The Credential Paradox: Skilled, Educated and Excluded

Exploring Employment Barriers for South African Skilled Immigrants in Canada

by

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We accept this Final Report as conforming
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Executive Summary

This capstone project critically examined the paradoxical nature of skilled South African immigrants' experience in the Canadian labour market, where individuals who arrive with advanced education, English fluency, and professional credentials often face significant barriers to meaningful employment. Central to these barriers is the "Canadian experience"[1] requirement, an implicit yet deeply entrenched hiring criterion that functions as a gatekeeping mechanism. By privileging domestic credentials and work history over international expertise, this requirement undermines Canada's ideals of multiculturalism and equitable inclusion, while also raising fundamental human rights concerns. Canadian and provincial human rights frameworks have recognized the "Canadian experience" requirement as a discriminatory practice unless it can be proven a bona fide occupational necessity, meaning its continued use not only limits economic participation but also infringes on principles of fairness, dignity, and equal opportunity. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured interviews, surveys, and document review, this study explored how the "Canadian experience" requirement and related employment barriers shaped the career development, economic outcomes, and long-term settlement decisions of skilled South African immigrants in Canada.

Context and Research Questions

This study was framed by a well-documented paradox: skilled immigrants cannot secure employment without "Canadian experience", yet they cannot acquire "Canadian experience" without employment (Oreopoulos, 2009; Rudenko, 2012). This paradox is relevant to South African immigrants, whose British-influenced education system provides

[1] "Canadian experience" is a combination of hard skills (education and knowledge) and soft skills (cultural competencies) and are essential in navigating the Canadian workplace.

qualifications consistent with Commonwealth and international standards (Walker, 2010), yet these credentials are frequently devalued within the Canadian labour market. This study was guided by the following primary question:

How do the notions of "Canadian experience" shape the career development and economic outcomes of skilled South Africans in Canada?

This study was further shaped by the following sub-questions:

1. In what ways does systemic discrimination intersect with the "Canadian experience" requirement to shape the labour market integration experiences of skilled South African immigrants?
2. How do the pre-arrival employment expectations of skilled South African immigrants compare to their actual labour market experiences in Canada, particularly in relation to the "Canadian experience" requirement and other employment barriers they face?
3. In what ways does the "Canadian experience" requirement intersect with issues of human rights and discrimination in the labour market?

Methodological Approach

The methodological design combined Action Research Engagement (ARE) with a stance of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Bradbury & Duncan, 2015; Rowe et al., 2013). ARE provided an interactive, participatory framework that emphasized co-inquiry and co-creation of solutions, while AI offered a strength-based stance to highlight resilience and adaptability alongside the barriers. This study was also guided by Integral Theory to provide a holistic framework for analyzing the individual, cultural, and systemic dimensions of immigrant integration (Wilber, 2005). In addition, the study was grounded in relational

accountability (Wilson, 2001), emphasizing respect, reciprocity, and responsibility in all interactions with participants and community partners.

Data collection involved five semi-structured interviews with skilled South African immigrants across varied professions, and 135 online surveys that were distributed nationwide. Thematic analysis (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003) was applied, supported by Survey Monkey and Atlas.ti, to identify recurring themes. The review of human rights and labour policies provided a critical complement to the primary data and embedded individual narratives within wider legislative and structural realities.

Key Findings

Participant Profile

Interview and survey participants brought diverse professional and educational backgrounds, with many holding postgraduate qualifications and extensive prior experience. Nevertheless, they faced significant employment challenges upon arrival.

Career Misalignment and Downward Mobility

The majority of participants reported underemployment and occupational downgrading, often accepting survival jobs below their skill level. Upward mobility remained limited.

Credential Devaluation and Exclusion

While most participants had credentials formally accessed, recognition was often partial and contingent on Canadian requalification. This eroded professional identity and trust in fair access to the Canadian labour market.

“Canadian experience” as Gatekeeping

This was the most significant barrier and was often demanded explicitly or implicitly. Participants described this as discriminatory, vague and cyclical.

Other Employment Barriers

Other employment barriers that were identified include a lack of networks, accent discrimination, and systemic bias.

Human Rights and Policy Context

The Ontario Human Rights Commission identified the "Canadian experience" requirement as discriminatory, leading to reforms such as Ontario's *Working for Workers Act (2024)* and British Columbia's *International Credentials Recognition Act (2023)*. However, provincial approaches remain inconsistent across provinces (Government of British Columbia, 2024; Government of Ontario, 2024; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013).

Resilience and Adaptive Strategies

Despite barriers, participants demonstrated remarkable determination, resilience and adaptability through further study, entrepreneurship, professional and social networks, and perseverance. Some participants adjusted career goals, while others considered return or onward migration.

Financial Outcomes and Belonging

Although many participants achieved employment and some stability, their income relative to qualifications and cost of living remained limited. Immigrants continued to experience a fragile sense of belonging, shaped by systemic exclusion and discrimination.

Discussion

The findings revealed that the "Canadian experience" requirement is not a neutral hiring practice, but a gatekeeping mechanism for exclusion. Rooted in colonial credential hierarchies, it reinforces discriminatory labour practices and hinders immigrant integration. This study adds original insight by focusing on South African immigrants who, despite relative privilege, encounter barriers similar to those faced by other racialized groups.

Leadership theories offered various lenses for this study. Critical Leadership Theory (CLT) revealed the power imbalances embedded in credential recognition practices (Collinson, 2014; Smyth, 1989). Transformative Leadership Theory (TLT) highlighted the moral imperative for systemic reform (Shields, 2010; Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Decolonial Leadership (DL) called for the dismantling of Eurocentric frameworks and professional legitimacy by valuing diverse ways of knowing. Together, these perspectives underscore the need for equity-oriented leadership in dismantling discriminatory hiring practices.

Policy and Practice Implications

From this study, several recommendations emerged:

Policy: Create a standardized, transparent system for credential recognition across all provinces, eliminate the "Canadian experience" requirement, enforce human rights protections uniformly across provinces, and expand targeted settlement support services.

Practice: Encourage inclusive recruitment and hiring practices, establish networking and mentorship programs, promote workplace equity and retention initiatives, and formally recognize international qualifications and experiences.

Conclusion

Skilled South African immigrants reflect Canada's commitment to attracting global talent and expertise, yet systemic barriers restrict their professional integration and economic outcomes, despite their strong qualifications. The persistence of the "Canadian experience" requirement reflected colonial legacies and discriminatory practices, while participants' resilience underscores both the human cost of exclusion and the untapped potential of immigrant talent. Reframing integration through justice, equity, diversity, decolonization, and inclusion (JEDDI) principles, Canada can move past fragmented reforms and pursue meaningful systemic change. This study was conducted in collaboration with the

South African Institute in Canada (SAIC), a settlement agency supporting South African immigrants nationwide.

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Technology Support Statement

In undertaking this Capstone Project, I utilized a range of digital and AI-supported tools in a balanced and ethical manner. These included Zotero, Grammarly, Zoom, Survey Monkey, OpenAI Whisper (via Plaud), Dropbox, Facebook, online search engines, and Atlat.ti. I had received approval from my academic supervisor to apply these tools, and their use was consistent with the *School of Leadership Studies' Provisional Guidelines for Utilizing Generative AI in Graduate Course Work* (School of Leadership Studies, n.d.).

Details on Application of Tools

Zotero

I used Zotero as a research database to organize scholarly literature and manage references. The APA citation plug-in for Microsoft Word (APA, 2025) generated citations automatically. However, I retained responsibility for selecting relevant sources and ensuring proper citation in the final report.

Grammarly

I used Grammarly to support clarity and readability by assisting with grammar, syntax, and phrasing in the final report.

Zoom

I used Zoom to conduct remote interviews. With participants' consent, I recorded sessions to ensure accuracy in data collection and later analysis.

OpenAI Whisper (via Plaud)

I used Plaud Note as a voice recorder during interviews. While Plaud incorporated multiple AI models (GPR-4.1, o3-mini, Claude 3.7 Sonnet, Gemini 2.5 Pro), I relied on its integration of OpenAI Whisper technology for transcription accuracy. Because Plau stored data on US

servers, I disclosed this in the participant information and consent form, as well as in the ethics application.

Survey Monkey

I used Survey Monkey to design, distribute, and collect survey responses. In addition to data collection, I made use of its manual tag function to assist with preliminary organization and analysis of responses. The platform hosted data on Canadian servers, and this was disclosed in the participant information and consent form.

Dropbox

I used Dropbox to store project files securely in the cloud. Access was restricted to myself as the researcher. Since Dropbox stored data on US servers, this was disclosed in the participant information and consent form and the ethics application.

Facebook

I used Facebook exclusively for recruitment by posting the participant invitation flyer and survey link. No research data were collected or stored on Facebook.

Online Search Engines

I used online search engines and databases to access relevant academic literature, including the RRU Library, Google Scholar, Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Emerald, Routledge, and Sage Journals. I also accessed materials through other university libraries and academic repositories to ensure a comprehensive review of relevant scholarship.

Atlas.ti for Qualitative Data Analysis

I conducted thematic analysis manually and used Atlas.ti as a secondary tool to validate coding and theme identification. Comparing manual and software-supported analysis strengthened the rigour and reliability of findings. I made final decisions on coding and

categorization in consultation with my supervisor to ensure alignment with the research purpose.

Chapter 1: Focus and Framing

1.1 Context

A study by the Metropolis British Columbia Policy Research Symposium found that Canadian employers value "Canadian work experience" over international work experience (Oreopoulos, 2009). Facing this barrier is challenging for skilled immigrants as they cannot secure employment in Canada without "Canadian experience" or acquire "Canadian experience" without employment (Rudenko, 2012). This paradox underscores the need to critically examine how Canada's labour market practices align with its multicultural ideals and immigration goals and how they impact skilled immigrants.

1.2 Focus and Framing

This study focused on a case study of skilled South Africans in Canada, many of whom arrive with English proficiency and professional qualifications from institutions aligned with British or international standards. South Africa's British-influenced education system produces credentials that are aligned with those of the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries (Walker, 2010). Yet, South African immigrants continue to face employment barriers in Canada, exposing how colonial legacies reinforce Eurocentric credential hierarchies. Canada privileges domestic qualifications despite shared standards, reinforcing professional legitimacy tied to national identity, regulatory control, and systemic exclusion. Historically, immigration policies favoured British and European immigrants while devaluing credentials from racialized and colonized regions (Guo, 2009). Even as policies shifted toward multiculturalism, credential recognition frameworks retained Eurocentric and nationalistic biases, positioning foreign-trained professionals as lacking "Canadian experience" despite shared colonial educational models. This study addressed the following research questions:

Primary Question

How do the notions of "Canadian experience" shape the career development and economic outcomes of skilled South Africans in Canada?

Sub-Questions

- In what ways does systemic discrimination intersect with the "Canadian experience" requirement to shape the labour market integration experiences of skilled South African immigrants?
- How do the pre-arrival employment expectations of skilled South African immigrants compare to their actual labour market experiences in Canada, particularly in relation to the "Canadian experience" requirement and other employment barriers they face?
- In what ways does the "Canadian experience" requirement intersect with issues of human rights and discrimination in the labour market?

The sub-questions directly supported the primary research inquiry by revealing how the "Canadian experience" requirement is embedded within broader systems of exclusion. By examining systemic discrimination, the research demonstrated how this requirement contributed to the unequal integration of skilled South African immigrants into the Canadian labour market. Pre-arrival employment expectations were compared with actual experiences that provided insights into how systemic barriers disrupted anticipated career development. In addition, the connection between the "Canadian experience" requirement, human rights, and discrimination reframed this requirement as more than a technical issue. These subquestions collectively enriched and strengthened the analysis of the primary research question.

1.3 Vision

My vision for transformative change was to challenge the dominant narrative among Canadian employers, policymakers, and society that overemphasized "Canadian experience" and also to highlight and elevate the value of international experience and skills, as well as the diverse contributions of immigrants.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Skilled immigrants face various employment barriers despite advanced education and international experience (Oreopoulos, 2009; Rudenko, 2012; Sakamoto, 2013; Sakamoto et al., 2010; Thomas, 2021). In the Canadian context, one of the most frequently cited obstacles is the lack of "Canadian experience," which has been embedded in hiring practices since the 1970s (Shear, 1978; The Globe and Mail, Toronto, p. 7, as cited in Sakamoto, 2013). This review of available literature will examine the meaning and impact of this requirement, alongside other barriers, as it raises critical questions regarding systemic discrimination and human rights, and affects the career development and economic outcomes of skilled immigrants in Canada.

This section presents a critical review of scholarly literature relevant to my study, which investigates how the notion of "Canadian experience" and other employment barriers shape the labour market integration of skilled immigrants in Canada. The review begins by defining and contextualizing the "Canadian experience" requirement within its historical, social and policy context, before examining its influence on credential recognition, career development, and economic outcomes, alongside considerations for return migrations. It further explores the human rights and discrimination implications associated with these barriers, and concludes with an exploration of justice, equity and decolonization leadership models in challenging exclusionary hiring practices. In doing so, it positions my study's

relevance and objectives within existing scholarship while identifying critical gaps that this study seeks to address.

2.1 Canadian Experience

The concept of "Canadian experience" is often an undefined **ye**t assumed hiring criterion (Sakamoto et al., 2010). Rudenko (2012) and Sakamoto et al. (2010) defined it as a combination of hard skills (e.g., measurable technical knowledge and education) and soft skills (e.g., cultural competencies and communication) that are essential in navigating the Canadian workplace. Sakamoto et al. (2010) further introduced the concept of tacit knowledge, which describes employment norms that are often unspoken and only learned through lived experiences. On the contrary, Rudenko (2010) noted that skilled immigrants perceive "Canadian experience" primarily as work experience obtained within Canada.

Thus, the paradox has been widely documented, reinforcing the systemic cycle of exclusion (Rudenko, 2012; Sakamoto et al., 2010). This framing illustrates how the "Canadian experience" requirement reinforces a gatekeeping function, maintaining Eurocentric standards of professionalism that privilege dominant groups (Sakamoto et al., 2010). Furthermore, the focus on "Canadian experience" tends to reinforce systemic discrimination by giving preference to individuals who are already familiar with local customs and workplace norms, and often comes at the expense of immigrants who bring valuable international skills and perspectives (Rudenko, 2012; Sakamoto et al., 2010). Whether through the devaluation of foreign credentials or the unspoken expectations shaped by Eurocentric standards, these challenges are not random. Instead, they point to deeper, systemic patterns of exclusion that continue to disadvantage skilled newcomers in subtle but significant ways. Consequently, it perpetuates inequality and underutilization of

global talent (Rudenko, 2012). Sakomoto et al. (2010) and Rudenko (2012) have noted that employers may struggle to assess international qualifications and experiences.

The way international credentials are often dismissed not only reveals a lack of trust in other countries' systems but also reflects lingering colonial ideas about which kinds of knowledge are considered legitimate or valuable (Hiller & Carlson, 2018; Kovach, 2021). Moss (2016) highlights how the legacy of settler colonialism in Canada continues to shape society today, particularly through the unequal power dynamics it created between Indigenous peoples and settlers. These imbalances remain and continue to affect who is included, recognized, and valued in society. This pattern also extends to the experiences of racialized immigrants. One example of this ongoing legacy is the way foreign credentials are often undervalued, with international qualifications receiving less recognition than those earned in Canada (Moss, 2016). Grant et al. (2015) describe how skilled immigrants encounter significant barriers to securing suitable employment due to a "credentialing" problem, wherein international credentials are not fully recognized or respected by Canadian employers. While these patterns often point to systemic exclusion, Grant et al. (2015) note that some scholars caution against blaming every credentialing issue solely on discrimination. They suggest that part of the challenge also lies in the complexity of verifying qualifications from different countries and education systems (Grant et al., 2015). Employers often face significant challenges when evaluating international qualifications. Differences in education systems, unfamiliar regulations, or limited knowledge about schools and institutions in other countries can make it challenging to assess how those credentials compare (Grant et al., 2015). In highly regulated fields, employers and licensing bodies often must comply with provincial laws or meet specific professional accreditation standards regarding credentials. These rules can make the process complicated. It is

essential to recognize that the situation is complex, but that does not take away from the need to question how institutional practices and assumptions can put skilled immigrants at a disadvantage (Grant et al., 2015).

A decolonizing perspective invites a more profound critique of these dynamics. The concept of "Canadian experience" reinforces settler-colonial norms and Eurocentric ideas of legitimacy, professionalism, and belonging. Indigenous scholars challenge the framing of Canada as a unified, sovereign settler state, instead arguing that it is a colonial project on unceded Indigenous Lands (Hiller & Carlson, 2018). This lens reveals how the focus on "Canadian experience" can push immigrants to the margins, reinforce colonial power structures, and overlook or erase Indigenous ways of knowing.

Challenging the assumptions of "Canadian experience" is critical to dismantling systemic barriers and fostering a more inclusive and equitable labour market. This study explores how immigrants perceive and experience the notion of "Canadian experience" through my inquiry. The following section examines how the "Canadian experience" barrier shapes the career development and economic outcomes of skilled immigrants in Canada.

2.2 Career development and economic outcomes

Many immigrants seek better economic opportunities. However, their post-arrival experiences often fall short of expectations. Studies such as (Picot et al., 2023; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010; Thomas, 2021) have shown a growing wage gap between skilled immigrants and Canadian-born workers, which is tied to barriers such as credential devaluation, job mismatches between international experience and local job opportunities, and the persistent "Canadian experience" requirement. Picot et al. (2013) argued that these patterns challenge the underlying assumption of the Human Capital Model of Immigration Selection (Statistics Canada, 2014), which claims that education automatically leads to

economic success. In practice, this model fails to account for the structural barriers many immigrants encounter, exposing its key shortcomings.

Crossman et al. (2021) observed that the wage gap between immigrants and non-immigrants grew from 2000 to 2015, although it narrowed somewhat between 2015 and 2019, possibly due to policy changes and shifts in labour demand. However, the continued existence of these disparities, even when immigrants have similar education and skills, suggests that the labour market is not based purely on merit but is shaped by more profound systemic inequalities (Crossman et al., 2021; Picot et al., 2023). Social factors like gender, race, and being an immigrant play a significant role in shaping people's economic opportunities. Even when South African skilled immigrants speak fluent English and have recognized qualifications, many still face unemployment and discrimination, confirming that systemic barriers are still very much in place.

Notably, Crush et al. (2013) is the only identified study that explores the economic outcomes of immigrants from Southern African countries, including South Africa. My inquiry aims to address a gap in the literature by focusing specifically on skilled South African immigrants, showing how even relatively privileged immigrant groups encounter systemic obstacles.

These persistent economic disparities and barriers not only influence immigrants' career development and integration into the labour market but also shape decisions about whether to remain in Canada or return to their home countries. Understanding these dynamics is essential for examining the factors that drive return migration among skilled South African immigrants.

2.3 Return Migration

Persistent employment barriers can cause immigrants to question their decision to migrate. Thomas (2021) found that many immigrants in Winnipeg and Edmonton were disappointed with post-arrival experiences, citing a decline in social and occupational status, while some were unemployed or working in roles unrelated to their professional backgrounds. Despite this disillusionment, actual return migration remains low (Thomas, 2021).

Crush et al. (2013) found that, despite widespread dissatisfaction, return migration among South Africans remains low. The 2024 South African Migration Profile Report cites barriers such as safety concerns, family ties in Canada, age and economic uncertainty (Statistics South Africa, 2024). While existing studies (Crush et al., 2013; Thomas, 2021) examine general or regional return migration, they do not focus on South African skilled immigrants in Canada – a gap this inquiry seeks to address.

Addressing this gap requires exploring return migration patterns while also examining the systemic factors, such as human rights concerns and discrimination, that shape the lived experiences and decisions of South African skilled immigrants in Canada.

2.4 Human Rights and Discrimination

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has opposed the "Canadian experience" requirement, citing its impact on immigrant integration and human rights (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013). Sakamoto et al. (2010) and Foster (2015) argue that it reinforces inequality and discrimination. Sakamoto et al. (2010) also introduced the concept of "*democratic racism*." This term describes how societies can simultaneously uphold values of equality and multiculturalism while engaging in practices that exclude or marginalize racialized groups. For example, while Canada promotes diversity and inclusion,

hiring practices such as the "Canadian experience" requirement often disadvantage immigrants of colour and highlight the subtle but deeply embedded forms of exclusion that continue to shape the system.

In collaboration with Sakamoto, the OHRC developed policy guidelines calling for the removal of the "Canadian experience" requirement, citing it as a human rights violation (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013; University of Toronto News, 2013). The OHRC's position and Ontario's legislative response affirm that the "Canadian experience" requirement constitutes a form of systemic discrimination with tangible human rights implications (Government of Ontario, 2024; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013). This advocacy helped lead to Bill 149, part of Ontario's Working for Workers Act, 2024, which officially bans the requirement (Government of Ontario, 2024).

However, no other province has passed similar legislation, and Rudenko (2012) noted that inconsistent practices across provinces undermine fairness and limit the mobility of immigrants. British Columbia has partially addressed the issue by removing the "Canadian experience" requirement in 18 regulatory bodies; however, this does not extend to unregulated occupations, which may still require navigating employer-specific requirements, potentially including a preference for "Canadian experience" (Government of British Columbia, 2024). Taken together, these findings suggest that the "Canadian experience" requirement is not merely a neutral or practical hiring standard but is shaped by deeper historical power dynamics and colonial ideas about whose experience and knowledge truly matter.

2.5 Leadership

Leadership plays a pivotal role in confronting deeply embedded practices that restrict equitable opportunities in the labour market, particularly the "Canadian experience"

requirement. This inquiry draws from Critical Leadership Theory (CLT), which questions power and exclusion (Collinson, 2014; Smyth, 1989); Transformative Leadership Theory (TLT), which promotes equity and systemic change (Shields, 2010), and Decolonial Leadership (DL), which seeks to challenge the legitimacy of colonial knowledge frameworks and elevate Indigenous ways of knowing (Khalifa et al., 2019; Kovach, 2021).

2.5.1 Critical Leadership Theory (CLT)

Critical Leadership Theory challenges traditional, hierarchical understandings of leadership by challenging how power, identity, and socio-political context shape leadership practices (Collinson, 2014; Smyth, 1989). CLT exposes the privileging of "Canadian experience" as not merely a neutral standard, but a socially constructed mechanism that is rooted in power imbalances, racialized exclusion, and dominant cultural norms. By uncovering these embedded inequities, CLT encourages leaders to disrupt established norms and reassess hiring practices that are not routinely assumed to be fair.

2.5.2 Transformative Leadership Theory (TLT)

Transformative Leadership Theory offers a justice- and equity-oriented framework for systemic reform (Shields, 2010). TLT frames leadership as both a moral and ethical duty to address privilege, promote inclusion, and remove structural barriers (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). TLT provides a practical roadmap for eliminating the "Canadian experience" requirement by guiding leaders to value international credentials, recognize diverse professional experiences, and implement hiring policies that actively counter systemic bias. It positions leaders as agents of intentional change who foster organizational cultures that reflect JEDDI principles in practice, not just in policy.

2.5.3 Decolonial Leadership (DL)

Decolonial Leadership, as articulated by Kovach (2021) and expanded by Khalifa et al. (2019), moves leadership away from Eurocentric models towards Indigenous knowledge systems, relational accountability, and multiple ways of knowing. DL resists the expectation that individuals from marginalized groups must abandon their cultural values and identities to be deemed competent in dominant-culture workplaces (Khalifa et al., 2019; Kovach, 2021). DL offers a critical lens to challenge colonial legacies embedded in the "Canadian experience" requirement and other employment barriers, it questions the legitimacy of privileging local credentials over those from the Global South, reframes notions of competence and professional "fit", and calls for hiring practices that honour multiple and diverse ways of knowing and lived experiences. This approach aligns with anti-racist and decolonizing principles encompassed within JEDDI, fostering a labour market that is inclusive, responsive, and equitable for skilled immigrants.

By integrating these three leadership lenses, this study frames the dismantling of the "Canadian experience" requirement within a broader movement toward systemic transformation. This information requires both the critical examination of entrenched norms and the active creation of inclusive, decolonized, and justice-driven labour market practices. These three leadership lenses collectively highlight the pathways through which systemic barriers can be dismantled, which guide the concluding reflections.

