rational skills-to-jobs match (Webb, 2015). Communities serve as venues for encouraging careers, providing organisational support, and occupation-based co-ethnic and migrant networks facilitate career advancement and information exchange (Yu et al., 2019).

Migrants can understand local cultural norms, which are often ingrained in recruiting and employment practices, thanks to these community connections. As demonstrated by Webb (2015), small-business ventures were made possible by the support of previous immigrant communities when employment opportunities were limited. Community groups often act as brokers for introductions and sponsorship, helping migrants access opportunities. Additionally, residing in ethnic enclaves or culturally familiar neighbourhoods can enhance job satisfaction by fostering social connectedness (Rajendran et al., 2020). However, they may also channel women into gendered, lower-status roles, limiting upward mobility (Webb, 2015). When job searches fail, community-based organisations can act as bridges to formal resources,

connecting women with résumé clinics, career development programmes, and communication workshops (Maitra, 2017).

Family Support: Enabling Time and Flexibility for Career Planning

Limited access to family support due to institutional restrictions, such as visa and sponsorship requirements, creates challenges for balancing childcare and professional goals. Family support, both domestically and internationally, is essential for striking a balance between caring obligations and professional goals. As a migrant shared, “My mother-in-law...is taking voluntary retirement...She is planning to come here to look after my son, then I will... continue my studies” (Ressia, 2010, p. 77). Several others stated they wanted their family members to get a visa to visit, help, and balance parenting and employment (Banerjee & Phan, 2014). This highlights how support from family can help women work, network, and progress, thereby accelerating their integration (Banerjee & Phan, 2014).

However, access to this support is sometimes limited by institutional barriers, such as financial requirements for family sponsorship, which impact dual-career couples who require the most assistance (Banerjee & Phan, 2014). In its absence, women often downscale and struggle to manage work-family conflict (Syed et al., 2020). This shows that although family support may accelerate integration its lack may hinder advancement and intensify gendered compromises. Women seek knowledge and support from peer networks and community organisations when family support is unavailable (Maitra, 2017).

Family support can facilitate interaction by freeing up time for childcare and household work, allowing for engagement with networks and training programmes, which are key to understanding local job and qualification requirements (Caidi et al., 2014; Maitra, 2017). Additionally, family members can offer valuable leads and connections, suggesting that employers prefer informal referrals (George et al., 2012).

Peer Mentoring: Translating Knowledge into Action

Skilled migrant women often lack insider knowledge of hiring systems and professional norms, limiting their ability to access quality jobs. Peer mentoring, both structured and informal, is an effective method for navigating hiring systems. For insider information, skilled migrants turn to peers in their industry. One migrant highlighted that "the most helpful source of information is... peers... because they have gotten jobs here... in the same field" (Caidi et al., 2024, p. 951). Formal mentorship programmes, such as those in Canada, pair up newcomers with experienced professionals to further establish benefits. These programmes helped them build their networks and guided workplace norms and credentials (George et al., 2012).

Mentoring also helps bridge social capital by introducing women to influential individuals outside their ethnic communities. Tamil women were able to secure high-status mentors in the United States who provided them with valuable advice, benefiting them in the competitive job market (Killian & Manohar, 2016). These mentoring relationships were not typically formed through formal government or industry programmes; rather, they emerged organically through education-to-work pathways and professional networking. Community ties based on faith and ethnicity offer stability and sometimes lead to civic engagement or entrepreneurship, which can serve as alternative career paths, particularly in gendered fields (Webb, 2015). Mentor-mediated introductions often resulted in employment offers without the need for conventional screening procedures (Singh & Mutum, 2024).

Informal support systems enable skilled migrant women to understand the labour market. Peer mentoring provides the bridging capital necessary for upward mobility, while community networks offer the bonding capital that promotes resilience and a sense of belonging. When family support is available along with mentoring and community support, it increases these advantages by eliminating care-related limitations and freeing up time. This

leads to women being more equipped to plan, persevere, and land higher-quality jobs (Caidi et al., 2024; Zikic & Klehe, 2021).

Institutional Support Systems

Institutional support systems offer pathways to overcome structural barriers through career advice and training, bridging programmes, credential recognition services, human resources processes, and language and information aid. When these methods are effectively integrated, they help women transform their current expertise into recognisable value. However, when scattered, they reinforce underemployment, despite women's persistent efforts (George et al., 2012; Harrap et al., 2022; Zikic & Klehe, 2021).

Employment Programmes, Career Counselling and Training

Newcomers often lack accurate knowledge of local job expectations, credentialing requirements, and effective application strategies, which can lead to skill underutilisation and frustration during job searches. Employment programme, career counselling and training help newcomers understand local job expectations and plan proactively, which improves job quality (Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Pre-arrival initiatives vary in governance. For instance, Career Bridge in Canada is a private-sector, not-for-profit programme that partners with employers to provide paid internships for internationally trained professionals, whereas the Working in Canada portal is a federal government initiative developed under the Going to Canada Immigration Portal, in collaboration with provinces, municipalities, and other stakeholders to deliver accurate occupational information (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Zikic et al., 2010). Some people believed that the CV and interview workshops offered by settlement agencies were also helpful in customising applications. In contrast, others felt that the approach was too simplistic for their level of expertise (George et al., 2012).

Migrants seek guidance to understand what is missing or needs to be changed in their applications and how to present their experience. As a migrant put it, “I need guidance from

someone who can tell me what I am doing wrong. I have tons of experience in management and cannot secure a job” (Nardon et al., 2022, p. 120). To aid new migrants in their adaptation, governments have increased investments in training and soft skills development modules. For example, Ontario spent CAD \$91 million on workplace culture courses, mentorship, and practice interviews (Maitra, 2017). However, researchers advocate for customised, transnational strategies and caution against one-size-fits-all solutions that ignore migrants’ expertise (Maitra, 2017; Palic et al., 2023). Similar appeals in Australia place a strong emphasis on coaching, mentoring and community-based career information to reduce skill underutilisation (Singh & Mutum, 2024). Counselling can aid in job searching (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012), but for maximum effect, experts recommend combining it with networking and real-world experience (George et al., 2012).

Bridging Programmes and Work Placement

Newly arrived migrants often face underemployment because their international qualifications and experience are not fully recognised, creating gaps in local credentials, language proficiency, and employer expectations. Bridging programmes help translate skills into local cues by combining training, exam preparation, and employer contact, often with internships and language support. These programmes are designed to help newcomers fill the gaps in their education and job experience, including training, assessment, and employment/license preparation (George et al., 2012; Okafor & Kalu, 2024). These often include internships and language training (George et al., 2012). Co-op programmes similarly provide Canadian experience that makes employers take résumés seriously (George et al., 2012).

Different policy frameworks exist. By 2015, Canada had over 70 bridge training projects offering mentoring, networking, and micro-loans, with additional funding added in 2016 (Maitra, 2017). In Australia, occupation-specific bridging courses (e.g., medical,

engineering) were introduced with modular training, internships, and pre-migration assessments, which were considered ‘world-leading’ at the time (Harrap et al., 2022). For many newcomers, these programmes were promoted as the passport from underemployment to decent work, even if they were not mandatory (Maitra, 2017). South Asian women shared their experiences of employment training programmes they joined to optimise their career aspirations. In comparison, bridging programmes focused on technical skills; most training aimed to shape immigrants’ values and behaviour so they could be more productive (Maitra, 2017). There are both positive and unequal outcomes. Some participants in a six-month bridging course were able to secure teaching posts, while others continued to struggle; however, none of them gave up on their career objectives (Janusch, 2015). To improve language and local experience, respondents called for the expansion of co-op programmes (Okafor & Kalu, 2024).

However, access is difficult. Bridging courses are challenging to access, as they are usually only available to permanent residents, are generally expensive, and are provided infrequently (Harrap et al., 2022). Low awareness further reduces uptake, especially for alternative career supports (Turin et al., 2023). Moreover, some migrants find themselves repeating similar training to that in their prior education to meet local requirements; for example, an experienced teacher still completed a bridging course to gain accreditation (Gowan & Teal, 2013). Scholars advocate for sector-specific, employer-linked models that incorporate internships and simplified pathways (Banerjee & Phan, 2014).

Information and Language Support

Migrants often face challenges in accessing accurate, tailored information and overcoming language barriers, which limit their ability to navigate local customs, conduct effective job searches, and integrate successfully. Language and information services are used by migrant women to navigate local customs and continue their employment searches.

Migrants attend early settlement seminars and use pre-arrival tools that offer realistic job-search information while reducing chances of brain waste (Maitra, 2017; Zikic et al., 2010). Nonetheless, many people complain that the government's message is unclear and overly optimistic, and that one-size-fits-all services overlook individual needs (Caidi et al., 2024).

These migrants navigate through peer forums, which combine emotional support with useful advice, and share information. Users share stories, learn from others, and express a range of feelings, often exchanging links to trusted programmes (Caidi et al., 2024). Over time, women become connectors and bridge-builders, sharing their knowledge with recent migrants (Caidi et al., 2024).

Migrants additionally take advantage of language training and courses. Newcomers enrol in English classes, reporting gains in adjustment, job search, and further education (George et al., 2012). To gain language proficiency and navigate through language barriers, participants enrolled in language courses with the hope that their chances of finding employment would increase once completed (George et al., 2012). Free settlement language services for long-term residents are crucial to integration in Canada (Biswas et al., 2024). When tailored and accessible, these supports transform navigation into actionable plans (Maitra, 2017).