2.6 Conclusion

In summary, the literature reveals that the "Canadian experience" requirement functions as a systemic barrier that perpetuates discrimination and exclusion. It privileges local, often Eurocentric, ideas of what constitutes professional or valuable knowledge, while sidelining immigrants who were trained elsewhere, even when they possess strong

qualifications and relevant experience. Scholars such as Sakamoto et al. (2010), Rudenko (2012), and Foster (2015) demonstrate how this requirement leads to the global talent being overlooked and reinforces the notion that some credentials hold more weight than others. A decolonial lens further shows how these practices are embedded in settler-colonial logics that normalize whiteness, undermine plural ways of knowing, and sustain systemic inequities (Hiller & Carlson, 2018; Kovach, 2021). Despite policy efforts such as Ontario's Bill 149, the persistence of this requirement across provinces, particularly in unregulated sectors, reflects ongoing structural discrimination. Despite the growing body of scholarship on immigrant employment barriers, the literature offers little to no focused examination of how skilled South African immigrants navigate the "Canadian experience" requirement and the impact on their career development and economic outcomes. Addressing this underexplored area positions this study to make an original contribution to understanding how systemic hiring practices affect a specific, yet often overlooked, immigrant group. This study seeks to address that gap by exploring these lived experiences in depth, using a leadership-focused and decolonial lens to understand how systemic barriers operate and how they might be dismantled. This sets the stage for the next section, which outlines the methodological approach used to carry out this inquiry.

Chapter 3: Approach

3.1 Overall Approach

Building on the identified gap in the literature, this project adopted a critical lens that was informed by integral theory, which provides a framework for examining complex issues from multiple perspectives, integrating four dimensions of human experience: individual interior (UL - thoughts, emotions, identity), individual exterior (UR - behaviours, skills), collective interior (LL - culture, values, shared meanings), and collective exterior (LR -

systems, institutions, policies) (Wilber, 2005). The intention was to utilize Integral Theory as a guiding lens to examine how the "Canadian experience" requirement shapes the labour market integration of skilled South African immigrants. By mapping internalized feelings of inadequacy (Upper Left), observable employment outcomes like deskilling and underemployment (UR), cultural norms privileging "Canadian experience" (LL), and systemic hiring practices (LR), the theory helped me to explore through various lenses how exclusion operates across personal, cultural, and structural domains, emphasizing the need for multidimensional responses (Landrum & Gardner, 2005). While insights from integral theory guided the project, the results did not aim to test or prove the theory but rather to use it to explore the multifaceted nature of immigrants' employment experiences and the barriers they face (See Appendix B).

This study was also guided by a commitment to relational accountability (Wilson, 2001), ensuring respect, reciprocity, and responsibility towards participants and the partnering settlement agency. Relational accountability emphasizes the importance of honouring relationships, shared knowledge creation, and ethical engagement throughout the research process. This approach helped to build trust with participants, facilitate dialogue, and share findings in ways that are meaningful and accessible to the community. This study was grounded in relational accountability through several commitments. Firstly, by using ARE and AI, the voices and lived experiences of participants were centred in this study, ensuring that the research was conducted ***for*** and ***with*** participants, and not ***on*** them. Secondly, this study aimed to share its findings through a summarized report with the settlement agency and interested participants. Thirdly, this study focused on practical, strength-based solutions that address employment barriers and support career development and the economic well-being of South-African skilled immigrants. Lastly, this

study was guided by reflexivity, acknowledging my positionality as a South African immigrant, and engaging in ongoing self-reflection and member check, to ensure transparency, accuracy, inclusivity and accountability towards all participants. All of these practices align with participatory and decolonial approaches and were aimed at advancing the broader goals of justice, dignity, and equity (Wilson, 2001).

3.2 Methodologies

This study drew on methodologies that leaned towards Action Research Engagement (ARE) (Rowe et al., 2013) and was informed by the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Bradbury & Duncan, 2015). These methodologies offered a robust framework for addressing complex employment barriers, facilitating practical solutions to enhance career development while aligning with ethical social responsibility standards, justice, inclusion and a more equitable society.

ARE is a cyclical inquiry, dialogue and deliberation process that aims to shift attitudes toward change, highlight diverse perspectives, identify challenges, and generate viable action plans (Rowe et al., 2013). This approach's iterative cycles are embedded in Lewin's action research cycles, which include planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Lewin, 1946). ARE played an essential role in this study, as it created a participatory space where immigrants could share their unique backgrounds and experiences, shedding light on how the "Canadian experience" requirement shaped their career development and economic outcomes. ARE challenged dominant narratives and deconstructed exclusionary assumptions, enabling participants to co-identify barriers and co-create practical strategies for change. This collaborative, inclusive framework increased the likelihood of generating sustainable participant-driven solutions as research was conducted with and for participants and not on them (Seehawer, 2018).

This study maintained a constructive and strength-based stance by incorporating AI, which focused on identifying existing strengths, successes, and opportunities for positive change (Bradbury & Duncan, 2015). By integrating critical AI, which blends AI principles with a critical lens on power, inequality, and social justice, the project highlighted not only barriers but also resilience, untold stories, and potential solutions that can improve immigrant integration (Bradbury & Duncan, 2015).

From a global perspective, this study addressed local and global challenges of immigrant integration, employment equality, and systemic barriers. Skilled immigrants globally face credential recognition gaps, discriminatory hiring, and undervaluation of international experiences. The combined use of ARE and AI aligns with justice, equity, diversity, decolonization, and inclusion (JEDDI) principles, with ARE fostering relational accountability through co-creation and AI complementing this by uplifting marginalized voices. This approach contributed to conversations on ethical migration, social responsibility and labour market fairness.

This approach also connected broader movements advancing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) (Gabriel & Veronis, 2023), including Sustainable Development Goal 8.5 on achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value (United Nations, n.d.). The barriers identified in this study undermine access to decent work, despite participants being highly qualified and experienced professionals. Additional sustainable development goals that were connected to this study include SDG 10.3, which relates to reduced inequalities, and SDG 16, which advocates for peace, justice, and strong institutions. The integration of ARE and AI reflected a global systems thinking perspective

that recognizes employment barriers shaped by interconnected local, national, and global structures, requiring a collaborative, multi-level response.

This study also aimed to address individual and community barriers by co-creating solutions with participants while informing broader advocacy, policy, and organizational practices to support systemic change beyond the local context.

As a South African immigrant, I recognized that I brought personal experiences and assumptions about Canadian systems and immigrant challenges. Throughout the project, I was aware that I might expect shared experiences among South African immigrants or view Canadian hiring practices as uniformly exclusionary. To stay accountable, I used reflexive journaling and member check to question these assumptions and to remain open to diverse perspectives.

3.3 Methods

I conducted five in-depth, semi-structured interviews with skilled South African immigrants (See Appendix H). Four of the interviews were face-to-face, while one interview was conducted via the Zoom online platform. I complemented these interviews with 135 online surveys via Survey Monkey with skilled South African immigrants from all over Canada (See Appendix I). Of the interview participants, 1 identified as a man, while 4 identified as women. Among the survey participants, 44 identified as men and 75 identified as women. For this study, a skilled immigrant was defined as a person who has the education, experience, and language skills to fill a job that typically requires a university degree, a college diploma or a skilled trade with apprenticeship training. To explore the human rights dimensions, I examined human rights and labour legislation policies. Results were analyzed using thematic analysis.

The five semi-structured in-person interviews allowed for a deep exploration of individual experiences and perceptions, particularly regarding the "Canadian experience" barrier, career development and economic outcome of South African immigrants. These interviews revealed nuanced insights into how policies, social structures and history shaped the labour market outcomes of these immigrants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The 135 online surveys gathered brought comparable insights from a larger group of South African skilled immigrants, enabling the identification of common patterns and experiences. This method complemented the depth of interviews by providing quantitative and qualitative data to support thematic analysis. The surveys also offered participants flexibility and anonymity, which encouraged candid responses on sensitive topics. Both methods were adapted to participants' needs to ensure rich, context-specific data.

Document analysis was done by systematically reviewing grey literature, government reports, and policy documents on labour rights, labour market integration, and employment equity. Human rights legislation related to employment and foreign credential recognition was also assessed to determine whether they support or contradict the "Canadian experience" requirement (Bowen, 2009). This combination of data sources helped to minimize bias and strengthen credibility. Throughout data collection and analysis, I used reflexive journaling and member check to examine how my positionality as a South African immigrant shaped interaction, interpretations, and meaning-making. At the same time, I aimed to maintain relational accountability to participants and the community.

Finally, I analyzed the data by using thematic analysis to identify and report patterns across all data sources (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). This method enabled me to synthesize insights from interviews and surveys by identifying recurring themes and patterns that connect participants' lived experiences with policy-level factors, thereby

providing a cohesive and multidimensional understanding of the "Canadian experience" barrier.

3.4 Structured approach for conducting the inquiry

This study adopted a structured, participatory approach guided by ARE and AI, emphasizing collaborative dialogue, co-creation of knowledge, and ethical engagement (Bradbury & Duncan, 2015; Rowe et al., 2013). The study was implemented over five months, progressing through the five stages of ARE.

3.4.1 ARE Step 1 – Contextualization and Framing the Inquiry

Relevant literature was reviewed to situate the project within a broader context. Related topics such as the notion of "Canadian experience," employment barriers, immigrant integration, career development, economic outcome and the relevance of human capital theory were explored to ground the study. The review also examined systemic, policy, and socio-economic factors influencing immigrant outcomes, which helped to identify the key issues and focus of the inquiry. The research design was finalized, and ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection.

3.4.2 ARE Step 2 – Building Relationships and Engaging Stakeholders

I collaborated with the settlement agency to recruit participants through ethical recruitment practices. This process ensured informed, voluntary, and ongoing consent while creating a safe and respectful research space. The focus was on South African skilled immigrants currently residing in Canada to ensure their experiences were centred in the inquiry. Relationship-building was guided by Appreciative Inquiry (AI) principles, which emphasized positive dialogue that recognized participants' strengths, resilience, and achievements.

3.4.3 ARE Step 3 – Co-Inquiry and Data Collection

Selecting Participants

Participants were South African skilled immigrants residing in Canada for at least one year. A skilled immigrant was defined as a person with the education, experience, and language skills to fill a job that typically requires a university degree, a college diploma, or a skilled trade with apprenticeship training.

Participants were recruited through the South African Institute in Canada (SAIC), a settlement agency located in Vancouver that acted as a gatekeeper. The agency supports South African immigrants across Canada, aiming to build connections, offer guidance, and foster a sense of community for a better future in Canada. SAIC assisted with recruiting participants for in-person interviews in Greater Vancouver and Victoria, as well as online interviews conducted via Zoom with participants located across Canada. The agency also supported the recruitment of survey participants nationwide by sharing the online survey through its digital platforms and newsletter (See Appendix C).

Exclusion from the study was guided by the ethical principle of fairness and the need to ensure participants' contributions aligned with the research purpose. Individuals who did not meet the eligibility criteria of being a skilled South African immigrant currently residing in Canada for at least one year were omitted, as their circumstances did not reflect the labour market integration experiences under investigation. Overall, the exclusion criteria were applied consistently and transparently, ensuring that the final dataset reflected the intended participant group while upholding the principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2, 2022).

Participant Recruitment Process for Interviews

1. The researcher contacted the gatekeeper and requested support in recruiting

participants for the research project.

2. The gatekeeper distributed an invitation on behalf of the researcher to a pool of potential participants who met the specified eligibility criteria. This invitation included the researcher's contact information, an overview of the study's nature and objectives, a brief description of the data collection methods, and the Participant Information Sheet.
3. Individuals who were interested in participating contacted the researcher directly to express their willingness to take part in the study.
4. The researcher responded by re-sharing the Participant Information Sheet and inviting participants to ask any questions they had about the study.
5. If the individual agreed to participate, the researcher sent the informed consent form to be signed by both the participant and the researcher.
6. Once consent was obtained, the researcher and participant arranged a mutually convenient interview format and location, either in person or virtually.

Participant Recruitment Process for Online Surveys

1. The researcher contacted the gatekeeper and requested support in recruiting participants for the research project.
2. The gatekeeper posted an invitation on behalf of the researcher via their Facebook platform. This invitation included a brief overview of the research objectives and a link to the Google Surveys platform.
3. Individuals who were interested in participating voluntarily clicked on the survey link, which opened the Google Surveys document. The survey began with the Participant Information Sheet, followed by the Consent Declaration and then the survey questions.

4. By completing and submitting the survey, participants indicated their informed, voluntary, and ongoing consent to participate in the research.

This sample offered valuable insights into how shared professional and educational backgrounds, particularly among those with English fluency and internationally recognized qualifications, intersected with systemic barriers that affected career development and economic outcomes. The selected sample was relevant to the inquiry and feasible within the project's five-month timeframe.

3.4.4 ARE Step 4 – Reflection, Analysis and Co-Interpretation

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes, patterns, and insights related to employment barriers, career development, and economic outcomes. This study was guided by an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) lens to explore not only the barriers faced by participants but also their strengths, successes, and opportunities for transformative action. Canadian labour and human rights legislation were incorporated into the analysis to contextualize the systemic and legal factors that influenced employment barriers for skilled immigrants.

Throughout the analysis, careful attention was paid to issues of power dynamics, researcher positionality, and relational accountability. After each interview question, the researcher provided a brief summary of her understanding of the participant's response to ensure accuracy and offer participants the opportunity to clarify or correct any misinterpretations. This process supported ethical engagement and strengthened the co-construction of knowledge.

A follow-up member-checking process was conducted by e-mailing participants a copy of their interview transcripts, which allowed participants to review and verify that their perspectives, experiences, and intentions had been accurately captured. This step further

reinforced relational accountability and contributed to the credibility, relevance, and trustworthiness of the findings.

To ensure the integrity of the data analysis, the researcher met regularly with her academic supervisor to discuss the interpretation of emerging findings, reflect on potential biases, and identify appropriate strategies to mitigate them. These reflective discussions helped to maintain methodological soundness and supported a transparent and ethically grounded approach to qualitative inquiry.

3.4.5 ARE Step 5 – Co-Constructing Action and Disseminating Knowledge

Based on the findings, practical recommendations were co-developed with participants to address employment barriers. These recommendations were framed through an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) lens, emphasizing existing strengths, capacities, and positive strategies identified by participants. The process centred participants' voices and experiences, ensuring that proposed solutions were grounded in lived realities and community wisdom.

The findings were disseminated through a comprehensive report submitted to the faculty and a summarized report shared with participants. This approach promoted relational accountability, empowered participants, and ensured that their voices were accurately reflected in the results. By inviting participants to validate interpretations and contribute to solution-building, the process enhanced the credibility of the research. It fulfilled an ethical responsibility to mobilize knowledge for meaningful community impact.

3.5 Ethical principles and considerations

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the RRU Research Ethics Board. The study was guided by the core principles outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2, 2022), which include respect for persons, concern for welfare and justice.

I aimed to uphold respect for people by ensuring that all participants provided informed, voluntary and ongoing consent. In plain language, participants were fully informed about the purpose of my inquiry, the process, risks, and potential benefits during recruitment and before and after interviews and online surveys. This information was provided in the participant information and consent form, which was shared with potential participants before they agreed to participate in the research and again before the interview commenced. I emphasized their right to withdraw, interrupt, or end participation at any time until the data became part of an anonymized dataset for the exclusive use of my project. Participants had the right to withdraw without penalty or consequences. Consent was documented through a signed participant information and consent form, which included explicit permission to make audio recordings during interviews (See Appendix D, Appendix E, Appendix F and Appendix G). I highlighted the potential risks associated with the use of online platforms. I indicated that platforms such as Survey Monkey, Zoom, Dropbox, Plaud Note, and Facebook might involve storing data on servers outside Canada. I removed the links as soon as the project was completed.

I aimed to minimize potential risks and ensure participants' psychological, emotional and social well-being by creating a safe, supportive environment. Throughout this study, I was mindful of the sensitive nature of discussing employment barriers and discrimination. If participants required support services, relevant contact information was provided in advance and clearly outlined in the Participant Information Sheet for both interviews and online surveys.

Participants were reminded throughout this study that confidentiality would be strictly maintained throughout the process by assigning a code name to each participant. Confidentiality included the safekeeping and storage of research materials in a secure

location, in a password-protected folder, and on a password-protected device to which only the researcher has access. While translation needs were not anticipated, unforeseen linguistic nuances that might have arisen were clarified and validated through member check to ensure inclusivity and understanding. I aimed to avoid the overrepresentation of vulnerable individuals and tokenism[2] and sought a diverse range of voices from South African skilled immigrants with the help of the settlement agency. Ethical approval was obtained from the Royal Roads Ethics Board before participant recruitment started.

Mitigating power-over dynamics was crucial as I was in a potentially privileged position. This privilege arose from my role in designing and leading the research, my academic affiliation, and my access to institutional resources and knowledge systems. I adopted a participatory and relational accountability stance by building trust, fostering dialogue and recognizing participants as co-creators of knowledge. I continuously reflected and examined my assumptions, positionality and biases throughout this study.

In addition to caring for participants, I also attended to my well-being as a researcher. I used regular reflexive practices like journaling and setting emotional boundaries to maintain balance and process complex emotions. I sought support from peers and faculty when needed. Ethical self-care enhanced my ability to remain present, accountable, and responsive throughout the inquiry.

I collaborated with the South African Institute in Canada (SAIC), a settlement agency located in Vancouver, which acted as a gatekeeper. The agency supports South African immigrants all over Canada, and its goal is to build connections, offer guidance and create a community for a better future in Canada. The agency assisted with participant recruitment

[2] Doing something to show that you are following the rules, not because you really believe it is the right thing to do.

for in-person interviews in Greater Vancouver and Victoria, as well as online interviews via Zoom from all over Canada. The agency also helped to recruit survey participants from all over Canada by inviting them to participate in the online survey via their online platform and newsletter. Research findings will be shared with the settlement agency through a summarized report for their use. For a broader survey scope, recruitment was also done through voluntary invitations on various South African community online platforms (Facebook) (See Appendix C).

In working closely with the agency, I sought to ensure community benefit and reciprocity by contributing knowledge back into the community. Throughout this process, I aimed to uphold integrity, dignity, and fairness, aligning with the ethical commitments of relational accountability and respect for participants.

Chapter 4: Results

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (n=5) and online surveys (n=135) with skilled South African immigrants. The qualitative data analysis in this study is guided by relational accountability and informed by an Appreciative Inquiry stance. This approach prioritizes and honours the voices and lived experiences of South African skilled immigrants who have encountered employment barriers in Canada. The analysis followed an organized, yet flexible approach that is based on Taylor-Powell and Renner's (2003) five-step framework. This framework includes (1) familiarization with the data, (2) focusing the analysis on key themes and guiding questions, (3) categorizing the information, (4) identifying patterns and relationships within and across categories, and (5) interpreting the findings. Framed through an Appreciative Inquiry lens, this analysis highlights participants' strengths, values and resilience, and does not focus solely on challenges and deficit-based narratives. Grounded by a commitment to relational accountability, this analysis ensured

that participants' narratives were represented accurately, respectfully, and with integrity and care.

The five semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim, member-checked and reviewed multiple times to ensure accuracy and deepen understanding. Initial readings captured overall impressions and began the process of meaning-making. Coding involved both preset and emergent themes, drawing from relevant literature and Appreciative Inquiry principles. In keeping with relational accountability, the development of themes extended beyond identifying employment barriers to also highlight participants' determination, resilience, strength, work ethic, "never give up" attitude and hopefulness. These themes reflect not only the systemic challenges participants face but also the assets, qualities and helpful resources they bring to navigate the Canadian labour market.

Throughout the process, reflective journaling and memo-writing were used to document analytic decisions, observations and insights, promoting transparency and reflexivity, while mitigating researcher bias. This approach aligns with the principles of AI and relational accountability by co-constructing knowledge and generating valuable insights that are both ethically grounded and action-oriented (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003).

The findings presented in this chapter respond to the overarching inquiry into how employment barriers, including the "Canadian experience" requirement, shaped the career development and economic outcomes of skilled South African immigrants in Canada. The themes that emerged from interviews, surveys, and document analysis highlight how systemic discrimination, pre-arrival expectations, and human rights considerations intersect to influence participants’ labour market integration.

The analysis followed the five steps from Taylor-Powell and Renner’s (2003) framework, which drew from pre-set themes that arose from literature, as well as emergent

themes that surfaced in the interviews. The results are organized around the following main and sub-themes.

Table 1 presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of both interviews and survey data. These categories were developed through a thematic analysis process and reflect the key issues, patterns, and insights shared by participants, offering a structured overview of how they experienced employment barriers, career development, and adaptation strategies.

Table 1 - Themes and Sub-Themes (Interviews and Surveys)

Theme	Sub-Theme
Participant profile overview	Demographics, Gender, Age Professional background diversity Timeframe
Career misalignment and downward mobility	Survival jobs and entry-level work Misalignment between current job and qualifications Shifts in career goals after immigration Limited opportunities for upward mobility
Credential devaluation and exclusion	Credential recognition outcomes Level of confidence in employment prospects before and after arrival Perceived valuation of qualifications and skills
“Canadian experience” gatekeeper	Direct or implied request for “Canadian experience” Perception of “Canadian experience” Other employment barriers View on human rights and discrimination Obstacles that hinder labour market integration Document analysis: Human Rights and Policy Frameworks
Resilience and adaptive strategies	Personal strengths Leveraging cultural background Helpful support services Supportive communities and settlement services
Financial stability	Current financial stability Impact of employment on financial capability Contradiction between financial stability and financial capability
Conditional belonging and migration intent	Sense of belonging Return or onward migration considerations Advice to new immigrants

4.1 Participant Profile Overview

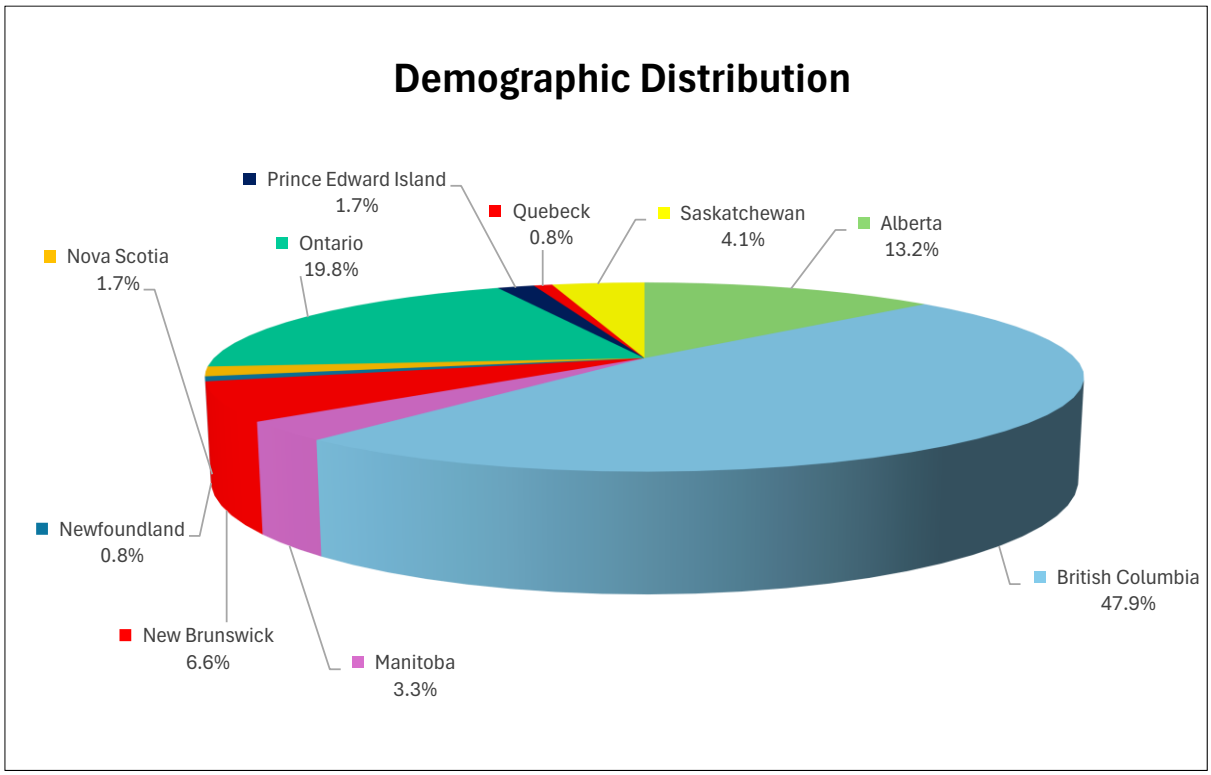
The following section will provide background information on the participants who contributed to the study. It outlines demographic details such as gender, age, provincial representation, and professional backgrounds across both the interview and survey groups. The overview gives important context to the findings presented in the subsequent sections.

4.1.1 Demographics, Gender, Age

4.1.1.1 Demographic Distribution.

The five interview participants, as well as the majority of survey participants, were residing in British Columbia. The findings may reflect the labour market dynamics in British Columbia more strongly than other provinces, which could influence employment opportunities, recognition of foreign credentials and local support services.

Chart 1 – Demographic Distribution (Surveys)



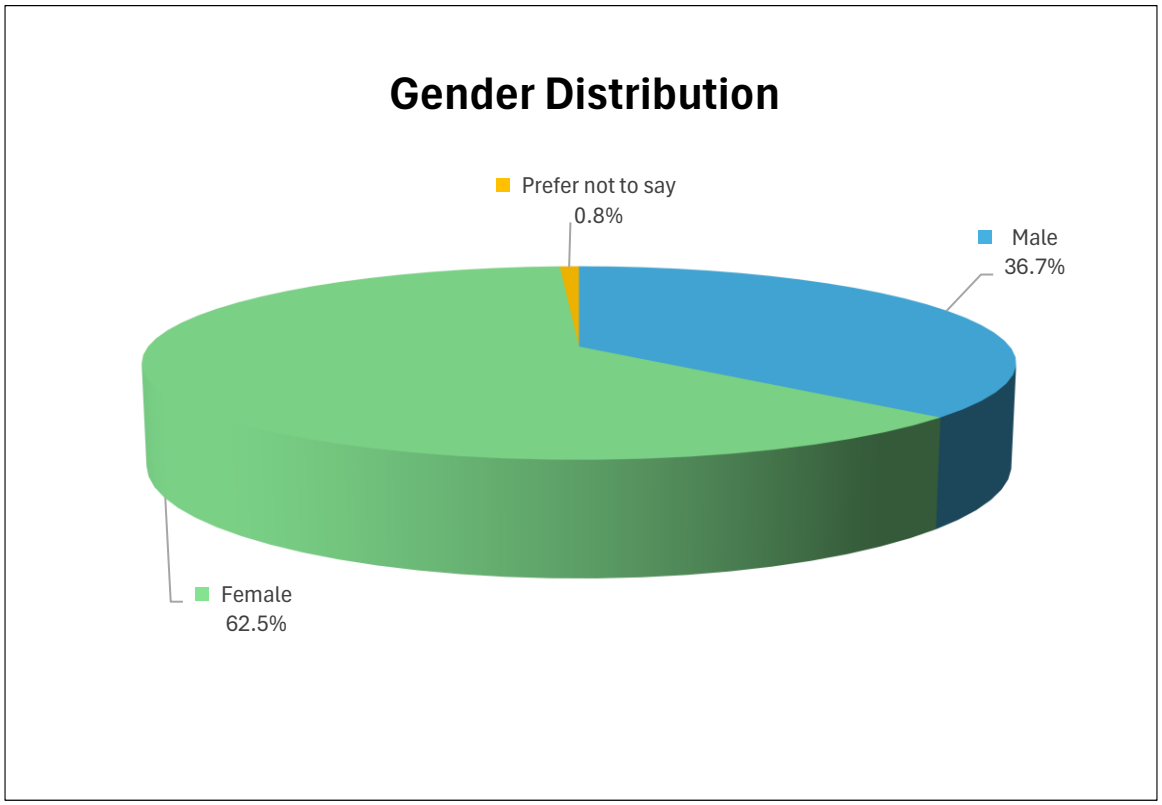
Province	Participants	Percentage
Alberta	16	13.2%
British Columbia	58	47.9%
Manitoba	4	3.3%
New Brunswick	8	6.6%
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	0.8%
Nova Scotia	2	1.7%
Ontario	24	19.8%
Prince Edward Island	2	1.7%
Quebec	1	0.8%
Saskatchewan	5	4.1%
Total	**121**	**100%**

4.1.1.2 Gender Distribution.

Gender distribution of the five interview participants was four females and one male, while the survey participants were mostly females. The majority of survey participants

were also female. The overrepresentation strongly suggests that the employment barriers and strategies that are identified are strongly shaped by women's perspectives, which may differ from those experienced by men.

Chart 2 – Gender Distribution (Surveys)



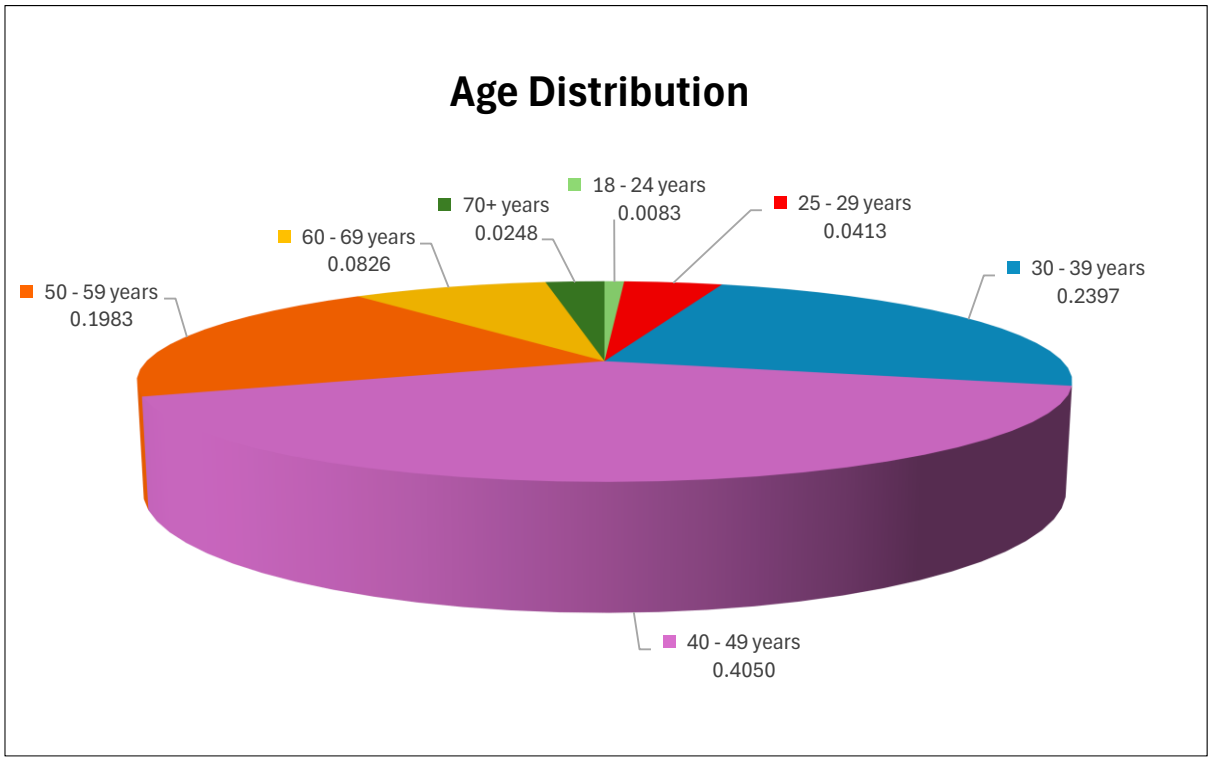
Gender	Participants	Percentage
Male	44	36.7%
Female	75	62.5%
Prefer not to say	1	0.8%
Total	**120**	**100%**

4.1.1.3 Age Distribution.

Participants 1,3, and 5 were in the age group 50-59 years, while participants 2 and 4 were in the age group 30-39 years. The majority of survey participants were in the age group 40-49 years, followed by the age group 30 – 39 years. The interview participants were

generally older than the survey participants, which is an indication that their employment experiences might have been shaped by age-related factors such as later career transitions, age discrimination and longer pre-migration employment histories.

Chart 3 – Age Distribution (Surveys)



Age Distribution	Participants	Percentage
18 – 24 years	1	0.8%
25 – 29 years	5	4.1%
30 – 39 years	29	24.0%
40 – 49 years	49	40.5%
50 – 59 years	24	19.8%
60 – 69 years	10	8.3%
70+ years	3	2.5%
Total	**121**	**100%**

4.1.2 Professional Background Diversity

4.1.2.1 Highest Level of Education.

The data confirms a wide range of educational backgrounds for both interview and survey participants. Many participants hold additional qualifications that range from post-graduate certificates, professional designations, more than one bachelor's or master's degree, to Canadian qualifications. These findings confirmed that most participants bring substantial formal qualifications and professional expertise to the labour market of Canada, highlighting the disconnect between their education and the employment barriers they face.

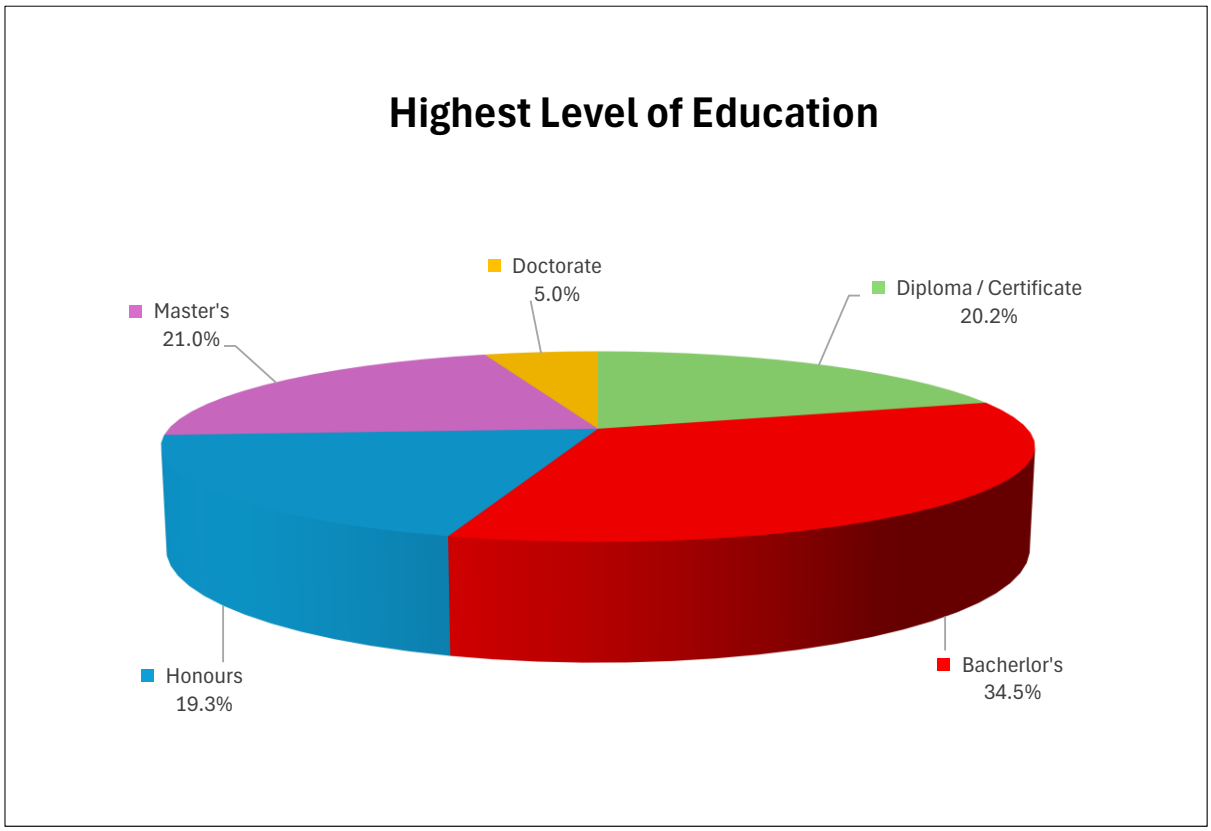
Table 2 – Highest Level of Education (Interviews)

Participant	Highest Level of Education
Participant 1	Bachelor's + Post-graduate Certificate
Participant 2	2 Certificates
Participant 3	Honours + Canadian CPA Designation
Participant 4	Doctorate
Participant 5	Trades Certificate + Canadian Red Seal Certification

Table 3 – Additional Qualifications and Certifications (Surveys)

Additional qualifications and Certifications	Participants
Canadian Masters	1
Industry Specific Certification	2
Post Graduate Certificates	4
Professional Designations	2
Two Bachelor's Degrees	3
Two Master's Degrees	2

Chart 4 – Highest Level of Education (Surveys)



Highest Level of Education	Participants	Percentage
Diploma / Certificate	24	20.2%
Bachelor's	41	34.5%
Honours	23	19.3%
Master's	25	21.0%
Doctorate	6	5.0%
Total	**119**	**100%**

4.1.2.2 Primary Profession Before Immigration.

Interview participants represented a diverse field of professions, while survey participants were mainly clustered in education, business/finance/administration, the health industry, environmental/mining/engineering and information technology. The diversity highlights that the experiences that are captured represent regulated, non-regulated and skilled trades and are not clustered in one profession.

Table 4 – Primary Profession Before Immigration (Interviews)

Participant	Primary Profession
Participant 1	Legal / Governance
Participant 2	Human Resources / Admin / Tourism
Participant 3	Accounting / Finance
Participant 4	Academia (Professor)
Participant 5	Plumber (trades) / Business Owner

Table 5 – Primary Profession Before Immigration (Surveys)

Primary Profession	Participants
Education (Teachers)	18
Finance / Business / Administration	16
Health Industry	14
Environmental / Mining / Engineering	13
Information Technology	12
Legal	9
Sales Consultants	6
Analysts	5
Trades (Plumbers / Electricians)	5
Aviation & Maritime	4
Health (Family Physicians / Specialists)	4
Media, Broadcasting, Journalism	4
Business Owners	3
Human Resources / Recruiters	3
Chef	2
Graphic Designers	2
Project Management	2
Property and Real Estate	2
Agriculture	1
Veterinarian Doctor	1
TV and Film Industry	1

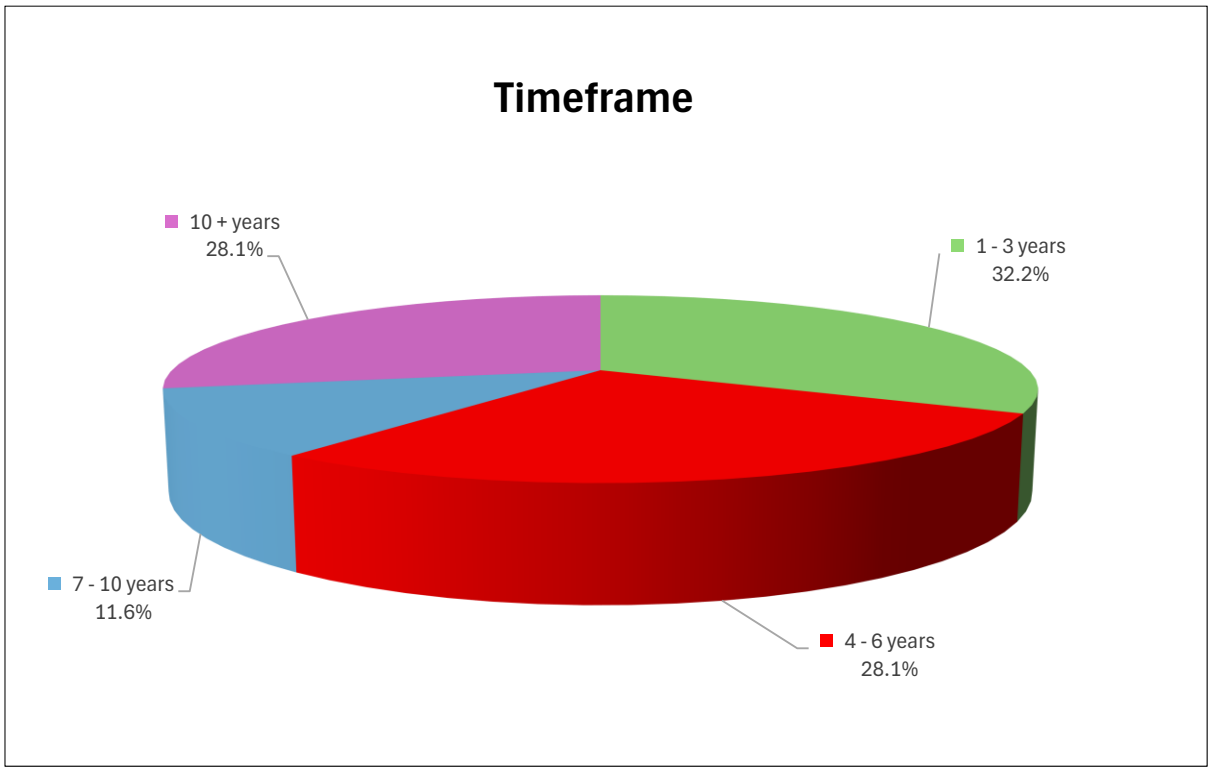
4.1.3 Timeframe

Most participants have been residing in Canada for 1 - 3 years, followed by an equal distribution of 4 – 6 years and 10+ years. These findings indicate that there is a diversity of settlement stages that can influence participants' employment experiences and labour market integration.

Table 6 – Timeframe in Canada (Interviews)

Participant	**Years in Canada**
Participant 1	4 – 6 years
Participant 2	7 – 10 years
Participant 3	10 + years
Participant 4	1 – 3 years
Participant 5	4 – 6 years

Chart 5 – Timeframe in Canada (Surveys)



Years residing in Canada	Participants	Percentage
1 – 3 years	39	32.2%
4 – 7 years	34	28.1%
7 – 10 years	14	11.6%
10+ years	34	28.1%
Total	**121**	**100%**

4.2 Career Misalignment and Downward Mobility

The following section explores the ways participants experienced a gap between their qualifications, professional aspirations, and the jobs they were able to secure in Canada. It highlights patterns of underemployment, survival jobs, and limited opportunities for upward mobility. The sub-sections examine how career misalignment impacted participants' sense of identity, professional development, and economic stability, while also revealing the systemic pressures that contributed to downward mobility.

4.2.1 Survival Jobs and Entry-level Work

4.2.1.1 Current Employment Status.

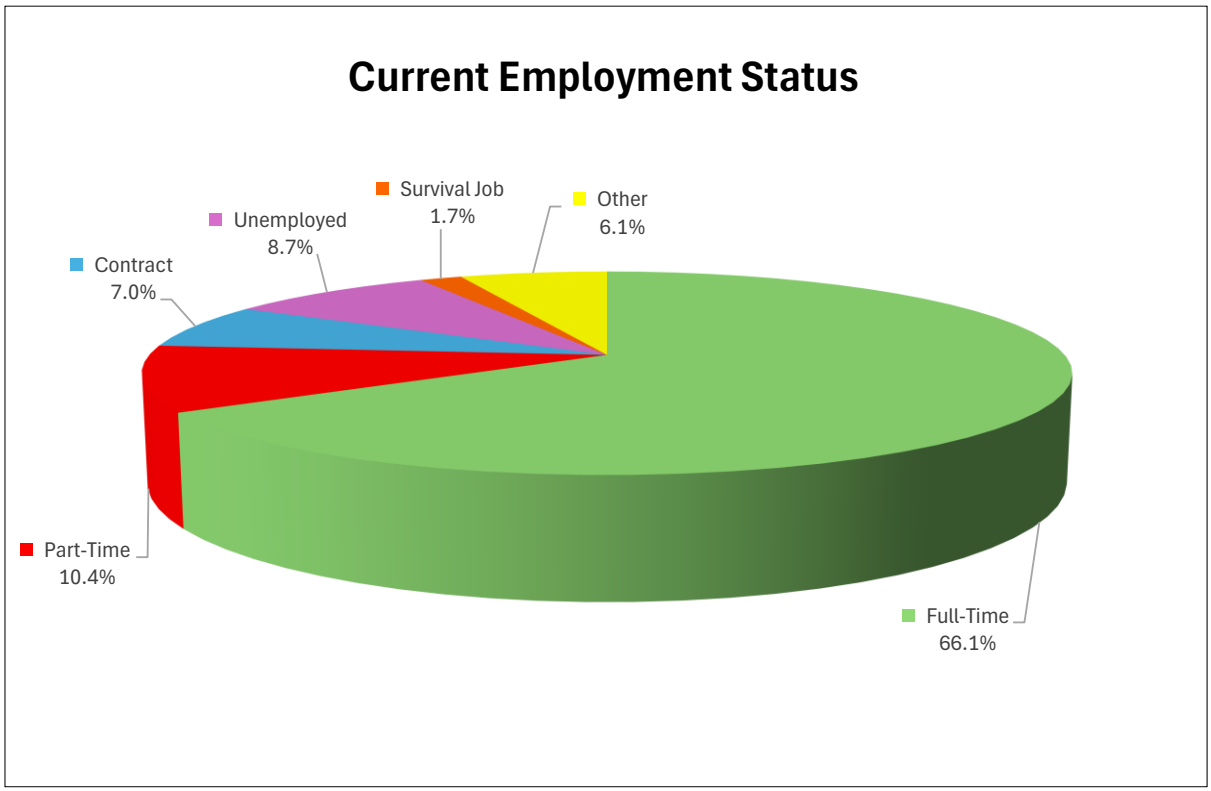
Participant 1 is currently unemployed and is studying full-time to improve her qualifications, while participants 2, 3 and 4 are employed full-time. Participant 5 is a business owner and self-employed.

Table 7 – Current Employment Status (Interviews)

Participant	**Employment Status**
Participant 1	Unemployed (currently studying full-time)
Participant 2	Full-Time
Participant 3	Full-Time
Participant 4	Full-Time
Participant 5	Self-Employed / Business Owner

The majority of survey participants are employed full-time. Other employment statuses include self-employed, volunteer work, semi-retired, disability insurance and maternity leave.

Chart 6 – Current Employment Status (Surveys)



Employment Status	Participants	Percentage
Full-time	76	66.1%
Part-time	12	10.4%
Contract	8	7.0%
Unemployed	10	8.7%
Survival Job	2	1.7%
Other	12	6.1%
Total	**115**	**100%**

4.2.1.2 Underemployment and Survival Jobs.

All five of the interview participants and half of the survey participants (50.5%) indicated that they worked in a lower-skilled job since arriving in Canada. These roles were typically entry-level positions, low-paying jobs and mostly outside their field of expertise and taken out of economic necessity. On the other hand, 49.5% of the survey participants

indicated they had not taken lower-skilled or lower-paying jobs, suggesting that a slight majority still experience a degree of occupation displacement during the integration into the labour market.

Participants often described these positions as a sharp decline from their professional standing in South Africa. For example, Participant 2, who previously managed an office in an auditing firm, recalled becoming "*a receptionist at the HR department for a big corporation*," a role she identified as a significant step down. Participant 3 similarly noted that she had to "*start over as a bookkeeper*," which she described as "a step or two lower" than her previous finance position.