Mentorship Programmes

Migrants often struggle to access professional networks and insider knowledge, which limits their ability to adapt their skills to local norms and secure roles that match their qualifications. Through expanding networks and converting implicit norms into tangible actions, mentoring accelerates the integration process for migrants. Skilled migrant women can actively seek mentoring initiatives in Canada, such as Career Bridge and The Mentoring Partnership, which are frequently cited as successful methods for integration (Banerjee et al., 2024; George et al., 2012). Engaging in mentoring helps counter career interruptions and

gender segregation through mentoring (Biswas et al., 2024). Australian research similarly recommends mentoring and coaching as effective strategies for reducing skill underutilisation (Singh & Mutum, 2024). Narratives reveal ripple effects, with many migrants later mentoring others due to their own experiences and a desire to assist those in similar circumstances (Caidi et al., 2024). Migrants can maximise these benefits by combining mentoring with skill development opportunities and networking, which together enhance access to decision-makers and improve career outcomes (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; George et al., 2012).

All things considered, migrants who proactively access institutional supports such as mentorship programmes, language and information services, and bridging courses are better positioned to overcome barriers and secure roles that match their skills.

Chapter Summary

To conclude the chapter, the findings reveal that skilled South Asian migrant women face multiple, intersecting barriers to employment, including credential devaluation, lack of local experience, gendered norms, cultural expectations, and systemic discrimination. These challenges are compounded by information gaps, weak support systems, and limited access to networks, often resulting in deskilling and underemployment. To navigate these obstacles, women employ various strategies, including identity work, cultural adaptation, upskilling, volunteering, and leveraging both informal and institutional support systems. Despite structural constraints, resilience and agency emerge as crucial factors that enable career re-entry and professional integration.

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This section of the dissertation discusses the findings of the systematic literature review in relation to the research questions regarding the employment experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women in their host countries. This review analyses 47 empirical studies published between 2010 and 2025 and synthesises the evidence in this discussion section. Despite holding education, work experience, and relevant skills in the host nation, many skilled migrant women continue to encounter significant difficulties in securing suitable employment.

Prior systematic literature reviews have examined skilled migrants broadly, often combining genders or focusing on general migration experiences. The reviews of organisational socialisation concentrate on skilled migrants in general (Tharenou & Kulik, 2020) or on workplace integration frameworks without a gender or regional focus (van Riemsdijk & Basford, 2022), while multidisciplinary reviews of qualification-matched employment and employability integrate diverse populations and geographies (Farashah et al., 2023; Shirmohammadi et al., 2019). However, even in cases where migrant women are highlighted, the perspective is often pan-Asian or cross-regional, rather than South Asian (Kalyanaraman, 2016; Tharenou, 2024), or focused on career advancement in general (Yazdankhoo et al., 2025b).

Therefore, this review addresses a research gap by synthesising empirical data on the intersectional identity of skilled South Asian migrant women, a demographic underrepresented in studies across five Anglophone host countries. It is critical to understand how these overlapping identities shape employment outcomes and experiences. This review addresses clear gaps in the literature:

- No prior systematic review has focused exclusively on skilled South Asian migrant women.

- Existing studies often overlook the interplay between employer decision-making heuristics (e.g., local experience, cultural fit) and gendered household norms, which jointly influence employment outcomes.
- The role of policy and institutional factors such as sectoral regulation, care infrastructure, and employer practices in shaping the success or failure of integration strategies, remains underexplored and was beyond the scope of this review.

This review provides a comprehensive account of both the barriers faced and the strategies employed by skilled South Asian migrant women. It highlights how institutional structures, rather than individual deficits, shape outcomes. This dual focus allows the review to go beyond summarising existing knowledge and instead reveal new mechanisms, boundary conditions, and policy-relevant insights that have not been previously articulated. While success and failure were not systematically analysed as outcomes, they emerged in narratives as subjective and evolving aspects of migrant experience. Some women succeed despite significant barriers, and their definitions of success shift over time. The review integrates information and language support, employer decision-making heuristics (including local experience and cultural fit), gendered household norms, and credentialing and licensing regimes into a single account of how these barriers impact women's employment and how they navigate these challenges. By doing so, the review identifies experiences specific to South Asian women, distinguishing them from those common to skilled migrants in general, and offers nuanced insights for targeted policy and research (Farashah et al., 2023; Shirmohammadi et al., 2019).

4.2 Research Question 1: Barriers to Finding Employment

This review contributes new insights by examining the barriers faced by a highly specific and underexplored demographic: skilled South Asian migrant women, when seeking employment and progressing in it in host countries. Unlike previous studies that focus on migrants in general or mixed-gender samples, this review examines the intersectional

challenges experienced by women who are simultaneously skilled professionals, South Asian, and migrants. Discrimination and bias, social and cultural barriers, structural barriers, credential devaluation, gendered power and roles, and information gaps and support system barriers were the five interconnected themes that emerged.