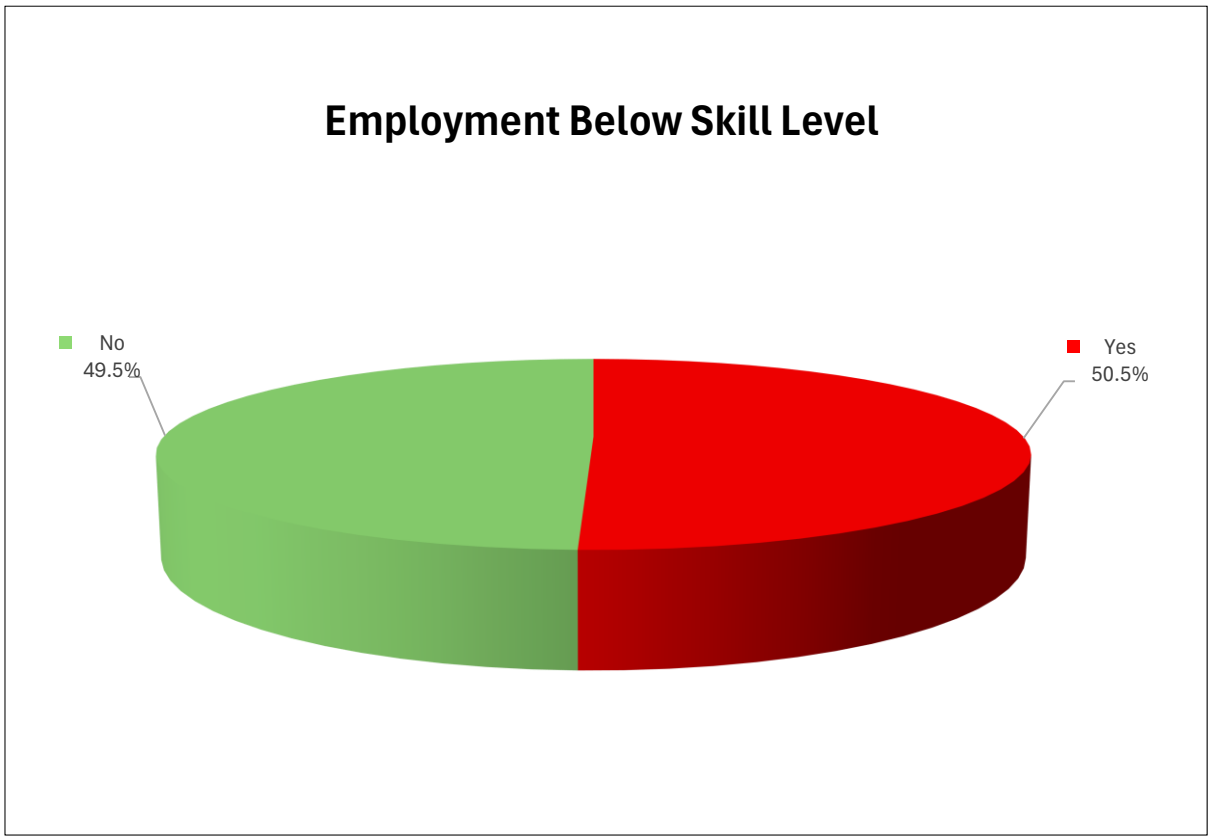
The emotional toll of this downward shift was also emphasized. Participant 1 accepted entry-level work because of permit restrictions, but admitted the experience "*killed [her] motivation*" when the nonprofit role she secured offered even fewer growth opportunities. Participant 4 described ongoing frustration two years later:

"*Demeaning is maybe the right word, but it does feel a little bit like what was the point of all of the effort I have put into my career. The late nights, the overtime, the whatever to have taken so many steps back*."

From another perspective, Participant 5, working in trades, highlighted how survival jobs reflected employer assumptions about immigrant competence:

"When I first arrived in Canada. The employer thinks that you don't know anything and have no experience. After a while, they actually see and realize that you are not stupid, and then, they will start thinking about giving you a small increase, just to keep you happy."

Chart 7 – Employment Below Skill Level (Surveys)



Employment Below Skill Level	Participants	Percentage
Yes	53	50.5%
No	52	49.5%
Total	**105**	**100%**

Collectively, these accounts show that while survival jobs provide short-term financial stability, they also represent professional setbacks and create feelings of devaluation. The combination of systemic barriers, limited recognition of international experience, and employer biases forced many participants into positions far below their qualifications, leaving them to rebuild careers from the ground up.

4.2.2 Misalignment Between Current Job and Qualifications

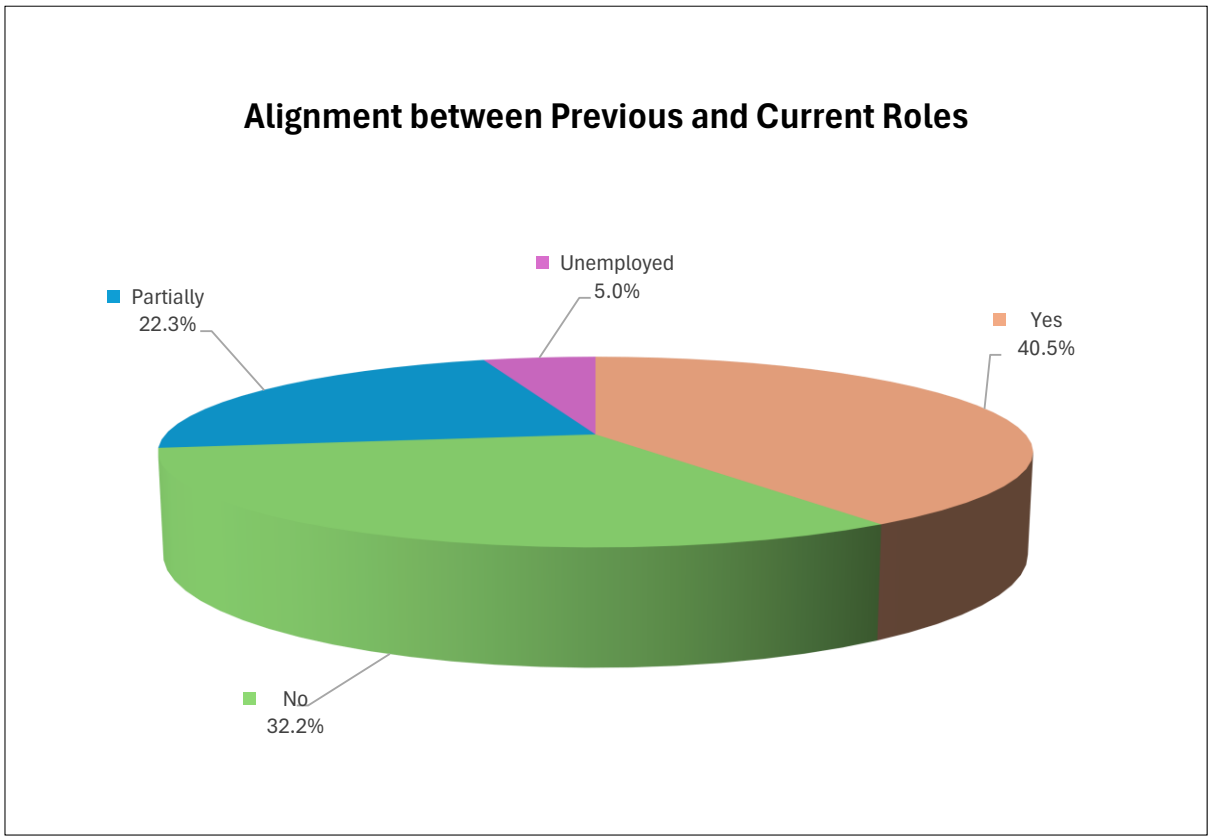
4.2.2.1 Alignment Between Previous and Current Roles.

Nearly 40% of participants indicated that their current job is related to their previous profession in South Africa. In contrast, just over 32% of the participants indicated that their current job is not related to their last profession at all. 22% of participants indicated that their current job is partially related to their previous profession in South Africa.

Table 8 – Alignment Between Previous and Current Roles (Interviews)

Participant	**Alignment Between Previous and Current Roles**
Participant 1	No (currently studying full-time)
Participant 2	Yes
Participant 3	Yes
Participant 4	No
Participant 5	Yes

Chart 8 – Alignment Between Previous and Current Roles (Surveys)



Alignment Between Previous and Current Roles	Participants	Percentage
Yes	49	40.5%
No	39	32.2%
Partially	27	22.3%
Unemployed	6	5.0%
Total	**121**	**100%**

4.2.2.2 Work-Qualification-Skill Alignment.

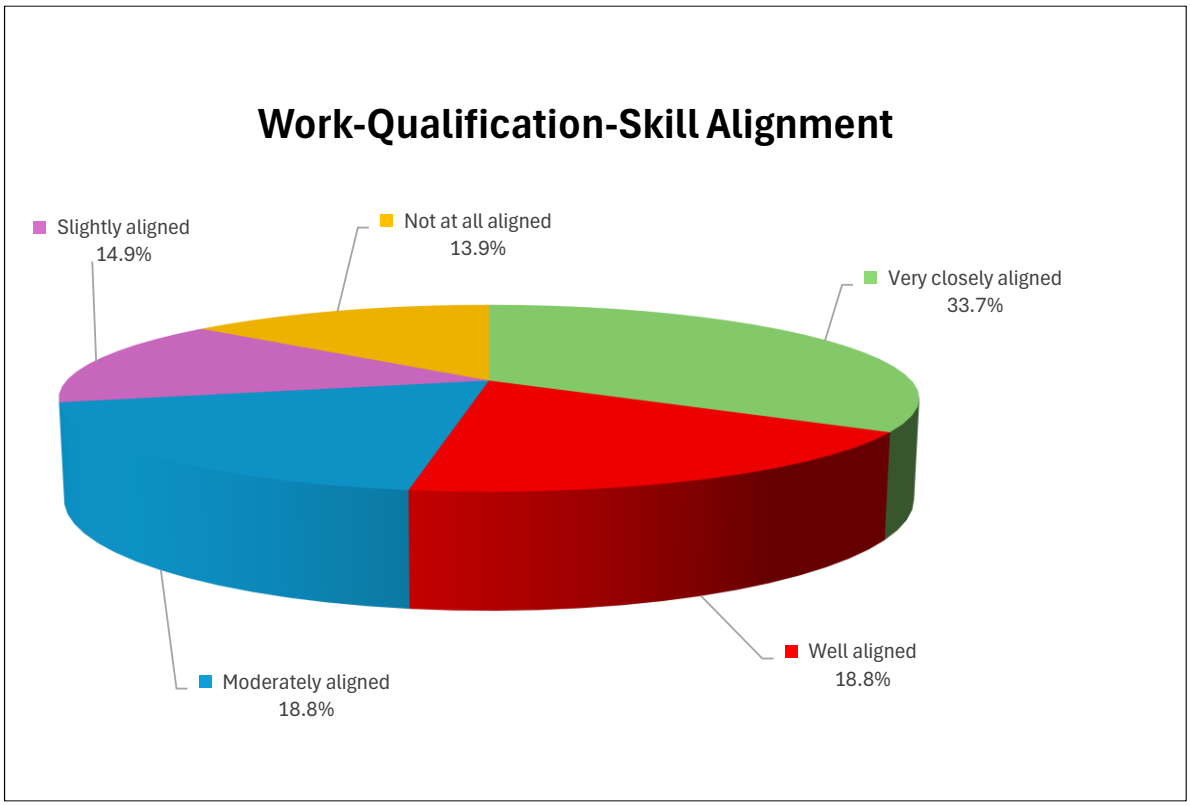
Participants 2, 3 and 5 are currently in jobs that are very closely aligned with their qualifications and skills, while participants 1 and 4 are not aligned at all. Participants 3 and 5 demonstrated how obtaining formal Canadian credentials can significantly improve job alignment, qualifications and skills.

Table 9 – Work-Qualification-Skill Alignment (Interviews)

Participant	**Grade of Alignment**
Participant 1	Not aligned at all (currently unemployed)
Participant 2	Very closely aligned
Participant 3	Very closely aligned
Participant 4	Not aligned at all
Participant 5	Very closely aligned

Survey results indicate that employment alignment with qualifications and skills is uneven. While33.7% indicated that their current job is very closely aligned with their qualifications and skills, and 18.8% felt that it was well aligned, nearly half of the participants (47.8%) experienced some degree of misalignment. These findings indicate that a significant number of participants face some or other type of barrier that prevents them from fully utilizing their qualifications and skills in the Canadian labour market.

Chart 9 – Work-Qualification-Skill Alignment (Surveys)



Grade of Alignment	Participants	Percentage
Very closely aligned	34	33.7%
Well aligned	19	18.8%
Moderately aligned	19	18.8%
Slightly aligned	15	14.9%
Not aligned at all	14	19.9%
Total	**105**	**100%**

4.2.3 Shifts in Career Goals After Immigration

All five interview participants reflected on how immigration to Canada influenced their career goals, but their experiences were a mix of uncertainty, adaptation, resilience and long-term planning. For some, the move forced them to reconsider their aspirations altogether. Participant 1, admitted:

"I have to re-engineer what I want to do. Do I now pivot and find another country willing to give me a chance?"

Others maintained more continuity. Participant 2 described deliberately staying within the corporate sector, rebuilding her career step by step in a similar field over nine years. In contrast, Participant 3 expressed disappointment that her career goals had not evolved, reflecting a sense of stagnation. Participant 4 explained that her direction had "become much more murky," while Participant 5 emphasized financial security over professional ambition. Having immigrated late in life, he explained that starting and growing his own business was part of a long-term plan for stability:

"The ultimate goal is to retire one day … this includes expanding the business and building towards a pension."

The survey data reinforced these mixed patterns. The most common career goal was promotion within one's current role, revealing a widespread desire for recognition and upward mobility. Many participants also highlighted the importance of securing permanent employment, pursuing requalification for better opportunities, or achieving increased income, goals tied to stability and long-term professional integration. A smaller group indicated that their focus was simply maintaining their current role, prioritizing stability over career advancement. Still, others mentioned aspirations for career changes or even leaving Canada altogether. As one survey participant bluntly stated: *"No goals, just keep surviving,"* while another was clear about wanting *"just to be a doctor seeing patients"*.

Table 10 – Career Goals for the Next 3 – 5 Years (Surveys)

Career Goals for the Next 3 - 5 Years	Participants
Promotion in their current role	31
Permanent Employment	13
Requalification for better employment opportunities	12
Increased Income	12
Retirement	12
Self-employed / Business-owner	11
Maintaining current job and role	9
Career change	6
No intention of staying in Canada	5
No goals – just keep surviving	3
Work in the field for which they are qualified	2
To own a property/house	1

Overall, both interviews and surveys show how migration reshapes career aspirations in different ways. For some, it disrupts and complicates long-term ambitions; for others, it reaffirms the need for security, recognition, and stability in the Canadian labour market.

4.2.4 Limited Opportunities for Upward Mobility

None of the five interview participants reported working in their ideal or dream job, highlighting a disconnect between aspirations and current employment realities. The open-ended nature of the interviews invited imaginative reflections that revealed how far participants' goals diverged from their lived experiences. Participant 1 envisioned herself *"in a compliance role, in a governance role, senior management or director level".* At the same time, others expressed more unconventional dreams, such as working with wildlife (Participant 3) or testing cars like a television host (Participant 5). These responses

underscored not only the professional aspirations of participants but also the contrast between their qualifications and the opportunities currently available to them in Canada.

At the same time, many survey participants described a more practical focus on securing better positions within their existing fields. A significant number of participants stated that their dream job would be their *current job*, but at a higher level or with a better salary. Others indicated aspirations in education, healthcare, finance, business administration, or senior leadership roles (CEO, CFO, COO, CTO). Unlike the more imaginative interview responses, these survey goals reflected a pragmatic orientation, shaped by financial pressures, family responsibilities, and a realistic assessment of what could be attained in the Canadian labour market.

Table 11 – Ideal or Dream Jobs (Surveys)

Ideal or Dream Job	Participants
Current Job (just a higher level, better salary)	38
Education	9
Health Sector	8
Business Owner / Self-employed	8
Senior Management (CEO / COO / CFO / CTO)	7
Finance / Business / Administration	6
Information Technology	4
Legal	3
Consulting	3
Agriculture	2
Family Physician	2
Architecture	1
Customer Service	1
Design	1
Government Sector	1
Maritime	1
Marketing	1
Production Toolmaking	1
Academia (Professor)	1
Trades (Plumber / Electrician)	1

Collectively, the findings reveal a dual pattern. Many immigrants continue to hold ambitions or imaginative visions for their careers, yet systemic barriers and economic pressures often compel them to recalibrate toward more practical and attainable goals. This tension between aspirations and reality underscores the limited upward mobility experienced by many skilled immigrants in Canada.

These findings highlight that many participants experienced downward shifts in employment status, with career paths often interrupted or redirected, setting the stage for broader challenges of credential recognition and validation.

4.3 Credential devaluation and exclusion

The following section explores how participants experienced the evaluation of their foreign qualifications and the consequences of credential recognition practices in Canada. It outlines the processes of credential assessment, the financial and emotional costs involved, and how exclusionary practices shape participants' access to professional opportunities. Sub-sections examine barriers within regulatory bodies, employers' perceptions of international education, and the broader systemic impact of credential devaluation on career development and integration.

4.3.1 Credential recognition outcomes

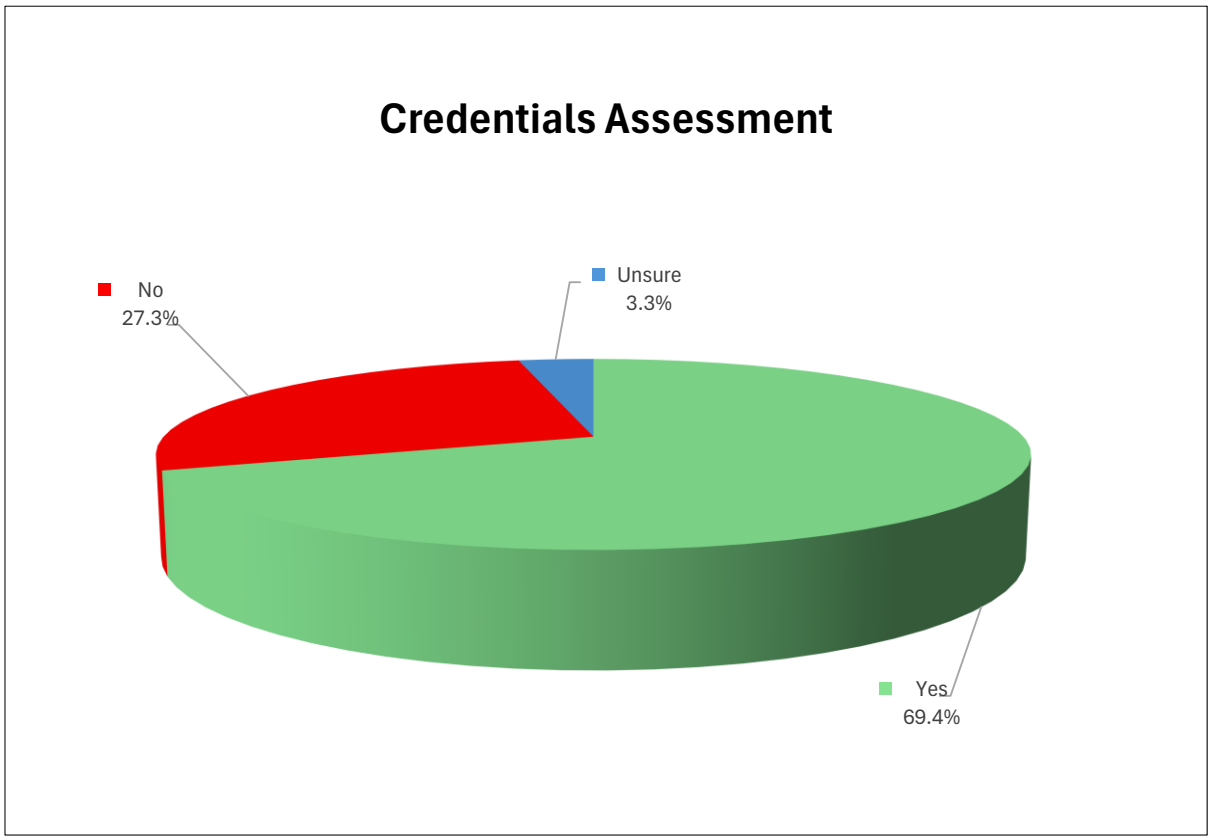
4.3.1.1 Credential Assessment

Nearly 70% of all participants had their credentials evaluated either for immigration or employment and licensing requirements. The survey results revealed that 69.4% of participants had their credentials assessed, while 3.3% are planning on doing it soon. 27.3% of participants indicated that their credentials were not evaluated.

Table 12 – Credential Assessment (Interviews)

Participant	Credentials Assessed
Participant 1	Yes
Participant 2	Yes
Participant 3	Yes
Participant 4	Yes
Participant 5	Yes

Chart 10 – Credentials Assessment (Surveys)



Credentials Assessment	Participants	Percentage
Yes	84	69.4%
No	33	27.3%
Planning to	4	3.3%
Total	**121**	**100%**

4.3.1.2 Credential Assessment Outcomes.

A recurring frustration expressed by participants was the lack of recognition for international credentials and foreign work experiences. Despite holding advanced degrees and postgraduate qualifications, with many years of relevant experience, they were frequently told to requalify in Canada or accept entry-level roles. All five interview participants had gone through some form of credential assessment, but their outcomes varied widely.

For some, the process offered only partial recognition. Participant 1, who trained as a lawyer, found that her qualifications were acknowledged only in part, leaving her with additional licensing requirements. She reflected:

"*… I thought I'd come to Canada and continue with that. I'm going to have to demonstrate my skills. I'm going to have to prove myself."*

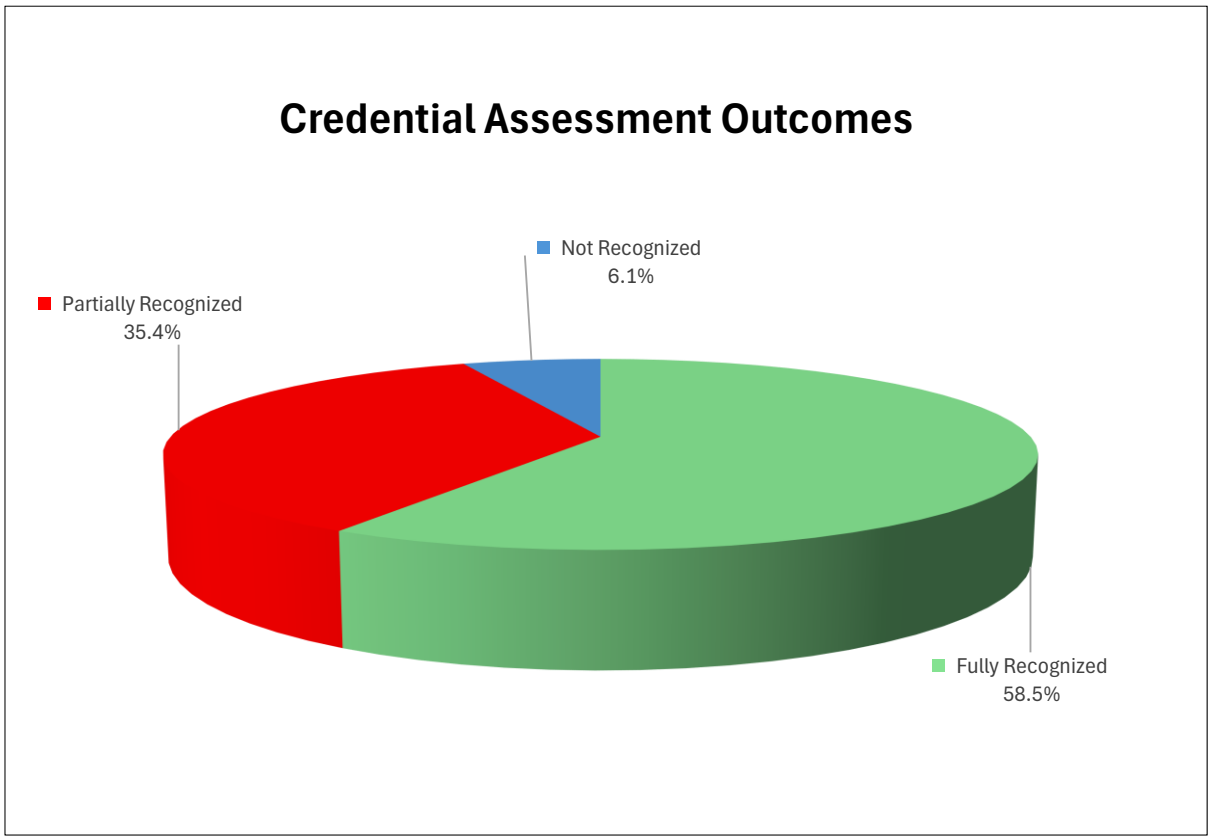
Similarly, Participant 3 explained that while portions of her South African accounting qualifications were accepted, she still had to complete *"a few extra courses"* in taxation and other Canadian-specific programs in order to qualify as a CPA.