The findings show that barriers do not simply accumulate; they interact in complex ways, creating unique challenges that are difficult to overcome. Migrant women's experiences are shaped significantly by gendered expectations. The division of household duties is rarely changed by migration. For example, gendered household norms and caregiving responsibilities constrain women's employment opportunities (Ressia et al., 2017a), while employer heuristics, such as local experience and cultural fit, further limit access to suitable roles (Ressia et al., 2017c). These dynamics produce a cycle of constrained participation and occupational downgrading despite high qualifications (Phan et al., 2015). Moreover, intersectional factors amplify these barriers for skilled migrant women (Syed et al., 2020). This synthesis demonstrates that migration does not disrupt traditional gender roles; instead, these roles continue to shape labour market outcomes in host countries.

This study demonstrates that women are disproportionately affected by credential devaluation and licensing restrictions in regulated fields, including healthcare, education, and engineering. Banerjee and Phan (2014) reported that immigrants in regulated healthcare, social science and education occupations experience delayed credential recognition and high licensing costs. Similarly, Collins and Reid (2012) identified that internationally educated teachers in Australia face inconsistent accreditation processes that prolong re-entry. In the engineering sector, Friesen (2012, 2016) found that immigrant engineers encounter structural and identity-based challenges related to credential transfer and professional recognition. The review emphasises that deskilling is not merely a temporary issue but a structural consequence, particularly when employers favour local experience over foreign qualifications (Almeida et

al., 2019; Oreopoulos, 2011). These dynamics often lead highly qualified migrants into low-pay, survival jobs, eroding their self-esteem (Almeida et al., 2015; Rajendran et al., 2020), which can result in deskilling (Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017). While Gowan and Teal (2013) linked such underemployment to diminished career optimism, the persistent underemployment entrenches long-term exclusion from professional fields (Palic et al., 2023; Singh & Mutum, 2024).

Importantly, this review identifies cultural fit as a gatekeeping mechanism that functions beyond formal criteria (Yu et al., 2019). It synthesises how South Asian migrant women are disadvantaged when their communication styles are judged through Western, racialised, and gendered norms. Limited interactional fluency can be misinterpreted as a sign of low confidence or competence (Gowan & Teal, 2013). Cultural norms of restraint are often mistaken for a lack of assertiveness (Almeida et al., 2015; Almeida et al., 2019). Similarly, workplaces often privilege overt self-promotion (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012), while such interpretations intersect with racialised and gendered stereotypes to marginalise migrant women professionally (Hari, 2013; Mahmud et al., 2014). This builds on earlier research by demonstrating that social isolation (Biswas et al., 2024; Collins & Reid, 2012) and restricted access to social support (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012; Ressia, 2010), informal networks (Gowan & Teal, 2013) exacerbate biases that are ingrained in informal norms, rather than just explicit discrimination and results in delays in career progression (Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017; Gowan & Teal, 2013). Opportunities are limited when employers misunderstand cultural differences (Gowan & Teal, 2013) and culturally inspired behaviour as a sign of a lack of ambition or confidence (Mahmud et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2019).

Furthermore, discrimination has a significant impact on employment outcomes (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012). Identity-based bias is evident at various stages of the employment process, such as name bias, which reduces callbacks (Oreopoulos, 2011), accent

bias (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Hari, 2013), and racialised evaluations that shape interview outcomes (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Almeida et al., 2015), promotions (Gowan & Teal, 2013), and client assignments (Hari, 2013; Yu et al., 2019). Women migrants face gender discrimination and greater work inequality (Biswas et al., 2024; Syed et al., 2020). They also report exclusion from informal networks, face penalties, are passed over for promotions, and are stereotyped as less assertive and lacking leadership (Okafor & Kalu, 2024; Pio & Essers, 2014; Rajendran et al., 2020).

Finally, the review reveals that information gaps and inadequate institutional support exacerbate these challenges. Unlike previous reviews that treat support systems as generic, this study shows that misaligned settlement services (Palic et al., 2023), lack of information (Caidi et al., 2014; Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017) and inconsistent guidance (Caidi et al., 2024; Hari et al., 2024) lead to trial-and-error navigation (Caidi et al., 2024) and underutilisation of skilled women (Turin et al., 2023). The findings collectively point to institutional rather than individual barriers as the cause of South Asian migrant women's struggles, and that intersectional disadvantage is shaped by both government policies and employer practices. These results highlight the necessity of institutional change that prioritises foreign experience, transparent credentialing procedures, and focused employment paths for qualified immigrants.

4.3 Research Question 2: Strategies for Navigating Barriers

The second research question explored how South Asian migrant women navigated these barriers. The reviewed studies portray women as proactive and resourceful, employing a range of strategies to reconstruct their identities and occupations in the host country in response to structural exclusion. Redefining one's professional identity, seeking further education, exhibiting resilience and perseverance, and utilising both official and informal support systems to take advantage of opportunities are some of these strategies.

The study demonstrates that identity reconstruction often occurs as a response to misrecognition, sometimes strategically, but also as an unconscious or psychological process, challenging earlier research that frames resilience and adaptation primarily as fixed personal traits. To seek acceptance, women selectively reveal cultural and gender identity markers (Pio & Essers, 2014; Yu et al., 2019), and reinterpret foreign expertise as a form of cross-cultural competence (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Hari et al., 2024; Yip et al., 2024). This study emphasises how emotional work is closely tied to rejection and deskilling, and how professional identity is negotiated rather than inherited (Biswas et al., 2024; Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017).

Additionally, the review demonstrates that recredentialing and bridging programmes might serve not only as technical remedies for skill gaps but also as symbolic actions of legitimacy. Internships, volunteer work (Hari, 2013; Webb, 2015), and retraining help immigrant women establish local connections and convert foreign qualifications into signals that employers may recognise (George et al., 2012; Turin et al., 2023). They often frame volunteer work, re-training, and temporary jobs as stepping stones rather than setbacks to maintain their sense of identity and self-worth (Hari, 2013; Mahmud et al., 2014; Syed et al., 2020). This process helps them maintain continuity between their pre-migration identities and post-migration circumstances. This builds on earlier research by demonstrating how sectoral regulation and client exposure affect the efficacy of these tactics (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Rajendran et al., 2017).

Entrepreneurship and informal networks emerge as alternative pathways to bypass gatekeeping, especially when formal employment channels are inaccessible (Maitra, 2017; Pio & Essers, 2014; Webb, 2015). However, the review cautions that resilience comes with a heavy cost: it can be emotionally and financially draining to stay motivated, and success depends on institutional support (Almeida et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2023; Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Isolated initiatives, such as CV workshops or general workshops (Caidi et al., 2024; Zikic & Klehe,

2021), are less successful than bundled interventions, including mentorship (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Singh & Mutum, 2024), supervised practice (George et al., 2012; Maitra, 2017), and affordable childcare (Rajendran et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2019). Informal support systems, including family (Phan et al., 2015; Ressia, 2010; Syed et al., 2020) and co-ethnic networks, play a vital role in navigating both domestic and professional challenges (Nardon et al., 2022; Rajendran et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2019).

These results collectively show that South Asian migrant women actively contribute to their own integration through networking, re-credentialing, and education. Although such strategies enable certain individuals to secure employment, they rarely result in complete equality with local professionals. The provision of inclusive and transparent pathways by employers and institutions, such as bridging programmes and supervised practices, is just as important to success as individual effort (George et al., 2012; Harrap et al., 2022; Janusch, 2015; Turin et al., 2023). However, it also argues that individual strategies alone cannot overcome systemic barriers and that institutional accountability is essential for equitable integration.

4.4 Integrative Discussion

Across both research questions, the review reveals a consistent mismatch between the capabilities of skilled South Asian migrant women and the employment opportunities available to them. Despite possessing high qualifications, many individuals face downward mobility, social isolation, and exclusion from professional networks. This is not due to individual deficits, but rather to institutional filters such as credential devaluation (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013; Zikic & Klehe, 2021), license delays (Ressia et al., 2017a), employer emphasis on local experience (Oreopoulos, 2011; Yu et al., 2019) and cultural fit (Janusch, 2015; Webb, 2015), which systematically disadvantage this group (Rajendran et al., 2017; Rajendran et al., 2020).

Building on prior research, this review advances the conversation by foregrounding intersectionality, showing how the combined effects of migration status, professional identity, gender, and South Asian cultural norms create unique challenges and strategies that differ from those identified in studies focusing on single dimensions. By doing this, it synthesises evidence from two crucial aspects of the migrant experience: (a) the barriers faced during the job search and (b) the strategies used for navigating these barriers. This dual focus, combined with demographic specificity, represents a contribution that few prior reviews have attempted to make. None of the previous research has integrated skill level, gender, ethnicity, and migrant status in a single systematic review. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how overlapping identities shape employment outcomes and adaptation strategies.

This review highlights a cycle of underutilisation. Women invest in host-country adaptation, but the rewards are limited by institutional barriers, requiring further adaptation (Maitra, 2017; Zikic & Klehe, 2021). The cycle of inequality persists in the absence of intentional organisational and governmental interventions, such as care-compatible structures and reliable local signals, which scholars argue are essential for equitable integration (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Syed et al., 2020). The research suggests reframing integration not as an individual responsibility, but as a shared societal process that necessitates inclusive practices and institutional accountability (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012; Palic et al., 2023).

Chapter Summary

This discussion synthesises the key findings of the systematic review, highlighting how institutional structures rather than individual deficits shape employment outcomes for skilled South Asian migrant women. It examines the interplay between barriers such as credentialing regimes, employer heuristics, gendered household norms, and limited access to information and networks, alongside the strategies women employ to navigate these challenges. By integrating these insights, the discussion reframes integration as a shared societal process that

demands inclusive organisational practices and policy interventions, moving beyond individual responsibility to institutional accountability.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter brings together the key insights from the systematic review of research on skilled South Asian migrant women, synthesising what has been learned and outlining its broader significance. It begins by summarising the review's contributions and practical implications, followed by recommendations for policy and practice. The chapter then identifies promising directions for future research and concludes by acknowledging the study's limitations. In doing so, it positions the findings within ongoing debates on migration, gender, and labour market integration, highlighting how this review advances understanding and informs inclusive strategies.