Other has more positive outcomes. Participant 2 noted that her South African diplomas were formally recognized as equivalent to Canadian ones, though she still felt undervalued for her professional skills and experiences. Participant 4 also reported full recognition through the World Education Services (WES) assessment, which acknowledged her PhD without requiring further requalification.

In contrast, Participant 5, a tradesperson, faced outright non-recognition. His South African Red Seal certification was dismissed due to insufficient Canadian work hours, forcing him to spend a year accumulating experience before he could challenge the Red Seal exam.

The survey results confirmed that such experiences were not isolated. Although many participants reported their credentials were formally recognized, 84% still had to pursue additional requalification or licensing before being accepted into the Canadian labour market.

Chart 11 – Credential Assessment Outcomes (Surveys)



Credential Assessment Outcomes	Participants	Percentage
Fully Recognized	48	58.5%
Partially Recognized	29	35.4%
Not Recognized	5	6.1%
Total	**82**	**100%**

Collectively, these findings show that while credential assessment processes sometimes acknowledge foreign qualifications on paper, the practical requirements for additional training, exams, or licensing undermine that recognition. This disconnect contributes to the devaluation of international expertise and forces skilled immigrants to invest significant time and resources to re-establish the career they had already built prior to migration.

4.3.2 Level of Confidence in Employment Prospects Before and After Arrival

Most participants described themselves as either confident or very confident about their employment prospects in Canada, although the resources of that confidence varied. Participants 1, 2, and 3 approached migration with optimism and a pragmatic understanding that the transition might be difficult and would likely involve starting from the bottom. Participant 1 reflected this optimism directly, stating:

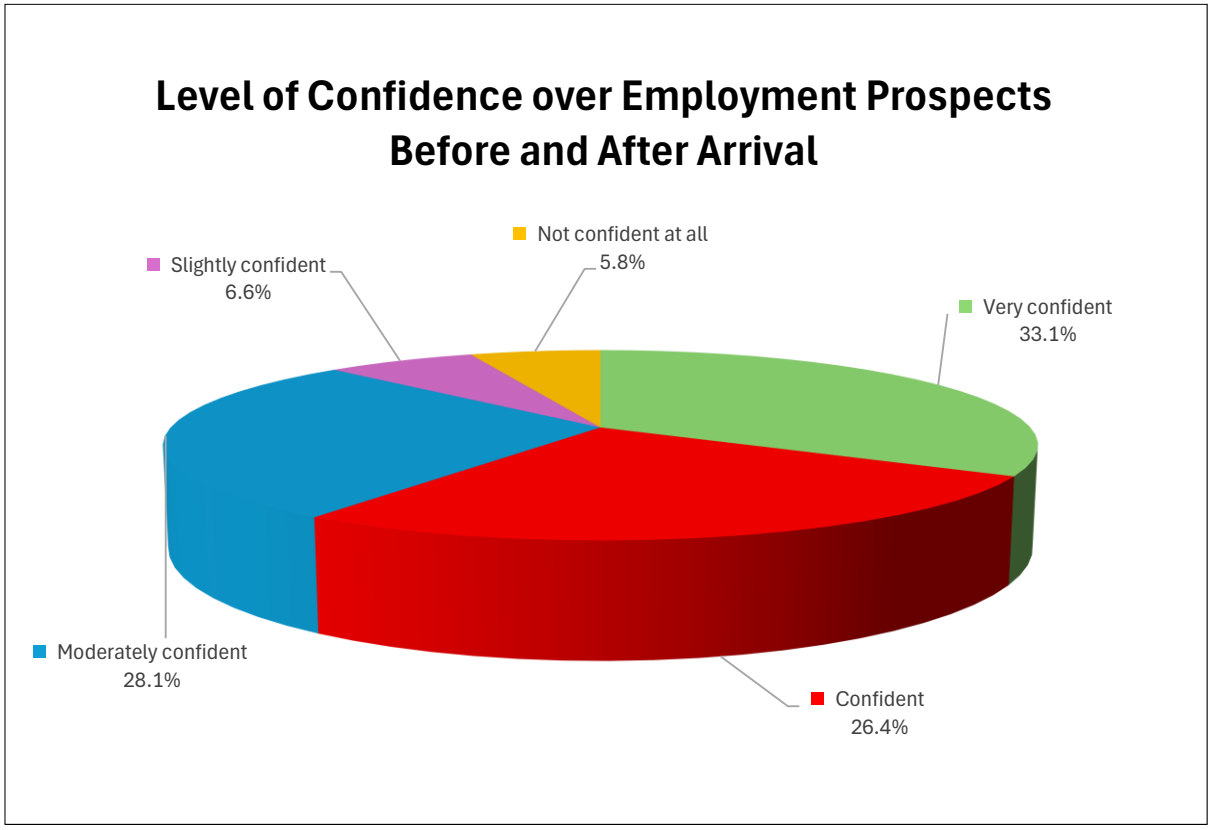
"I had the knowledge, the know-how, and everything. There's a ton of work here."

Participant 2 echoed this sentiment but paired it with realism, explaining that she and her family *"braced ourselves"* for challenges, expecting to start over but aiming to *"eventually climb the ladder again"* toward stability and growth.

Participant 3 also expressed confidence, though she briefly considered changing career paths before deciding to remain in her professional comfort zone. In contrast, Participants 4 and 5 began with very specific expectations tied to their fields. Participant 4 envisioned lecturing in tourism at Royal Roads University, which she saw as the only realistic academic option in her area. Participant 5 anticipated secure employment as a plumber and hoped for a future free from discrimination, where his skills would be fully recognized.

Survey data reinforced these perspectives. Nearly 60% of respondents reported feeling confident or very confident about their employment prospects, with only a small percentage (5.7%) stating they were not confident at all. These findings suggest that many immigrants arrive with a sense of optimism in their qualifications and potential for integration, even while anticipating challenges. A small minority, however, face uncertainty of barriers that diminish their confidence and limit their ability to see clear pathways into the labour market.

Chart 12 – Level of Confidence Over Employment Prospects Before and After Arrival (Surveys)



Grade of Alignment	Participants	Percentage
Very confident	40	33.1%
Confident	32	26.4%
Moderately confident	34	28.1%
Slightly confident	8	6.6%
Not confident at all	7	5.8%
Total	**121**	**100%**

Collectively, the interview and survey results revealed that confidence before and after arrival was often tempered by realism. While most immigrants believe in their skills and arrive ready to persevere, their expectations are quickly shaped by systemic barriers and the realities of integration, which can either reinforce resilience or erode optimism over time.

4.3.3 Perceived Validation of Qualifications and Skills

When asked whether their qualification and skills were validated in Canada, most participants described feelings of shock, disillusionment, and frustration. Despite holding professional degrees and years of experience, they felt undervalued, excluded, and unrecognized in the labour market. Many spoke of the stark gap between the reception they had anticipated and the reality they encountered.

Participant 1 captured this sense of disbelief, explaining:

"It was shocking! And it's my work experiences. So I was 100% convinced that because my speciality was governance, risk, and compliance, it was easily transferable because I had done the research. The jobs are advertised; they're not advertised for you. They're advertised for Canadians, and if you get a legg in the door you are very lucky."

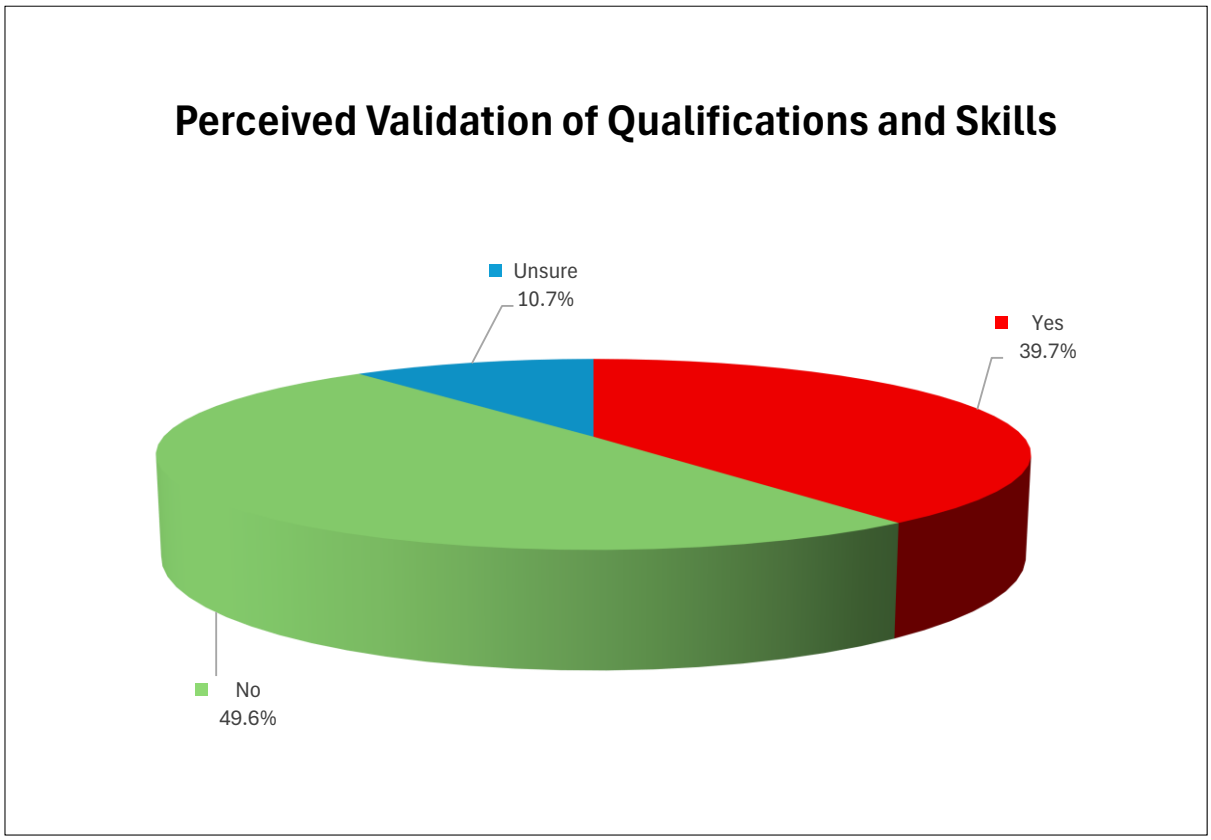
Participant 2 also admitted that she underestimated the challenge, recalling that she and her family expected it *"would be a bit easier than what it really was"*. Participant 4 similarly described the transition as *"a stark realization,"* while Participant 5 said he was *"very disappointed,"* finding the process frustrating and far more difficult than anticipated.

Not all participants reported such a mismatch. Participant 3 indicated that her experience aligned mainly with her expectations, although she still acknowledged the challenges of entry.

The survey data reinforced the sense of underrecognition. Only 39.7% of participants felt that their qualifications and skills were validated in Canada, while just over 10% were unsure. The majority indicated that their professional backgrounds were not valued, reflecting what many described as a pervasive sense of professional under-evaluation. One survey participant summarized the sentiment bluntly:

"Never let your guard down … You are just another immigrant."

Chart 13 – Perceived Validation of Qualifications and Skills (Surveys)



Perceived Validation of Qualifications and Skills	Participants	Percentage
Yes	48	39.7%
No	60	49.6%
Unsure	13	10.7%
Total	**121**	**100%**

Collectively, the interview and survey findings suggest that while a few individuals felt their expectations were met, most encountered disappointment when their skills and qualifications were overlooked. This lack of validation contributes not only to professional stagnation but also to deeper feelings of exclusion, raising questions about how immigrant talent is received and integrated into the Canadian labour market.

The struggles with credential recognition underscore the systemic barriers that limit labour market integration, directly shaping how participants encounter the “Canadian experience” requirement in hiring processes.

4.4 Canadian Experience Gatekeeping

The following section examines how participants encountered gatekeeping practices that shaped their access to employment and professional recognition in Canada. It highlights the role of employers, regulatory bodies, and institutional systems in setting entry barriers that limit opportunities for skilled immigrants. The sub-sections explore how requirements such as “Canadian experience”, licensing restrictions, and informal biases operated as forms of gatekeeping that reinforced exclusion and constrained career advancements.

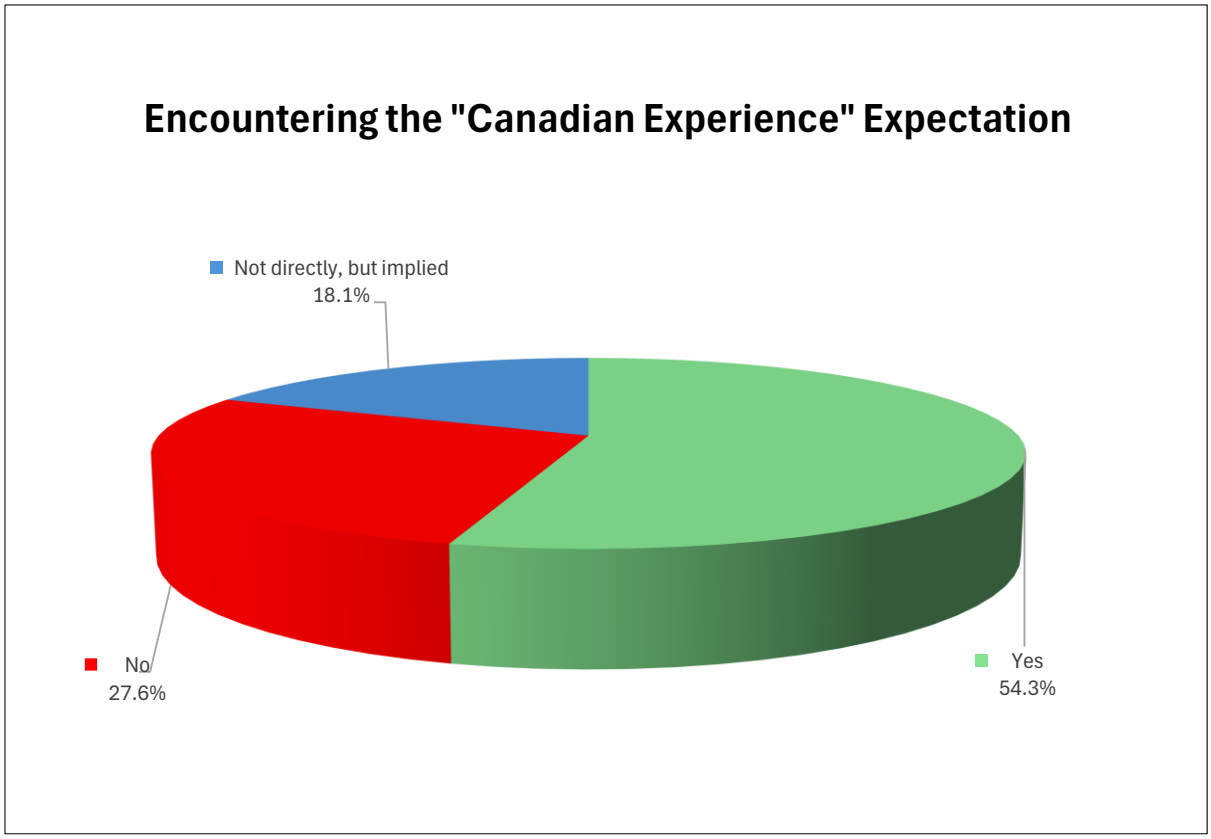
4.4.1 Direct or Implied Request for Canadian Experience

The “Canadian experience” requirement emerged as a dominant theme across both interviews and surveys. Four of the five participants described encountering it either explicitly or implicitly, often as a subtle barrier rather than a direct statement.

Some participants explained that the requirement was never voiced outright but still shaped hiring decisions. Participant 2 recalled leaving interviews confident in her performance, only to hear later that the rejection was *“not due to experience,”* which she felt clearly implied otherwise. Participant 3 also explained that although no one ever said it to her directly, she gradually *“picked it up as [she] went along”* and came to feel it as a personal shortcoming. Participant 4 expressed a similar sentiment, admitting that while she was never told she lacked experience, she *“for sure felt it”*. In contrast, Participant 5 was told explicitly, *“from day one, even while still in South Africa,”* that his lack of “Canadian experience” would be a problem.

Survey results confirmed the pervasiveness of this issue. More than half of participants (54.3%) reported being directly told that they lacked “Canadian experience”, while a further 18.1% indicated that the requirement was implied. Only 27.6% stated they had never encountered it. These findings show that roughly 70% face this barrier in some form, making it one of the most common challenges to labour market integration.

Chart 14 – Encountering the “Canadian Experience” Expectation (Surveys)



Encountering the “Canadian Experience” Expectation	Participants	Percentage
Yes	57	54.3%
No	29	27.6%
Not directly, but implied	19	18.1%
Total	**82**	**100%**

Collectively, the interview and survey responses suggest that the “Canadian experience” requirement often operates as an unspoken gatekeeping mechanism. Even

when not stated outright, it is widely perceived and felt, leaving immigrants with the impression that their international expertise is undervalued and that full inclusion into the labour market remains conditional on local validation.

4.4.2 Perception of "Canadian Experience"

When participants were asked to define what "Canadian experience" meant to them, the responses revealed that the term is vague and inconsistently applied. It does not appear to function as a neutral or purely technical criterion but instead operates as a structural barrier that allows employers to restrict access to meaningful employment.

Interview participants expressed both confusion and skepticism about its meaning. Participant 1 admitted that even after years in Canada, she remained unclear, noting.

"If you have to straight out, ask someone what Canadian experience is that you're expecting from me. There aren't. They are not able to answer you. So we're always going to be in a position of confusion of what that is. It's always going to be left open for interpretation…the jobs are advertised for Canadians, not for us".

Participant 2 offered a more functional interpretation, describing it as having worked for a Canadian employer and contributed to the economy. However, she distinguished between "Canadian experience" in general and "Canadian relevant experience," questioning the value of survival jobs when applying for professional roles. Participant 4 emphasized the cultural learning embedded in the term, pointing to the need to adapt to workplace norms and communication styles. In contrast, Participant 5 dismissed it entirely, viewing it as *"red tape"* and *"an excuse for employers to discriminate against immigrants".*

Survey participants echoed these perspectives. Some defined "Canadian experience" in narrow terms, such as simply *"working for a Canadian employer"*. Others described it as a matter of *"culture fit"* or *"a nonsensical concept"* that assumes tasks are performed

differently in Canada. Several noted that recruiters themselves could not clearly define the term, reinforcing its vagueness. One respondent concluded bluntly that *"it depends"* and is *"often used as an excuse"*.

The most cited definitions from the survey included the following:

Table 13 – Perceptions of "Canadian Experience" (Surveys)

Perceptions of "Canadian Experience"	Participants	Percentage
Working/Volunteering for a Canadian Company	56	52.8%
The way of doing things in Canada	17	16.0%
Soft skills and cultural nuances	14	13.2%
Gatekeeping and Discrimination	11	10.4%
Canadian Education and Training	8	7.6%
Total	**106**	**100%**

Collectively, the interview and survey responses show that "Canadian experience" is widely perceived not as a concrete requirement but as a shifting, subjective, and often exclusionary concept. Its ambiguity enables it to function as a gatekeeping mechanism, one that places newcomers in a position of perpetual uncertainty and reinforces the devaluation of their international expertise.

4.4.3 Other Employment Barriers

4.4.3.1 Matrix of Possible Employment Barriers (Interviews).

Interview participants were asked to provide employment barriers that they faced while navigating the Canadian labour market. These barriers include a lack of "Canadian experience", credential recognition issues, language and accent bias, discrimination, lack of networks and underemployment.

Table 14 – Summary of Other Employment Barriers (Interviews)

Participant	Lack of "Canadian Experience"	Credential Recognition Issues	Language and Accent Bias	Discrimi-nation	Lack of Networks	Underem-ployment
Participant 1	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 2	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 4	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The interviews revealed that participants often experienced multiple employment barriers simultaneously rather than in isolation. As summarized in Table 14, nearly all participants reported challenges with underemployment, lack of networks, and discrimination. Issues with "Canadian experience", credential recognition, and language or accent bias were also reported by most, though the severity varied.

Participants described these barriers as deeply interconnected. Participant 1 reflected on discrimination, observing,

"It's a huge, unconscious bias... they need to put you in a box. They need to say, Okay, you're from South Africa. Let's put a ribbon on here. That's where you come from. I don't know about your education. Maybe it's not as good as Canada. Oh, you're Brown!"

Participant 2 highlighted the difficulty of building social capital in a new country, explaining that without networks, *"one of the barriers of getting an interview, or just getting even recognized"* becomes almost impossible. For Participant 3, the combination of lacking "Canadian experience" and struggling with credential recognition created a compounding effect. Participant 4 described the demoralizing impact of underemployment, questioning whether the years of effort invested in her career had been worthwhile when she was forced to take *"so many steps back".* Finally, Participant 5 pointed to language and accent

bias, noting that *“as an immigrant, you are always at fault”* when Canadians struggle to understand you.

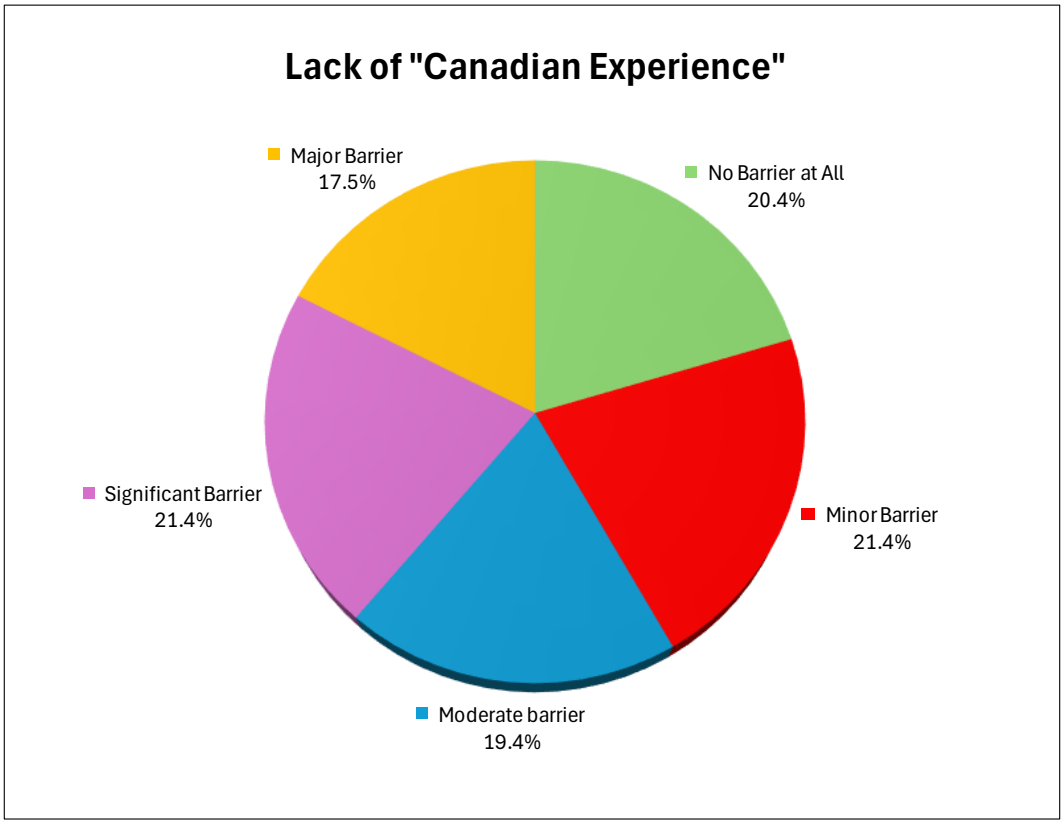
Survey results reinforced these findings, showing that the majority of participants experienced at least one barrier, and many reported facing several at once. The most frequently cited challenges were lack of “Canadian experience”, underemployment, and difficulties with credential recognition. Language and accent bias, discrimination, and lack of networks were also rated as significant, though to varying degrees.

Collectively, the interview and survey data illustrate that employment barriers are rarely singular obstacles. Instead, they interact and overlap in ways that compound disadvantage, leaving skilled immigrants to navigate a labour market where professional underecognition, systemic bias, and social exclusion reinforce one another.

4.4.3.2 Matrix of Possible Employment Barriers (Surveys).

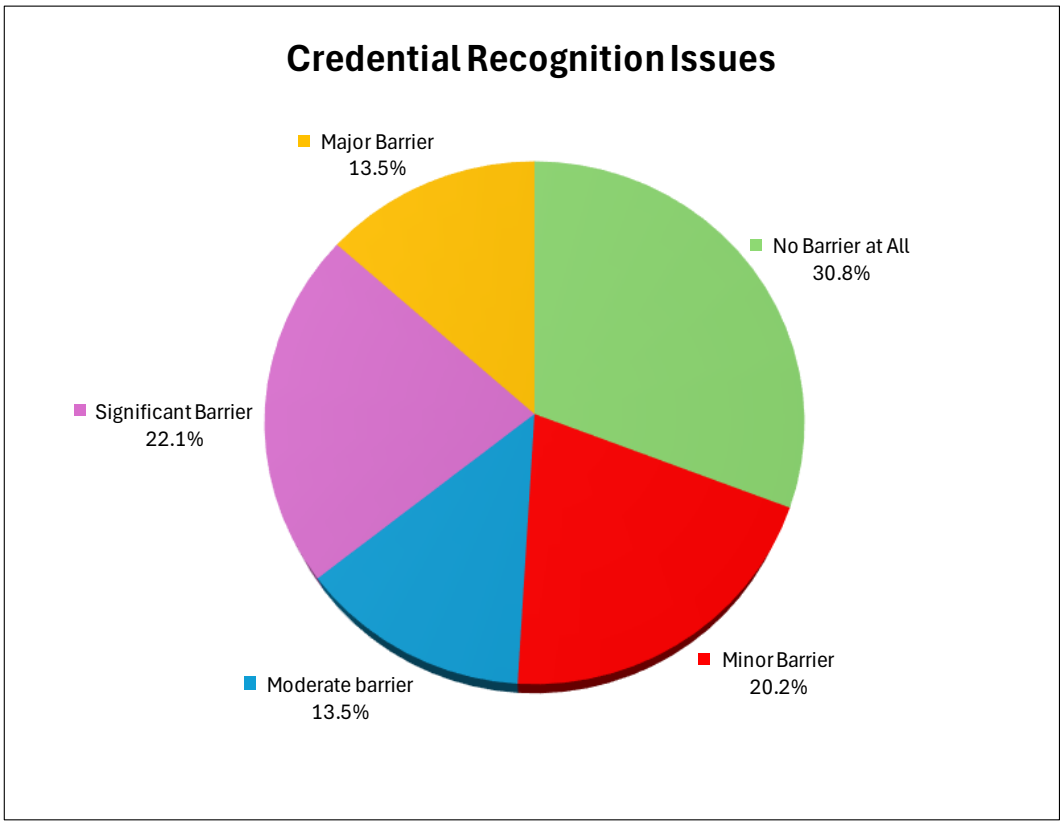
Survey participants were asked to grade the following employment barriers: a lack of “Canadian experience”, credential recognition issues, language and accent bias, discrimination, lack of networks and underemployment.

Chart 15 – Lack of "Canadian Experience" (Surveys)



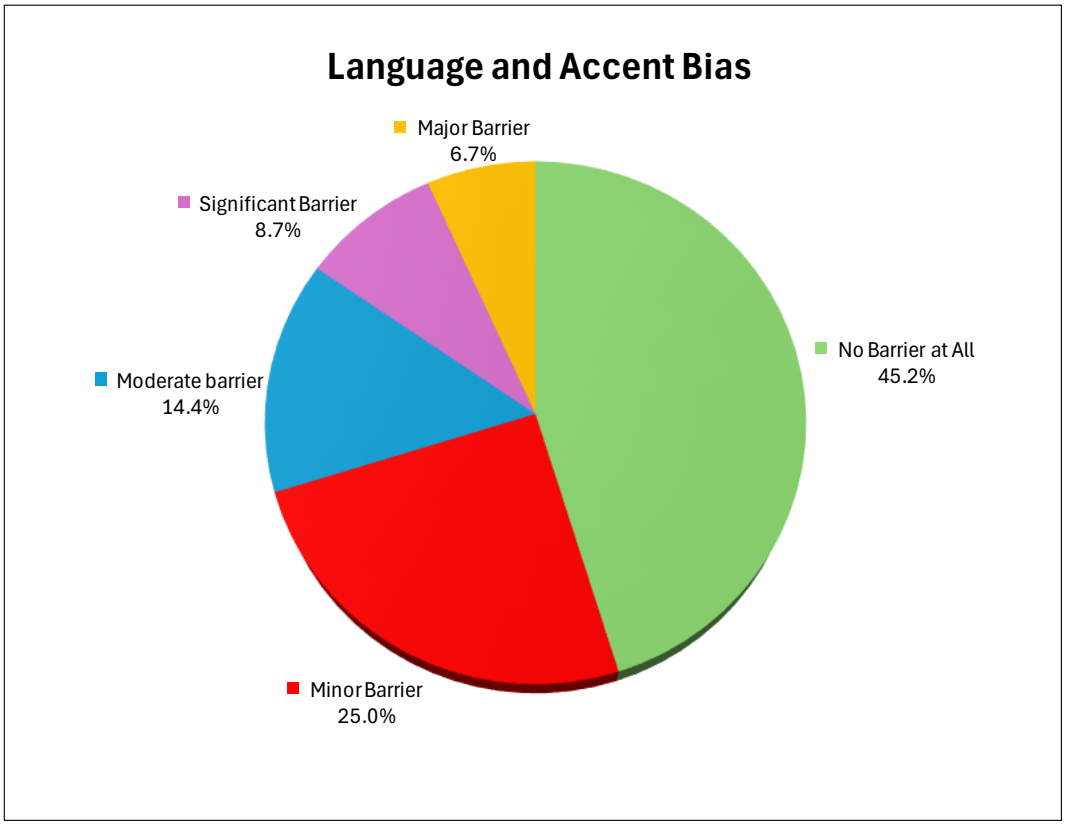
Lack of "Canadian Experience"	Participants	Percentage
No Barrier at All	21	20.4%
Minor Barrier	22	21.4%
Moderate Barrier	20	19.4%
Significant Barrier	22	21.4%
Major Barrier	18	17.5%
Total	**103**	**100%**

Chart 16 – Credential Recognition Issues (Surveys)



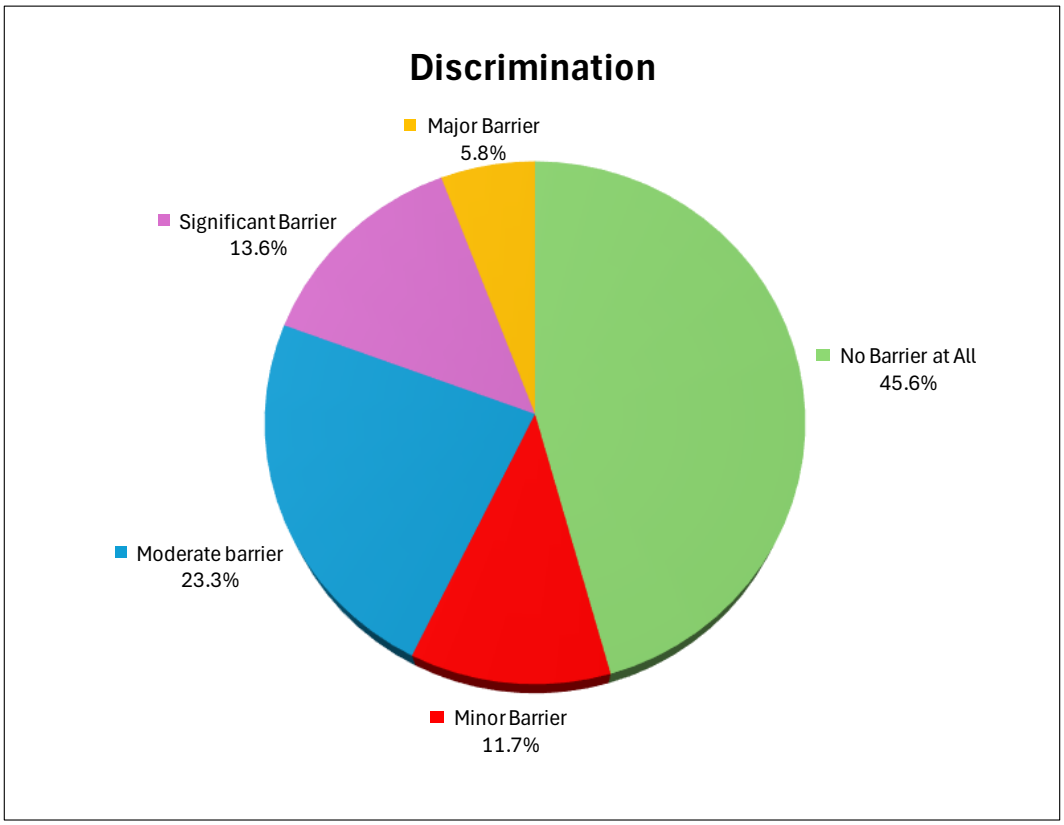
Credential Recognition Issues	Participants	Percentage
No Barrier at All	32	30.8%
Minor Barrier	21	20.2%
Moderate Barrier	14	13.5%
Significant Barrier	23	22.1%
Major Barrier	14	13.5%
Total	**104**	**100%**

Chart 17 – Language and Accent Bias (Surveys)



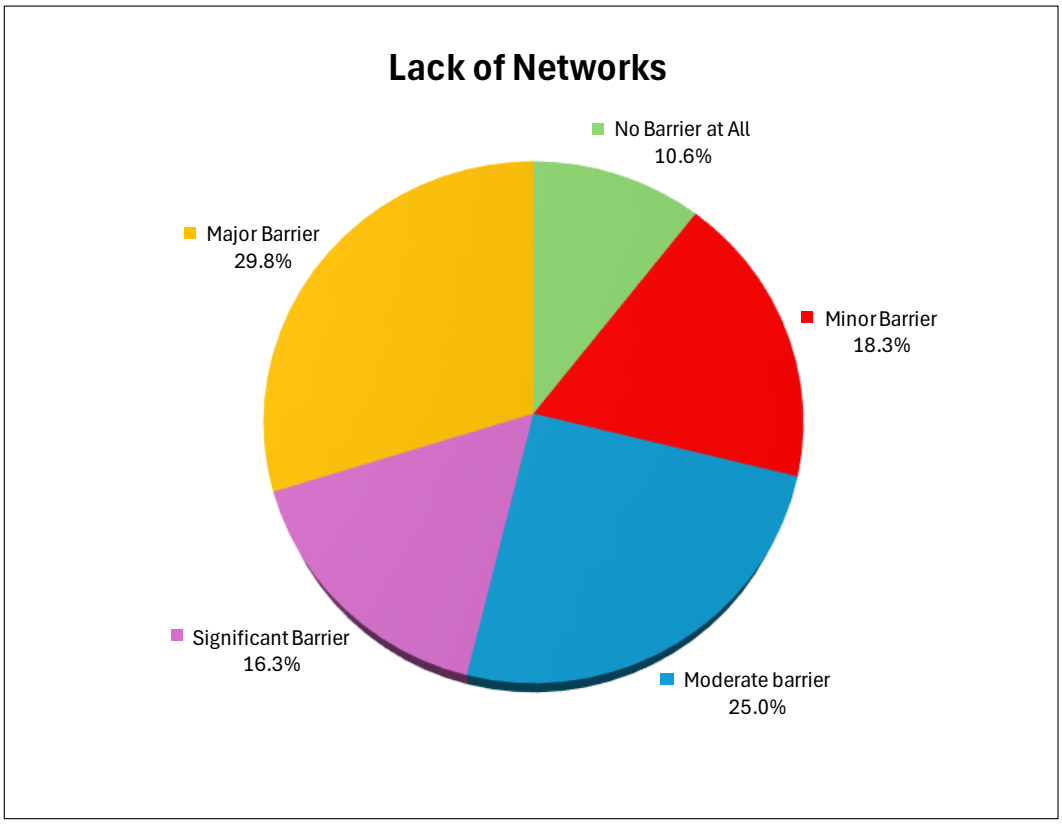
Language and Accent Bias	Participants	Percentage
No Barrier at All	47	45.2%
Minor Barrier	26	25.0%
Moderate Barrier	15	14.4%
Significant Barrier	9	8.7%
Major Barrier	7	6.7%
Total	**104**	**100%**

Chart 18 – Discrimination (Surveys)



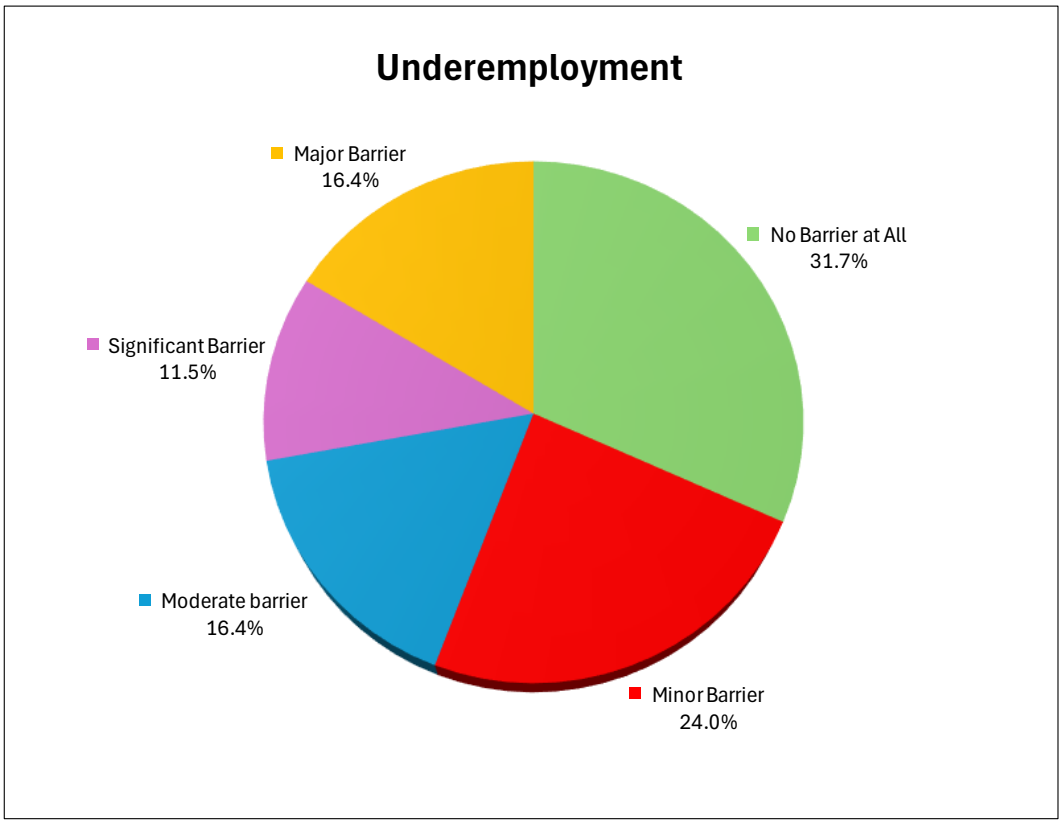
Discrimination	Participants	Percentage
No Barrier at All	47	45.6%
Minor Barrier	12	11.7%
Moderate Barrier	24	23.3%
Significant Barrier	14	13.6%
Major Barrier	6	5.8%
Total	**103**	**100%**

Chart 19 – Lack of Networks (Surveys)



Lack of Networks	Participants	Percentage
No Barrier at All	11	10.6%
Minor Barrier	19	18.3%
Moderate Barrier	26	25.0%
Significant Barrier	17	16.3%
Major Barrier	31	29.8%
Total	**104**	**100%**

Chart 20 - Underemployment (Surveys)



Underemployment	Participants	Percentage
No Barrier at All	33	31.7%
Minor Barrier	25	24.0%
Moderate Barrier	17	16.4%
Significant Barrier	12	11.5%
Major Barrier	17	16.4%
Total	**104**	**100%**

Table 15 – Significance of Barriers (Surveys)

Barrier in Order of Significance	No Barrier at all	Minor Barrier	Moderate Barrier	Significant Barrier	Major Barrier
Lack of Networks	10.6%	18.3%	25.0%	16.3%	29.8%
Lack of "Canadian Experience"	20.4%	21.4%	19.4%	21.4%	17.5%
Credential Recognition Issues	30.8%	20.2%	13.5%	22.1%	13.5%
Underemployment	31.7%	24.0%	16.3%	11.5%	16.3%
Discrimination	45.6%	11.7%	23.3%	13.6%	5.8%
Language and Accent Bias	45.2%	25.0%	14.4%	8.7%	6.7%

4.4.3.3 Overall Significance of These Barriers.

Lack of Networks

Participants identified the lack of networks as the most substantial barrier of all (46.2%), while only 10.6% reported no barrier at all. Networking plays a crucial role in the Canadian labour market, and immigrants are disproportionately disadvantaged when arriving without pre-existing network connections.

Lack of "Canadian Experience"

More than one third (38.8%) of participants experience this barrier as substantial, despite Canada's emphasis on diversity, inclusion and equity. Only 20.4% experienced no barrier at all regarding the lack of "Canadian experience".

Credential Recognition Issues

The recognition of foreign credentials remains inconsistent, with over one third (35.6%) of participants identifying this barrier as substantial, while 30.8% confirmed no barrier at all.

Underemployment

Nearly a third of participants (27.9%) reported being underemployed. In contrast, a third of the participants (31.8%) reported no barrier at all. These results indicate a mismatch between skills and job opportunities, which may result from credential recognition, limited "Canadian experience," and employer bias.

Discrimination

One in every 5 participants (19.4%) identified discrimination as a major or significant barrier, while 45.6% reported no such barrier. These findings highlight the need for stronger anti-racism hiring practices for all Canadians and immigrants to ensure equitable access to employment opportunities.

Language and Accent Bias

Only 15.4% of participants perceived language and accent bias as a significant barrier, while 45.2% of participants confirmed no barrier at all. South Africa has a British-based education system, with English as one of its official languages. However, some participants still experienced accent-related bias, reflecting perceptions of "foreignness" rather than deficiencies in language ability.

4.4.4 View on Human Rights and Discrimination

Although only interview participants were directly asked about the relationship between human rights and the "Canadian experience" requirement, survey participants echoed similar sentiments. Across both groups, several described the requirement as discriminatory, racist, or rooted in colonial attitudes. Their responses drew attention to inequities in credential recognition, hiring practices, and workplace integration.

Participant 1 argued that the practice undermines the Canadian promise of equal opportunity, calling it a *"potential infringement on a human right"* that erodes the dream of

access to a fair life in Canada. Participant 2 also framed it as a human rights violation, pointing out that job postings often demand three to five years of “Canadian experience”, which immediately disqualifies newcomers regardless of their international expertise. Participant 5 was equally clear, stating that it is unfair when *“Canadians are hired without 'Canadian experience', while immigrants with more experience are refused.”*

Other participants expressed more nuanced views. Participant 3 admitted she had never considered the issue through a human rights lens and therefore did not view it as such. Participant 4, however, highlighted that while she appreciated some provincial reforms aimed at replacing “Canadian experience” with measurable metrics, she found it problematic that the achievements of skilled immigrants are so often disregarded.

Survey participants provided similarly strong critiques. One called the requirement outright *“discrimination”* and praised Ontario’s recent efforts to ban it. Others described it as *“racist and colonial,”* arguing that it contradicts Canada’s claim of multicultural openness while relegating immigrants to menial work. Respondents also pointed to examples of systemic inequities, such as the lack of reciprocal recognition of professional qualifications or ven driver’s licenses, despite Commonwealth ties. Others described the requirement as *“nonsense”, “elitist”* and a way to *“mask and protect Canadians”* by excluding foreign talent. As one participant summarized, Canada actively recruits skilled professionals. However, it then makes it *“exceptionally difficult for those skilled professionals to make a living, let alone a decent living,”* which directly undermines their sense of belonging.

Collectively, the responses revealed that many immigrants perceived the “Canadian experience” requirement as not only a practical barrier to employment, but also a form of systemic discrimination. Whether framed as a violation of human rights, a colonial legacy, or

an inequitable hiring practice, the requirement is seen as undermining Canada's stated values of fairness, openness, and multicultural inclusion.

4.4.5 Obstacles That Hinder Labour Market Integration

Participants identified a wide range of obstacles within current labour practices that hinder immigrant integration. Their reflections reveal frustrations with systemic biases, rigid hiring practices, and structural barriers that prevent fair access to employment.

Several participants pointed to unconscious bias and tokenistic approaches to diversity. Participant 1 criticized automated resume screening and the superficial use of inclusion language, arguing that employers fail to recognize the talent in front of them:

"They are too lazy mentally to sift through the applicants to see and find the diamonds that are there."

Similarly, Participant 2 expressed frustration that employers disregard foreign experience without assessing its relevance, describing how resumes are often discarded simply because the experience is *"not Canadian"*.

Other concerns focused on transparency and fairness in hiring. Participant 3 emphasized the absence of salary transparency, noting that applicants go through lengthy processes *"going in blind,"* unsure whether they are pricing themselves out or undervaluing their expertise. Participant 4 stressed the need for greater openness to international qualifications, cautioning that employers often force immigrants into narrowly defined *"Canadian boxes"* rather than appreciating the diversity they bring. Participant 5, from a trades background, pointed to the burden of excessive regulations, suggesting that while safety is important, rigid enforcement of minor rules limits productivity and autonomy.

Survey participants echoed these frustrations, identifying systemic barriers rather than personal shortcomings as the main obstacles to successful labour market integration.

Across responses, the most frequently cited issues were the devaluation of foreign credentials, the “Canadian experience” requirement, and persistent employer biases about immigrant competence.

Table 16 – Obstacles That Hinder Labour Market Integration (Surveys)

Obstacles That Hinder Labour Market Integration	Participants
Acknowledge and accept foreign qualifications and experiences	17
Canadian biases and mindsets about immigrants	11
Better or smoother credential recognition processes	10
Remove the “Canadian experience” requirement	10
Educate yourself on the Canadian labour market needs before immigration	7
Have realistic expectations about Canada and the labour market	7
Gather a network of support as soon as possible	6
Test skills rather than just accepting credentials	6

Collectively, the interview and survey responses revealed that skilled immigrants encounter systemic obstacles at nearly every stage of the employment process, from application to workplace integration. These insights reflect a strong call for transparent and equitable systems that value international expertise, recognize diverse pathways of experiences, and remove structural biases that continue to limit immigrant integration into the Canadian labour market.

The persistence of the “Canadian experience” requirement reflects how broader systemic barriers intersect with personal employment outcomes. Participants navigated these barriers through resilience and adaptive strategies.

4.4.6 Document Analysis: Human Rights and Policy Frameworks

The document analysis revealed that Canadian legal and policy frameworks recognize discrimination as a critical barrier to equitable employment opportunities. Section 7 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (R.S.C., 1985, c. H-6, s.7) prohibits discriminatory practices in employment, including direct and indirect forms of adverse treatment based on prohibited grounds such as race, national or ethnic origin, age, sex, and disability. This broad protection establishes that employment-related decisions must be free of discriminatory bias (Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985).

At the provincial level, human rights bodies have also identified how systemic barriers manifest in employment. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2013) explicitly recognized the "Canadian experience" requirement as a form of discrimination that places an undue burden on newcomers. The OHRC directed employers and regulatory bodies to avoid requiring "Canadian experience" uncles it could be demonstrated as a bona fide occupational requirement, emphasizing that the practice often masks bias and contributes to exclusion from the labour market. Building on this guidance, the Government of Ontario implemented Bill 149, the *Working for Workers Four Act, 2024,* which formally prohibits the use of the "Canadian experience" requirement in more than 30 regulated professions, thereby moving policy from advisory recommendations to enforceable legislation (Government of Ontario, 2024; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013).