5.1 Contributions to theory

This review makes four key contributions to the literature. First, it reveals the mechanism of misrecognition. Prior systematic literature reviews discussed employer preferences and qualification-matched employment issues (Farashah et al., 2023; M. Shirmohammadi et al., 2023). However, according to my synthesis, there is an ongoing cycle of misrecognition. Delays in licensing and credential devaluation, along with local experience heuristics and cultural fit gatekeeping, push women into survival jobs, which reduces their time and visibility for networking and upskilling, especially as caregiving becomes more intense (Friesen, 2016; Oreopoulos, 2011; Rajendran et al., 2017; Ressia et al., 2017b, 2017c; Yu et al., 2019). This review, to my knowledge, is the first to explicitly connect employer filters with gendered household roles/duties, which were not previously acknowledged, demonstrating how these domains interact to constrain career progression, particularly for women.

Second, the study identifies the conditions that determine the most successful strategies:

- a) Sectoral regulation and client exposure are important to shape the success of re-entry strategies. To transform foreign credentials into trusted local signals, regulated (health,

engineering, education) and client-facing sectors (accounting) need structured onboarding and mentorship (Collins & Reid, 2012; Turin et al., 2023).

b) Care infrastructure, such as access to affordable childcare, flexible work schedules, speeds up re-entry into skilled tracks, especially for women migrants, by moderating role-constrained involvement. In their absence, part-time downgrading persists (Phan et al., 2015; Ressia et al., 2017a; Syed et al., 2020).

Third, it demonstrates the superiority of bundled interventions. These interwoven interventions, such as bridging programmes, mentorship, paid supervised practice and affordable care plans, perform better than isolated strategies like generic CV workshops or resilience training (George et al., 2012; Harrap et al., 2022; Janusch, 2015; Maitra, 2017; Singh & Mutum, 2024).

Last, the study highlights intra-South Asian variation. Unlike prior reviews that treat migrants as a homogeneous group, this study considers sub-regional norms surrounding breadwinning, modesty, and family governance, which shape employment pathways differently for skilled South Asian migrant women. This is done while keeping gender and sub-regional identity in mind (Phan et al., 2015; Syed et al., 2020). By focusing specifically on skilled South Asian migrant women, this review isolates a demographic that has been largely overlooked in previous literature. None of the previous studies have focused specifically on skilled South Asian migrant women. Therefore, this study helps highlight their unique struggles while showing that, although migrants from different ethnic backgrounds face distinct challenges, they also share common gender-based barriers. Additionally, it focuses specifically on migrant women rather than migrants in general, including men, which helps to clarify their unique struggles and experiences.

In summary, this review not only confirms known barriers, such as credential discounting and local experience bias, but also explains how and why deskilling persists for

skilled South Asian migrant women by integrating gendered domestic roles with employer decision-making heuristics. It identifies two boundary conditions (care infrastructure and sectoral regulation/client exposure) that shape the success of strategy and shows that bundled interventions outperform isolated efforts. To the best of my knowledge, these gender-specific mechanisms and conditions for skilled South Asian migrant women have not been explicitly articulated in prior reviews that focused on skilled migrants or mixed gender samples (Farashah et al., 2023; Melika Shirmohammadi et al., 2023; Shirmohammadi et al., 2019; van Riemsdijk & Basford, 2022)

5.2 Implications for practice

This synthesis provides targeted, evidence-based recommendations for three key stakeholder groups: a) government and professional bodies, b) employers, and c) service providers. These groups play complementary roles in improving the employment outcomes of South Asian migrant women by addressing systemic inequities, improving recognition processes, and fostering inclusive organisational cultures.

a) Government and Professional Bodies

Credential recognition and paid programmes

To address barriers in regulated professions such as nursing, engineering, and pharmacy, transparent, competency-based assessments should be expanded. Governments and professional bodies should fund paid bridging seats and supervised practice to convert foreign credentials into reliable local signals. For example, Ontario's Bridge Training Program provides sector-specific training, clinical placements, and exam preparation, supported by bursaries. This model has proven effective in reducing underemployment among internationally educated professionals and can be replicated in other jurisdictions (Ontario Ministry of Labour & Skills, 2023, 2025).

Information and guidance

Early settlement guidance is crucial for preventing underemployment and misinformed career decisions. Strengthening national recognition portals and advisory services can help newcomers understand licensing routes, equivalency requirements, and realistic timelines. Consistent messaging across agencies and professional bodies prevents duplication and misinformation, thereby improving transparency and trust (Rajendran et al., 2017).

Cross-jurisdictional recognition and skills assessments

Modern migration requires harmonised recognition systems. For trades and licensed occupations, mutual recognition frameworks and updated skills-assessment authorities should be developed. Australia's approach through Trades Recognition Australia and the ANZSCO-linked skilled occupation lists demonstrates how migration and licensing systems can be aligned to ensure consistency between national qualifications and labour market needs (Department of Home Affairs, 2025; Employment & Workplace Relations, 2025). Adopting similar models can reduce delays, standardise criteria, and ensure that skilled migrants are employed at levels commensurate with their expertise.

Policy integration and monitoring

Governments should embed migrant employment objectives within the broader labour market and gender equity strategies. Monitoring frameworks that track credential-recognition outcomes, wage parity, and progression rates would provide data-driven insights into the effectiveness of current policies. Collaboration between immigration, labour, and education ministries can ensure that migration pathways are matched with realistic career integration plans.

b) Employers

Skills-based, bias-aware hiring

Employers play a pivotal role in bridging systemic gaps. Recruitment systems should be audited for name, accent, and gender bias, and the over-reliance on “local experience” should be replaced with skills-based evaluation. Structured interviews, work trials, and task-based assessments have been shown to have stronger predictive validity and lower adverse impact than informal interviews (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). The UK Civil Service’s name-blind recruitment policy and skills-based hiring practices adopted by technology firms illustrate practical solutions (UK Cabinet Office / Civil Service, 2015; UK Parliament, 2025). Although degree requirements are declining globally, research shows that many firms have yet to fully align their practices with this shift, underscoring the need for process redesign (Harvard Business, 2024).

Mentorship and brokered placements

Employers should collaborate with community organisations to design mentorship and placement programmes that provide structured exposure, supervised practice, and networking opportunities. Germany’s IQ Netzwerk initiative offers a useful example of programmes such as “Let’s Connect and Match!” job fairs, which create local references and foster cross-cultural teamwork, reducing assimilation pressures and enhancing skill utilisation (Netzwerk, 2024, 2025). Similarly, Ontario’s bridge-training and employment services (e.g., ACCESS Employment) partner with employers to provide mentoring, interview practice, and supervised internships tailored to specific industries. Companies can participate in such initiatives by hiring partners and adapting curricula to align with their standards, thereby benefiting from a diverse talent pipeline.

Care-compatible work design

Employers can mitigate “motherhood penalties” by offering flexible scheduling, remote or hybrid options, where possible, and affordable access to childcare. Comparative evidence shows that moderate lengths of paid parental leave and subsidised childcare significantly increase women’s employment and working hours, while excessively long leave may have counter-productive effects (OECD, 2020b). Embedding flexibility into job design not only supports equity but also improves retention and productivity.

Organisational Practices and Cultural Inclusion

Long-term integration depends on organisational culture. Employers should implement comprehensive diversity and inclusion strategies that challenge assumptions and view cultural differences as assets rather than barriers. Real change requires cultural shifts within organisations, including challenging assumptions, involving diverse individuals in hiring panels, and establishing policies that value cultural diversity and international experience (Almeida et al., 2015; Rajendran et al., 2017).

Diversity training for hiring managers and structured, group-based decision-making can reduce implicit bias (Almeida et al., 2015). Cultural marginalisation and employment inequality persist in the absence of such efforts. Inclusion also extends beyond hiring; orientation sessions and continuous professional development should address workplace norms, communication expectations, and networking practices (Friesen, 2016; Rajendran et al., 2017). Targeted assistance after onboarding, such as cultural fluency training, mentorship to explain unwritten customs, and inclusive social design, can reduce exclusion (Friesen, 2016; Almeida et al., 2019).

Structured placements that generate local references and exposure to diverse colleagues also help reduce reliance on assimilation (Almeida et al., 2015; Almeida et al., 2019; Maitra, 2017; Webb, 2015). Employers should also design follow-up inclusion activities, such as cross-

cultural workshops and feedback sessions, that normalise diverse communication and leadership styles.

Research shows that everyday exposure to diversity can significantly reshape perceptions and increase inclusion, particularly when reinforced by inclusive human-resource systems. Human resources managers can enhance skill utilisation by redesigning jobs and focusing on vulnerable groups, such as single and female migrants (Farivar et al., 2022). Higher job satisfaction and career advancement are predicted by a positive climate of inclusion, particularly through social informal interactions (Rajendran et al., 2020). Recruitment panels that include diverse members help reduce similarity bias and enrich decision-making (Almeida et al., 2015). In turn, cross-cultural HR training enables managers to accurately evaluate international experience and reduce misinterpretation of cultural behaviours (Almeida & Fernando, 2017). Managers develop mutual respect in multicultural teams through everyday exposure to diverse colleagues, and multinational firms often frame diversity as a core value (Almeida et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, exposure alone is not enough. Research highlights gaps in diversity strategies and calls for targeted training, as well as increased representation of migrants on hiring panels (Gowan & Teal, 2013; Rajendran et al., 2017). As one migrant noted, feeling excluded from informal networks highlights the need for structured inclusion alongside natural interactions (Gowan & Teal, 2013). Human resources cover job design, recruitment, and culture, which, when aligned, drive both equity and performance. Inclusive human resources systems and daily exposure to diversity together reshape structures and shift perceptions, expanding access to fair employment (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Almeida et al., 2019; Rajendran et al., 2020).