More recently, the Government of British Columbia has taken legislative steps to address this barrier directly. The *International Credentials Recognition Act (2023)*, which came into force on July 1, 2024, prohibits 18 regulatory authorities from requiring "Canadian experience" as a licensing condition for international qualified professionals. The effective date is July 1, 2025, unless an exemption has been granted. The Act requires

regulatory bodies to adopt fair, transparent, and timely processes for credential recognition, marking it, alongside Ontario, one of the earliest provincial legislative responses to systemic barriers identified by human rights bodies.

Together, these documents illustrate how Canadian federal and provincial frameworks acknowledge discrimination as a systemic issue and identify the "Canadian experience" requirement as an employment-related practice with significant human rights implications.

The legislative development also mirrors participants' experiences of exclusion, underscoring how the persistence of the "Canadian experience" barrier is both a lived reality and a formally recognized human rights concern. Despite these systemic obstacles, the findings also highlight how participants actively drew on resilience and adaptive strategies to navigate exclusionary practices and pursue pathways to labour market integration.

4.5 Resilience and Adaptive Strategies

The following section examines the ways in which participants responded to employment barriers and credential challenges by developing resilience and adaptive strategies. It outlines coping mechanisms, career recalibrations, and community-based supports that enabled participants to persist in their integration journey. Sub-sections highlight strategies such as pursuing further education, shifting career paths, leveraging networks, and redefining success in the Canadian context.

4.5.1 Personal Strengths

Participants identified a range of personal skills that supported their transition into the Canadian workforce. Adaptability, persistence, and a willingness to learn were recurring themes. Participant 1 explained that she needed to be flexible to gain entry, noting

"I took roles that were not ideal just to get in and prove myself."

Participant 2 emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence and relationship-building, reflecting that *"building relationships was key"* to finding opportunities and mentors.

Others drew on technical expertise and professional discipline. Participant 3 relied on determination and sacrifice to requalify as a Canadian CPA, a step she described as essential for opening doors to employment. Participant 4, whose PhD was formally recognized, stressed that intercultural competence was equally important, acknowledging that success required more than credentials and involved *"being willing to grow into Canadian workplace norms".*

For Participant 5, self-confidence and entrepreneurial drive were central. He described focusing on tangible results and perseverance, crediting a *"never die attitude"* with helping him succeed in the trades and eventually build his own business.

The survey results highlighted the following skills and strengths that are needed to help South African immigrants adapt professionally. From the results, it is evident that soft skills play an essential role when facing employment barriers.

Table 17 – Personal Strengths (Surveys)

Personal Strengths	**Participants**
Work experience and network capabilities	27
Strong, tenacious and hard working (Fighter Attitude)	25
Determination	23
Adaptability	22
Communication and interpersonal skills	16
Resilience	16
"Never give up / Can do" attitude	10

Collectively, the responses show that while systemic barriers shaped the employment journeys of all participants, personal strengths such as adaptability, persistence, technical skills, and relational abilities were critical resources in navigating the Canadian labour market.

4.5.2 Leveraging Cultural Background

Participants expressed mixed views regarding whether their cultural background was valued in the Canadian labour market. Although Canada promotes multiculturalism, most of the participants found that it does not always translate into the workplace. Participants felt that they needed to adapt and prove themselves and earn recognition over time.

For some, their background was dismissed or even used against them. Participant 1 shared a discouraging example in which her contributions were overlooked:

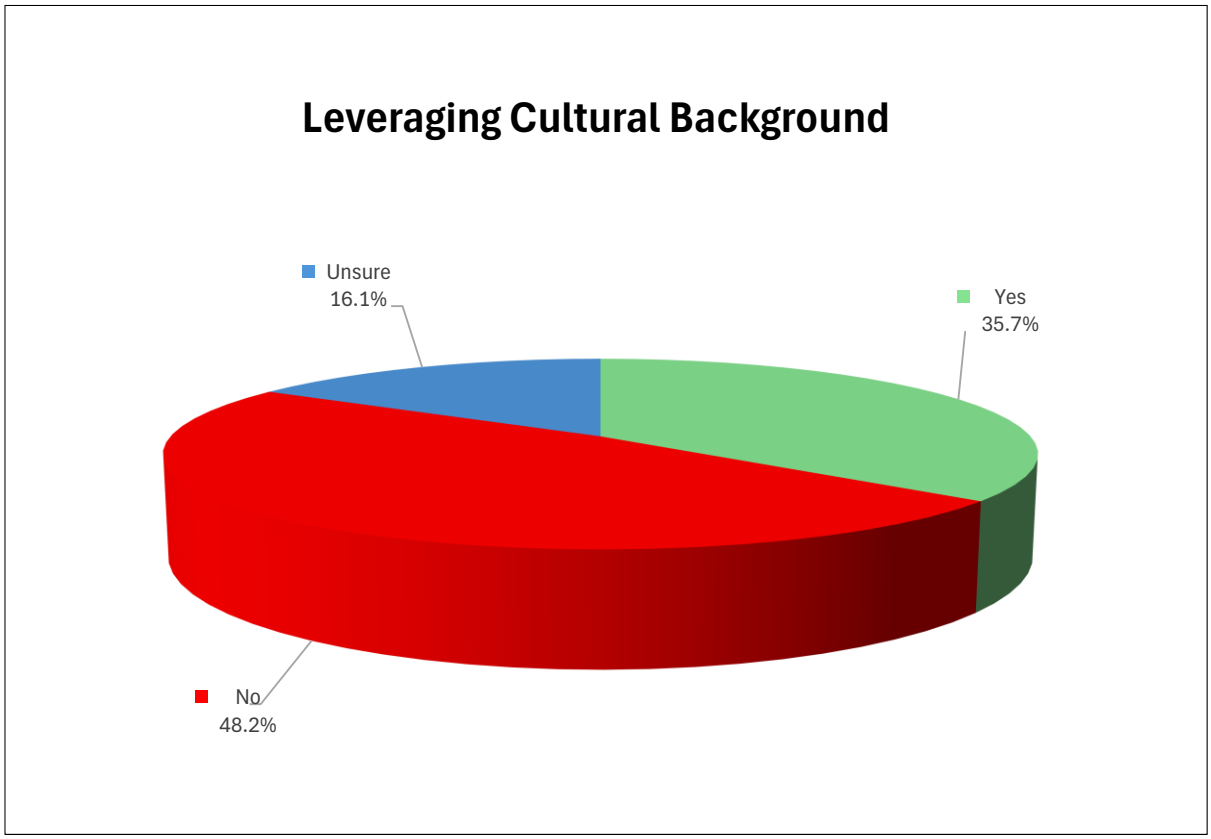
"*They hired this consultant, who came and presented my work as hers at a meeting. She got paid $12,000 for my work."*

Participant 2 also felt undervalued initially, pointing out that while her South African accent was perceived as *"educated,"* it was *"not Canadian enough".* Yet she emphasized that persistence eventually led to belonging and seniority in her workplace, where she now feels she is making a meaningful contribution.

Other participants found partial or conditional recognition. Participant 3 explained that after requalifying as a CPA, her expertise became valued, particularly when colleagues began seeking her guidance. Participant 4 noted that her PhD was recognized *"on paper,"* but underutilized in practice, leaving her with the sense that her career had taken *"so many steps back".* Participant 5 described a trajectory in which his skills were initially dismissed, but eventually acknowledged once his employer realized his capabilities, leading to incremental recognition. Survey results reflected this ambivalence. Nearly half of

participants (48.2%) reported that their background was not valued in Canada, while just over a third (35.7%) felt it was recognized, and 16.1% were unsure.

Chart 21 – Leveraging Cultural Background (Surveys)



Leveraging Cultural Background	Participants	Percentage
Yes	40	35.7%
No	54	48.2%
Unsure	18	16.1%
Total	**105**	**100%**

Collectively, the interview and survey findings suggest a disconnect between Canada's multicultural ideals and workplace realities. While immigrant professionals bring valuable skills and perspectives, these are often undervalued or overlooked until they have proven themselves over time, highlighting the need for more inclusive recognition of international expertise.

4.5.3 Helpful Support Services

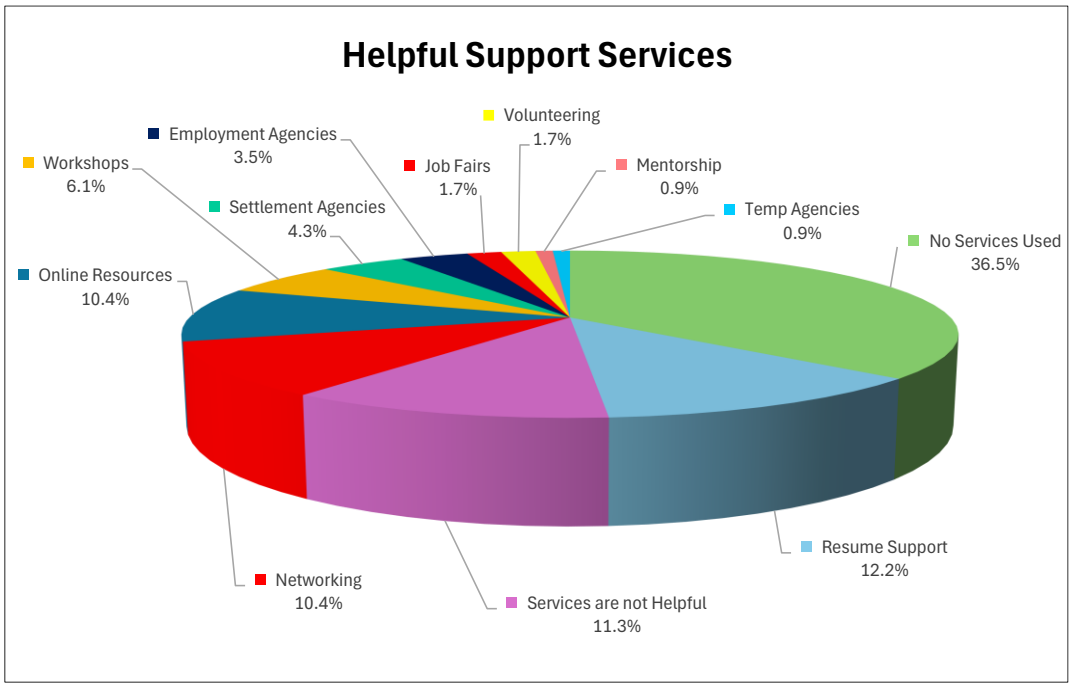
Participants described mixed experiences with support services while navigating the Canadian labour market. Settlement agencies, employment agencies, workshops, government programs, and peer networks were commonly accessed, though their usefulness varied depending on personal circumstances and prior preparation.

Some participants reported only limited value for these resources. Participant 1 turned to the Open Door Society in Saskatoon during a period of unemployment, but found the assistance less impactful after already doing substantial research herself. However, she acknowledged the support was *"very gracious"*. Participant 3 similarly tried workshops, skills training, and several employment agencies, but concluded that these efforts made little difference to her long-term outcomes. Participant 4 used resume examples and seminars to learn *"the Canadian perspective,"* combining these with informal peer support from friends.

Others highlighted specific benefits. Participant 2 credited employment and temp agencies, as well as WorkBC, with helping her navigate early barriers, including adapting her resume to Canadian standards. In contrast, Participant 5 did not use any services at all, having secured his position directly from South Africa, and instead relied on the commitment of a supportive employer.

Survey results reflected this variability. More than one-third (36.5%) reported not using any support services, and 11.3% indicated that the services they tried were not helpful. About 30% found value in resume support, networking, and online resources, while smaller numbers highlighted the usefulness of workshops, settlement agencies, employment agencies, job fairs, volunteering, mentorship, and temp agencies.

Chart 22 – Helpful Support Services (Surveys)



Helpful Support Services	Participants	Percentage
No Services Used	42	36.54%
Resume Support	14	12.2%
Services are not helpful	13	11.3%
Networking	12	10.4%
Online Resources	12	10.4%
Workshops	7	6.1%
Settlement Agencies	5	4.3%
Employment Agencies	4	3.5%
Job Fairs	2	1.7%
Volunteering	2	1.7%
Mentorship	1	0.9%
Temp Agencies	1	0.9%
Total	**105**	**100%**

Collectively, the interview and survey findings suggest that while support services can provide valuable guidance and skill-building opportunities, their impact is uneven. For

some, these resources offered critical entry points and networking opportunities. For others, they were perceived as limited in effectiveness, underscoring the need for more tailored and practical forms of support.

4.5.4 Supportive Communities and Settlement Services

When asked to describe the kind of environment that would help them thrive professionally, participants identified different preferences. However, their responses pointed to a common desire for workplaces that balance professionalism, stability, respect, and connection, while also offering fair opportunities for growth.

Participant 1 emphasized the importance of challenge and opportunity, stating:

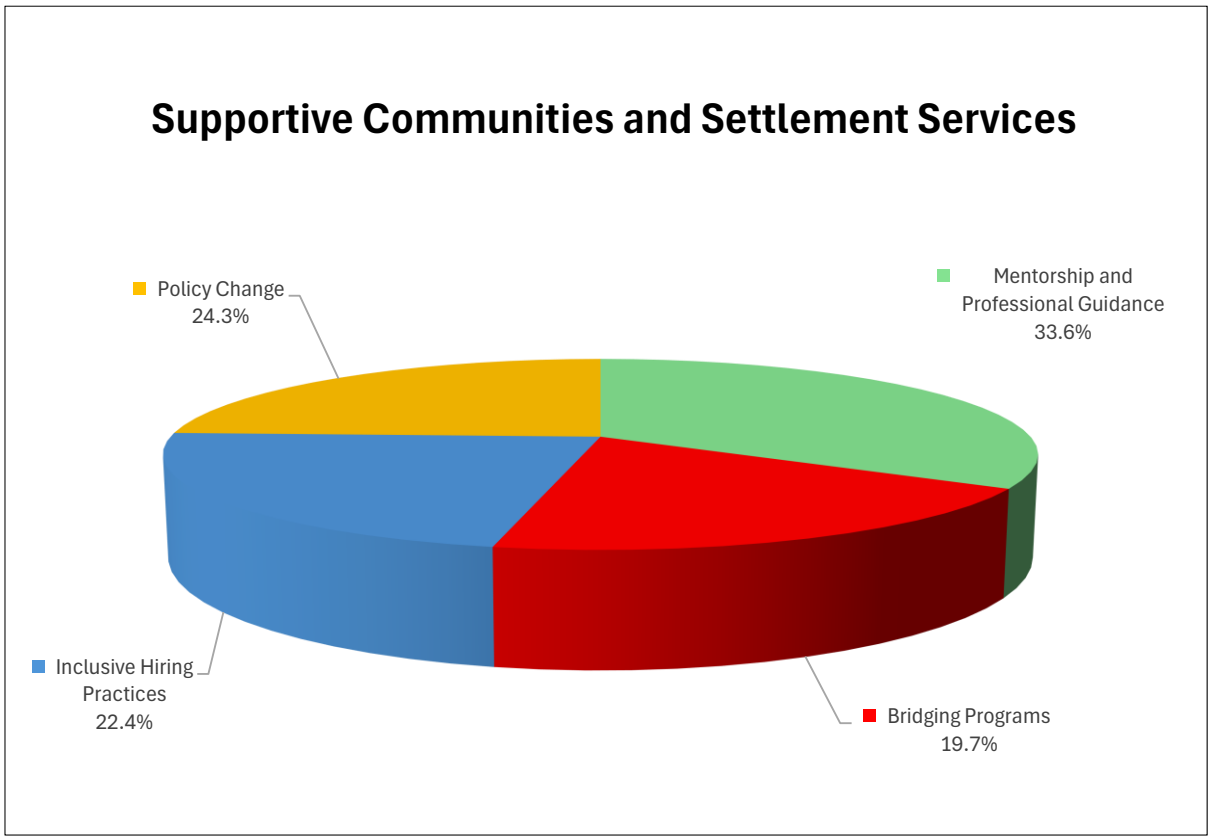
"*I need a mature crowd… someone to challenge me… someone who's just willing to give you an opportunity… I'd like to sit around the table with people who are competitive… because that's how you raise the level and the standard of work."*

Participant 2 preferred predictability, describing her ideal setting as *"structured, dependable, reliable"* where expectations are clear and change is limited. Participant 3 also valued clarity, but wanted it without micromanagement, noting a professional environment where *"everyone knows and is accountable …. And you just run with it"*.

Other highlighted belonging and fairness. Participant 4 described wanting a supportive and social workplace where she would be valued not just for her work, but as a person. Participant 5 underscored the importance of equitable treatment, arguing that stronger monitoring of workplace practices would improve employee satisfaction and reduce the pressure immigrants feel to open businesses out of necessity, rather than choice.

Survey participants reinforced these priorities. About one-third (33.6%) identified mentorship and professional guidance as most helpful, followed by policy change (24.3%), inclusive hiring practices (22.4%), and bridging programs (19.7%).

Chart 23 – Supportive Communities and Settlement Services (Surveys)



Supportive Communities and Settlement Services	Participants	Percentage
Mentorship and Professional Guidance	51	33.6%
Bridging Programs	30	19.7%
Inclusive Hiring Practices	34	22.4%
Policy Change	37	24.3%
Total	**105**	**100%**

Collectively, the findings show that South African immigrants view supportive environments as those that combine fairness, recognition, and stability with opportunities for growth and connection. Both interview and survey results highlighted the need for workplaces and settlement services that not only provide technical or policy support, but also foster belonging and respect as central conditions for success.

While participants demonstrated determination, adaptability and reliance on support networks, their strategies were not always sufficient to overcome structural barriers. Economic outcomes and financial stability were a key area of concern that emerged from this data.

4.6 Financial Stability

The following section analyzes how employment barriers, career misalignment, and credential challenges affected participants' financial well-being. It highlights ways in which underemployment, survival jobs, and stalled career progression influenced income security, savings, and long-term financial planning. The sub-sections consider both immediate financial pressures and broader economic consequences, showing how financial stability shaped participants' overall settlement and integration experiences.

4.6.1 Current Financial Stability

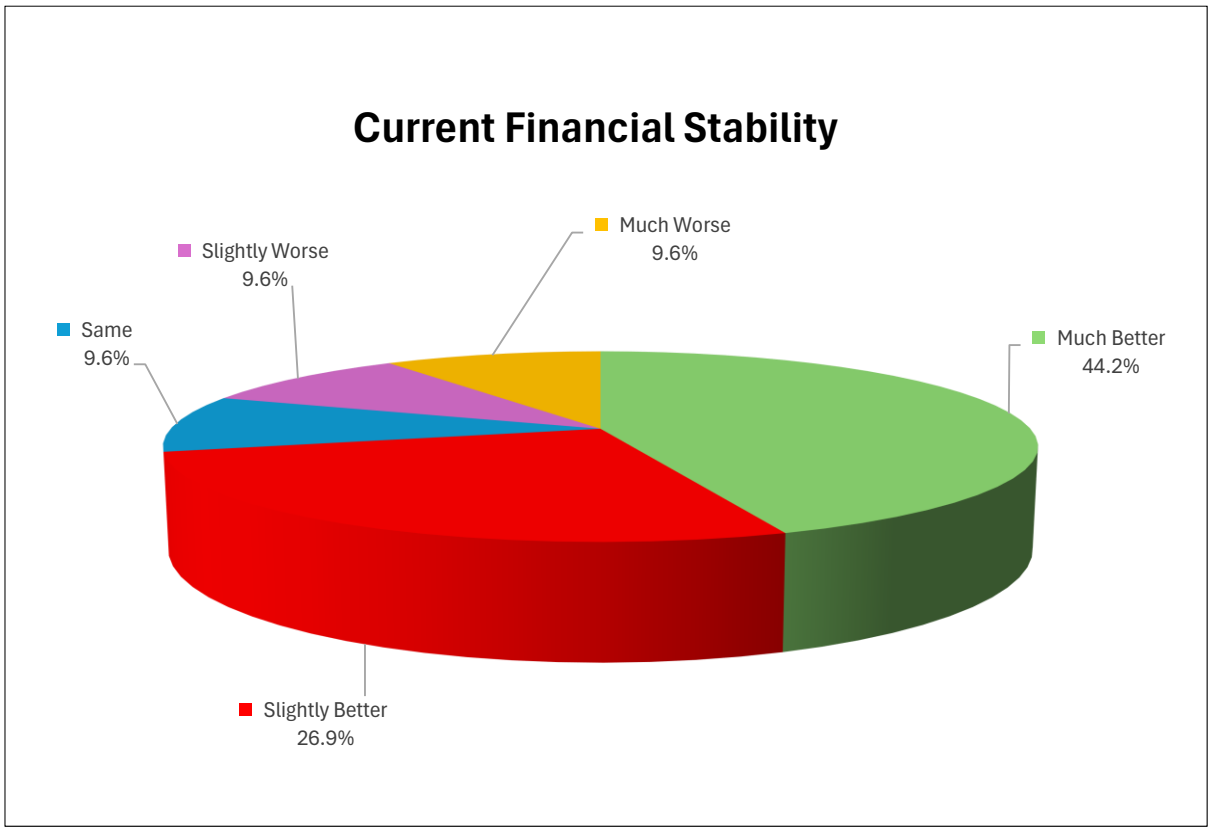
Interview participants described how their employment experiences shaped their financial stability, often noting a contrast between their initial struggles and their current situations. For most, the early years were marked by financial strain, but over time, some were able to rebuild stability through persistence and adaptation.

Participant 1 explained how periods of unemployment derailed her long-term plans, admitting, "M*y unemployment is more than my employment, I've had to use up my savings to survive and buy groceries. So my dreams are shattered"*. Participant 2 also reflected on financial strain in the early years, recalling that the *"first three years were not better, it was actually worse*." However, after nearly a decade, her family had achieved stability. In contrast, Participant 3 described a smoother adjustment, noting that she was *"able to save from the beginning"* of her career in Canada. Participant 4 expressed gratitude despite acknowledging that her household had not yet reached its financial goals. Participant 5

described being *“a few steps back in life,”* though starting his own business had begun to restore his financial stability.

Survey results revealed mixed responses. Just under half of participants (44.2%) reported that their financial situation was much better than when they arrived, while 26.9% said it was slightly better. At the same time, 30% reported no change or a decline, with equal proportions (9.6%) stating their situation was the same, slightly worse, or much worse.