c) Service Providers

Orientation and Cultural Fluency Training

Settlement and employment-support agencies are critical intermediaries between migrants and the labour market. They should deliver a comprehensive pre-employment orientation that includes both technical and cultural readiness components. Induction programmes should cover workplace customs, communication styles, networking strategies, and expected behaviours alongside sector-specific skill training (Friesen, 2016; Rajendran et al., 2017). Practical modules, including role-plays, peer feedback, and real-world simulations, can help women practise communication in professional contexts and build confidence. Post-placement support, including mentoring and group coaching, reinforces early learning and reduces feelings of isolation.

Partnerships and capacity building

Service providers should collaborate closely with employers and professional associations to co-design training curricula and facilitate direct placements. Joint initiatives build mutual trust and ensure that training aligns with industry standards. Moreover, providers can act as information brokers, helping migrants navigate credentialing processes and connecting them with mentors who understand both professional requirements and the challenges of cultural adaptation.

5.3 Limitations

First, the reviewed publications originated from only two databases: SCOPUS and EBSCO, as previously mentioned. As a result, certain significant works that are not included in these two databases may be excluded from the review.

Second, only a limited number of keywords were used for searching, and a broader range of keywords may have been accessible. The articles that used keywords different from

my search terms might not have been found by this study; therefore, some authors' research may have gone unnoticed.

Third, only papers published between 2010 and 2025 were included in the analysis. As a result, pertinent published works before 2010 have been excluded. Furthermore, the focus on skilled migrants omits lower-skilled cohorts whose experiences could reveal deeper structural inequalities. These limitations suggest caution in over-generalising findings but also highlight areas for future inquiry.

Lastly, relevant insights that are not included here may be found in non-English and grey literature sources. This review primarily focused on studies published in English and included research originating from Anglophone countries (the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). However, studies from Western Europe or Turkey, for example, may not have been captured; therefore, the overall representation of non-English-speaking regions is limited. Some of this literature may have been eligible for inclusion in the review but was likely missed due to language, country restrictions, and the database selection criteria outlined in the methodology chapter. Therefore, the exclusion of non-English and grey literature constitutes another limitation, as it may reduce the diversity and generalisability of the findings.

5.4 Further Research Directions

The aforementioned limitations present prospects for future research. First, a broader range of international databases, including SocINDEX, ScienceDirect, Emerald, JSTOR, ProQuest, and PsycINFO, should be included in the literature search for future systematic reviews. As a result, it can make it easier to obtain additional relevant articles. Second, research should examine the literature on migration over a longer period, perhaps starting in 2000. Thus, the evaluations could incorporate early, significant research. Third, due to the lack of disaggregation in the current literature, investigate the ways in which religion, caste, visa type,

and maternal status affect job outcomes. Last, primary research focusing solely on skilled South Asian migrant women who have moved to Europe, as well as other Anglophone destinations, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA, should be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.

5.5 Final Reflections

This systematic review synthesised data regarding the employment obstacles and coping mechanisms faced by skilled South Asian migrant women. Underemployment and deskilling are systematically slowed or diverted by five interconnected barriers: gendered roles, credential/licensing challenges, social-cultural gatekeeping, discrimination, and information/support gaps. Women respond by using multi-level support structures, resilience/agency, identity work, and focused adaptation. The best results are obtained when care-compatible work structures are combined with employer-linked, credential-bridging pathways and mentored practice to create credible local signals.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach. Host societies can strive to create hiring procedures, recognition systems, and workplace cultures that are more transparent, inclusive, and responsive to caregiving responsibilities, while migrants continue to invest in their own adaptation and professional development. Acknowledging and supporting the contributions of skilled migrant women is not just a question of justice; it is also a strategic investment in the varied human potential that enriches communities, economies, and organisations.

Ultimately, the experiences of South Asian migrant women highlight the broader paradox of global mobility: movement across borders expands opportunities yet exposes inequalities. Addressing this paradox requires redefining integration as reciprocal recognition, where societies value not only what migrants learn from them, but what they can learn from

migrants. Only through such mutual transformation can migration become a pathway to fulfilment rather than survival.

Finally, it is essential to emphasise that the suggested research directions are not intended to constrain future inquiry into the experiences of skilled South Asian migrant women. Rather, they aim to offer meaningful pathways for deeper exploration of the complex social, cultural, and professional dynamics that shape these women's lives. While proposed solutions can provide valuable starting points, they are often aspirational and may not fully account for structural and contextual challenges. Continued research should therefore focus on uncovering nuanced realities rather than assuming quick fixes. Ultimately, advancing this body of work will not only fill critical gaps in the literature but also contribute to more inclusive and equitable migration policies worldwide.

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