Chart 24 – Current Financial Stability (Surveys)



Current Financial Situation	Participants	Percentage
Much Better	46	44.2%
Slightly Better	28	26.9%
Same	10	9.6%
Slightly Worse	10	9.6%
Much Worse	10	9.6%
Total	**104**	**100%**

Collectively, the interview and survey data suggest that financial stability often improves over time, but usually comes after significant hardship and sacrifice. For many immigrants, the first few years involve depleted savings and delayed goals, while long-term stability depends on re-establishing careers, securing steady employment, or pursuing entrepreneurship. This trajectory underscores both the resilience of newcomers and the

economic challenges that continue to shape their settlement experiences.4.6.2 Impact of Employment on Financial Capacity

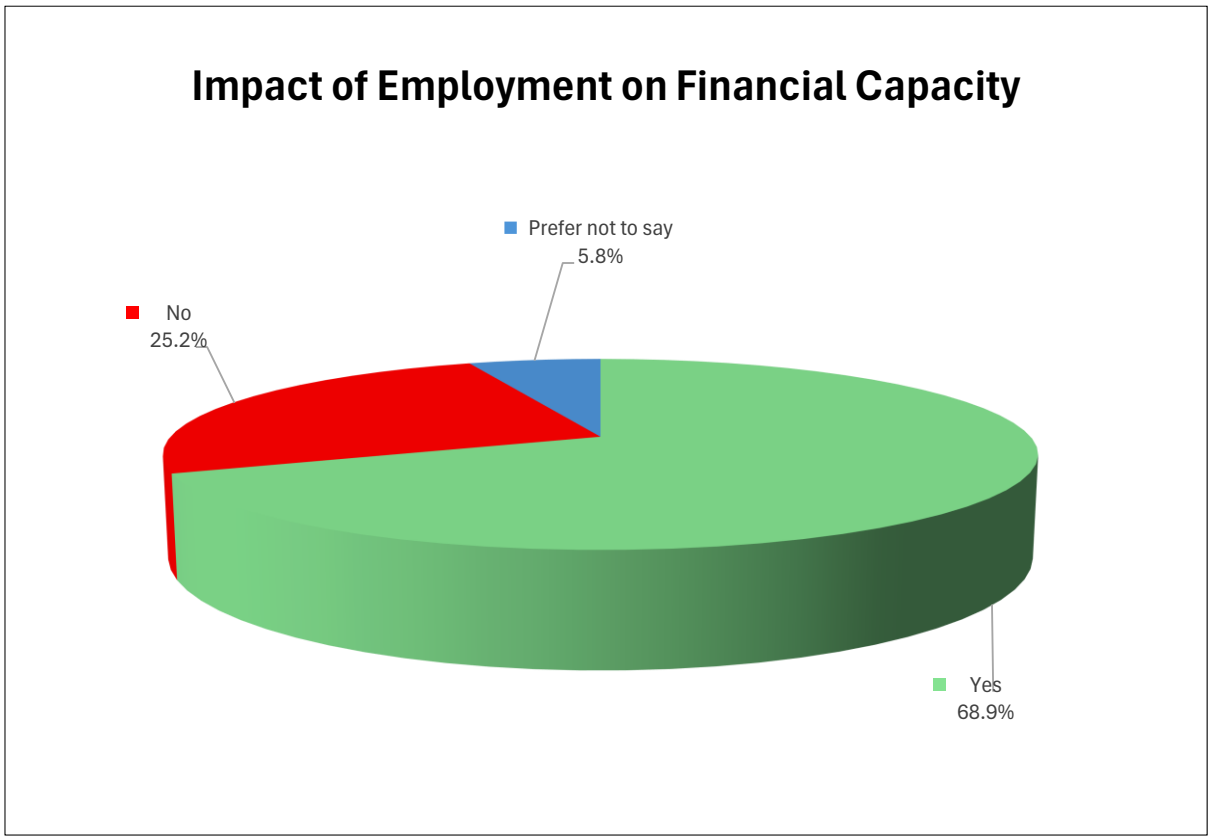
Interview participants described how their employment experiences shaped their financial capacity, particularly their ability to save, invest, or support their families. Most explained that migration required starting over financially, as they arrived without household goods and had to rebuild living essentials, pursuing long-term financial goals.

For some, unemployment or underemployment caused significant setbacks. Participant 1 explained that her savings were depleted entirely, noting, *"Because my unemployment is more than my employment, I've had to use up my savings to survive and buy groceries"*. Participant 2 also experienced strain in the first three years. However, after nearly a decade, she and her family achieved stability, reflecting that it is *"definitely better now"* despite the difficult start. Participant 5 similarly described being *"a few steps back in life"* after requalification, and the transition to self-employment slowed his financial progress.

Others reported more stable trajectories. Participant 3 described being able to save immediately from the beginning of her Canadian career. At the same time, Participant 4 acknowledged slower progress, explaining that although her household had not yet reached its financial goals, she still felt *"blessed on the way"*.

Survey data confirmed these patterns. Nearly seven out of ten participants (68.9%) reported that their employment experiences negatively affected their financial capacity, limiting their ability to save, invest, or support family members. Only a quarter (25.2%) indicated that their financial plans were unaffected, while a small proportion (5.8%) chose not to answer.

Chart 25 – Impact of Employment on Financial Capacity (Surveys)



Impact of Employment on Financial Capacity	Participants	Percentage
Yes	71	68.9%
No	26	25.2%
Prefer not to say	6	5.8%
Total	**104**	**100%**

Collectively, the interview and survey findings show that employment instability has lasting effects on financial capacity. While some immigrants achieve stability and savings more quickly, the majority experience disruptions that delay long-term planning and set back financial goals, underscoring the significant economic costs of starting over in Canada.

4.6.3 Contradiction Between Financial Stability and Financial Capacity

The majority of participants (71.7%) indicated that they are financially better off now than when they arrived in Canada. In comparison, 68.9% indicated that their employment

experiences affected their ability to save, invest, or support family. There is a visible contradiction between these two findings, and it supports a nuanced financial trajectory for skilled South African immigrants in Canada.

At first glance, the data may seem contradictory, however, the findings reflect a typical trajectory for most immigrants of initial financial hardship when they arrived, which was then followed by gradual improvement over the next few years. While 71.7% confirmed that they are better off now than when they arrived in Canada, this improvement did not instantly happen, it came gradually over many years, and usually after requalification or a career change. The 68.9% that said their employment experiences affected their ability to save, invest or support family, often referred to the early or mid-stages of their settlement process. A common experience noted is that while most immigrants are currently more stable in their financial outcome, the path was long and complex, and it delayed their ability to meet long-term financial goals such as investing or retirement planning. These two findings complement each other and reveal a typical trajectory for most South African immigrants of initial struggles that is then followed by gradual recovery and adaptation.

The findings on financial stability revealed the uneven and delayed financial recovery that many immigrants face, linking personal economic stability to broader issues of belonging and long-term migration decisions.

4.7 Conditional Belonging and Migration Intent

The following section explores how participants' experiences of exclusion and limited opportunities shaped their sense of belonging in Canada and their future migration decisions. It highlights how feelings of conditional acceptance influenced both personal identity and community integration. The sub-sections examine participants' reflections on staying in Canada, considering return migration to South Africa, or seeking opportunities in

third countries, revealing how belonging and mobility were closely tied to employment and social inclusion.

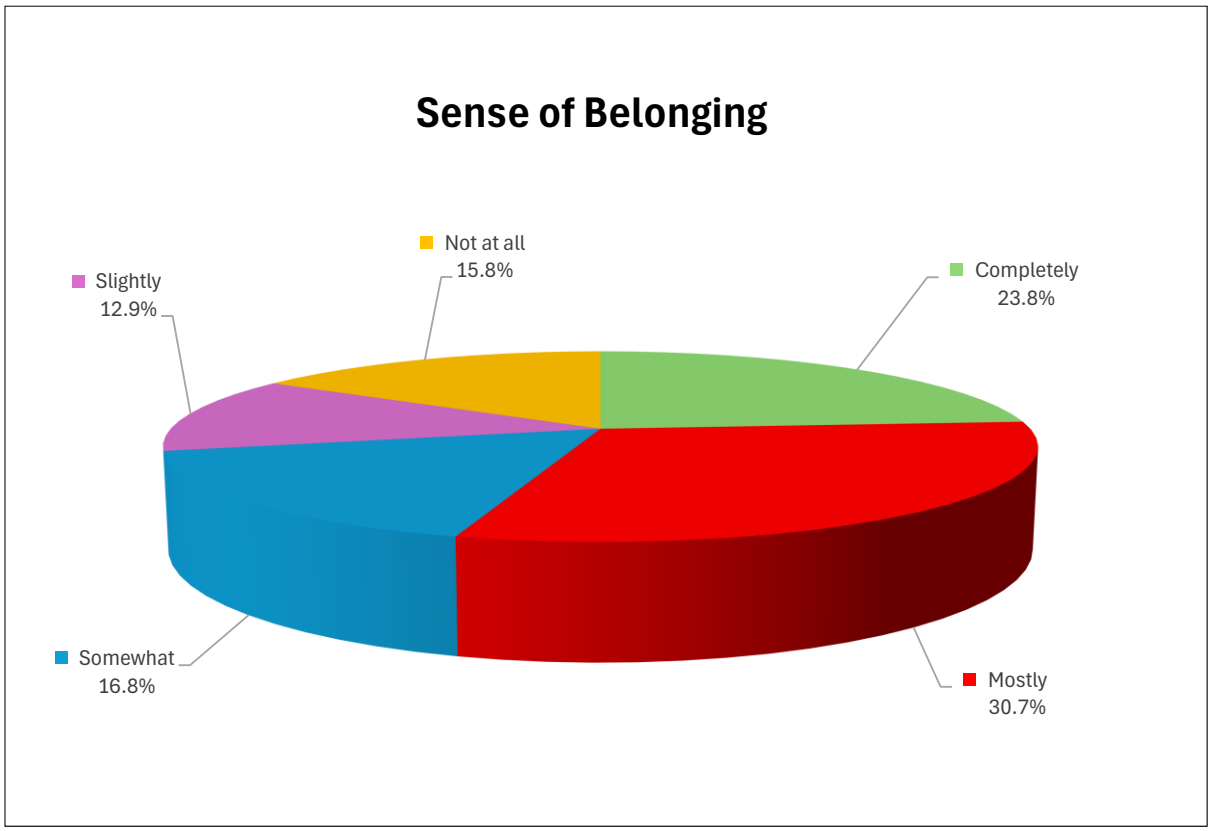
4.7.1 Sense of Belonging

Interview participants described a wide range of experiences in relation to professional belonging. For some, belonging was strongly felt in their workplaces. Participant 2 described being valued by her colleagues and contributing meaningfully, explaining, "*In my current profession, in my current department, in my current work, yes! So I think for me, I do find feel that I do belong in the team, and that I do make a difference. Even though I'm an immigrant, I'm Canadian now."* Participant 3 also reflected on how familiarity and accumulated knowledge created belonging over time, as she became a resource for new employees.

Others, however, expressed uncertainty or disconnection. Participant 4, who had recently changed careers, admitted that she had not yet developed a sense of belonging, but remained optimistic that it would come with time. Participant 1 was more discouraged, confessing, "*I'm completely alone, and it's making me very unhappy, and I don't feel a sense of belonging."* Participant 5 likewise felt exploited rather than included during his early employment, describing it as *"a sense of using but not a sense of belonging"*. He later found greater belonging and positivity after establishing his own business.

Survey findings reinforced this mixed picture. While the majority of respondents reported belonging at work, the levels varied. Almost one-quarter (23.8%) felt a complete sense of belonging, while 30.7% felt it mainly, and 16.8% felt it somewhat. At the same time, over a quarter (28.7%) reported only a slight sense of belonging or none at all.

Chart 26 – Sense of Belonging (Surveys)



Sense of Belonging	Participants	Percentage
Completely	24	23.8%
Mostly	31	30.7%
Somewhat	17	16.8%
Slightly	13	12.9%
Not at all	16	15.8%
Total	**104**	**100%**

Collectively, the interview and survey data show that while many immigrants eventually build belonging through recognition, contribution, and familiarity, a significant minority remain disconnected or excluded. Belong is therefore not guaranteed but negotiated over time, contingent on both workplace culture and individual adaptation.

4.7.2 Return or Onward Migration Considerations

4.7.2.1 Return Migration Considerations.

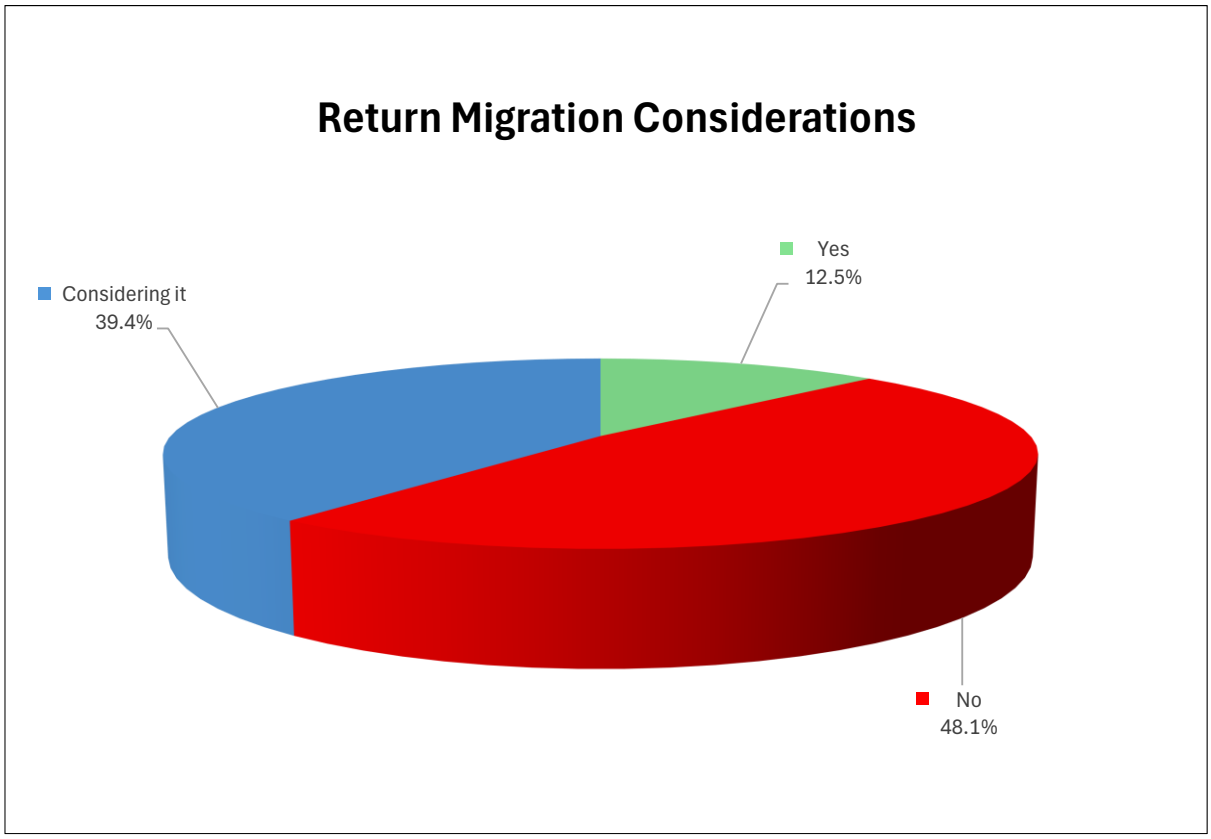
Interview participants expressed mixed views on whether they had considered returning to South Africa or migrating to a third country. For some, return migration was a clear option. Participant 1 shared that she has already decided to leave Canada within the next 8 months. However, she is still undecided between returning to South Africa or relocating to the United Kingdom: *"Going home is the last resort at this point, but I will have to leave Canada. That is a decision I've made".* Participant 3 also acknowledged considering a return, but stressed that it would be for family reasons only, not because of her professional situation.

For others, return migration was considered briefly during the early stages of settlement, but no longer feels like a realistic choice. Participants 2 and 4 admitted that they had once looked into the possibility of moving to countries such as South Africa or New Zealand. However, both emphasized that they now feel settled in Canada and value the stability, safety, and job security they have established. Participant 5 recalled he almost returned to South Africa within 6 months, mainly out of cultural frustration and a sense of exclusion, but ultimately chose to stay because of what he described as his *"never die* attitude".

Survey findings reflected a broad spectrum of perspectives. One-third of respondents (34.9%) reported that they are currently considering return migration to South Africa or another country. A further 12.5% have already decided to leave. At the same time, nearly half of the participants (48.1%) said they have not considered leaving Canada. These findings suggest that employment barriers, career stagnation, and underemployment are important drivers of return migration considerations, while emotional and social factors

such as family ties, feelings of isolation, and cultural disconnection also play a role. Financial pressures, including instability, the high cost of living, and the limited prospect of home ownership, were also cited as key influences.

Chart 27 – Return Migration Considerations (Surveys)



Return Migration Considerations	Participants	Percentage
Yes	13	12.5%
No	50	48.1%
Considering it	41	34.9%
Total	**104**	**100%**

Participants who considered leaving Canada identified the following countries that they would consider for migration.

Table 18 – Popular Countries for Migration (Surveys)

Popular Countries for Migration	Participants
South Africa	16
United State	13
Australia	6
New Zealand	3
Portugal	3
United Arab Emirates	2
Europe	2

Collectively, the interview and survey results show that return migration considerations remain a real possibility for many South African immigrants. While some ultimately find stability and belonging in Canada, others continue to weigh the costs of staying against the pull of family, safety, or opportunities elsewhere, reflecting the ongoing negotiation of settlement and identity.

4.7.2.2 Reasons for Migration Decisions.

Participants identified a range of reasons influencing whether they would consider returning to South Africa or migrating to another country. For some, feelings of isolation and cultural frustration played a central role. Participant 1 shared that she has decided to leave Canada in the near future, describing going home as *"the last resort"*. Participant 5 also recalled that within his first 6 months, he considered returning because of cultural barriers and negative perceptions of immigrants. However, he ultimately chose to remain because of what he called his *"never die attitude"*.

Family ties emerged as another important factor. Participant 3 explained that her only reason for considering return migration was family, noting simply *"Family. Nothing else, just family"*. For others, practical considerations outweighed the idea of leaving.

Participant 2 admitted that she and her husband initially thought about returning, but decided against it because of the security, pensions, and job stability they had built in Canada. Participant 4 expressed no intention to leave at all, stating that she and her family feel fully settled.

Survey responses reflected the same diversity of motivations. While some participants cited persistent employment barriers, underemployment, and a lack of recognition as reasons for leaving, others pointed to family obligations, cultural disconnection, and feelings of isolation. Several participants also mentioned broader concerns such as financial pressures, the high cost of living, housing affordability, and uncertainty about long-term settlement. A smaller group also noted political and environmental issues.

Survey participants cited the following reasons for considering return migration. These findings revealed a mix of economic, political, environmental and social concerns.

Table 19 – Reasons for Migration Decisions (Surveys)

Reasons for Migration Decisions	**Participants**
High cost of living	14
Liberal Canadian Government	7
Current state of public services, especially health care	6
Family	6
Tough winter conditions	6
Feeling excluded with no sense of belonging	5
Impossible to own property/house	4
Lack of opportunities	3
High Taxes	3

Collectively, the interview and survey findings highlight that a complex interplay of personal, professional, and social factors shapes migration decisions. While some immigrants choose to remain in Canada for stability and security, others weigh the costs of staying against family ties, cultural belonging, or opportunities elsewhere.

4.7.3 Advice for New Immigrants

In keeping with an Appreciative Inquiry approach, participants were invited to reflect on their own journeys and share advice for new and prospective immigrants. Their insights highlight the importance of mental preparation, humility, adaptability, and proactive engagement with the labour market. While their experiences revealed significant challenges, they also pointed to strategies that supported their resilience and growth.

Participant 1 emphasized the need to prepare mentally and practically before arrival. She advised newcomers to research the Canadian labour market deeply, be ready to pivot or change careers, and understand that job advertisements often prioritize Canadian-born candidates. She reflected, *"The jobs are advertised for Canadians. If you get a leg in the door, you are very lucky … you've persisted, you've networked".* She warned that Canada's promises may seem more promising from afar and recommended planning for a transition period of at least five years.

Participant 2 echoed the need for humility and persistence, urging new immigrants to *"put your pride in your pocket"* and be willing to start from the bottom. She emphasized the importance of tailoring resumes, writing strong cover letters, and being realistic about interview outcomes. *"Just because an interview went well does not mean you're going to get the job,"* she cautioned.

Participant 3 highlighted the mismatch between labour supply and demand and encouraged newcomers to focus on industries with skill shortages. Understanding where opportunities exist, she said, is critical: *"You need to know where people are needed".*

Participant 4 advised immigrants to build strong support networks and not try to navigate the journey alone. She stressed open-mindedness, acceptance of starting over, and patience: *"It will probably take a couple of years to get back to the position you were in"*.

Participant 5 offered a candid perspective, urging new arrivals to let go of expectations that they will immediately resume the status they held in South Africa. He emphasized mental preparedness, hard work, and the reality of doing manual labour if needed: *"It is going to take time … from day one, you have to start building on your network. Network, network network!"*.

Collectively, interview participants offered a powerful message that while the road to integration is often long and challenging, resilience, adaptability, and connection are key. Their advice encourages newcomers to approach immigration with realistic expectations, strong support systems, and a willingness to grow into new possibilities, reaffirming the capacity of immigrants to thrive, even in the face of systemic barriers.

Survey participants reinforced several core themes that were also presented during the interviews. The top responses included the following categories.

Table 20 – Advice for New Immigrants (Surveys)

Advice to New Immigrants	**Participants**
Network	23
Be prepared to do any job and start from the bottom	17
Revise your expectations about employment in Canada	14
Never give up	12
Embrace your new country	10
Upgrade your skills or requalify	9
Research and educate yourself on the labour market requirements	8
Work hard	8
Be flexible, adaptable, determined, resilient and true to yourself	8
Save as much as possible before moving to Canada	6
Adapt your resume to Canadian standards	4
Be humble	4
Be patient during the transition period	3
Be willing to learn	3
Secure employment before moving to Canada	3
Create your own opportunities	2
Ensure your qualifications are recognized before moving to Canada	2
Translate your capabilities to local needs	2
Volunteer	2
Arrive with Permanent Resident status if possible	1
Ask relevant and important questions during your interview	1
Be less cynical; most Canadians want you to succeed	1
Consider a change in career	1
Do contract work if you struggle to find permanent employment	1
Expect to work twice as hard as locals	1
Focus on the end goal	1
Draft proper cover letters; it is essential	1
Research the cost of living before moving to Canada	1
Seeking opportunities in other provinces and remote towns	1
Start credential assessments before moving to Canada	1

In addition to the individual reflections, the most commonly shared advice across interview and survey participants emphasized the importance of networking (mentioned by 23 participants), widely seen as essential for finding opportunities and advancing careers in Canada. Many urged newcomers to be prepared to do any job and start from the bottom (17) and to revise their employment expectations (14), recognizing that initial roles may be far below their previous positions. Other key recommendations included maintaining determination and perseverance ("never give up" attitude or "vasbyt," an Afrikaans word for never give up) (12), embracing life in their new country (10), and upgrading skills or requalifying (9) to meet Canadian standards. Participants also stressed the value of researching the labour market (8), working hard (8), and demonstrating flexibility, adaptability, and resilience (8) as crucial for long-term success.

Other practical advice included saving money before arrival, researching the cost of living, adapting resumes, exploring provinces or towns, starting credential assessment early, and considering entrepreneurship or volunteering.

Overall, the advice shared by participants reflects not only practical survival strategies but also a deeper emotional and psychological negotiation of identity, resilience, and belonging. These insights provide a foundation for understanding how immigrants make meaning of their journey and lay the groundwork for the discussion that follows in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The findings from Chapter 4 highlight the complexity of South African skilled immigrants' integration into the Canadian labour market. Even though participants had diverse professional backgrounds, advanced education qualifications and extensive work

experience, their transitions into the labour market were complicated by career misalignment, credential devaluation, and the “Canadian experience” barrier. These barriers affected their financial stability and career development in the long-term, however, participants demonstrated resilience, adaptability and resourcefulness in navigating the labour market. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to existing literature, with a focus on how systemic barriers, institutional practices and individual strategies shape the career development and economic outcomes of skilled South African immigrants.

5.2 Participant Profile Overview

The demographic and professional profile of participants provides important context for interpreting the findings. The opportunities available to immigrants and their pathways into the labour market were shaped by factors such as provincial location, gender and age distribution, educational accomplishments and professional diversity. The analysis maps participant characteristics to establish the context in which employment outcomes and career development unfold.

5.2.1 Geographical Distribution

The geographic distribution was a defining influence. The majority of participants (47.9%) resided in British Columbia, suggesting that findings are strongly influenced by the economic structure, regulatory environment, credential assessment processes, and settlement services in British Columbia. Research confirms that provincial variations in credential recognition and immigrant integration policies contribute to differing labour market outcomes for newcomers across Canada (Reitz, 2007). For example, Ontario has introduced the *Working for Workers Four Act (2024)* (Government of Ontario, 2024), which includes provisions to ban the “Canadian experience” requirement in regulated professions and mandates faster licensing timelines, signalling a proactive approach to immigrant

inclusion. In contrast, British Columbia's credential recognition processes remain decentralized, often requiring skilled immigrants to navigate multiple regulatory bodies with limited coordination or support (Guo, 2009). Such policy differences contribute to uneven access to professional employment across provinces. While many experiences documented here resonate with immigrants across Canada, the BC specific concentration means that findings may not be fully generalizable to all regions.

5.2.2 Gender and Age

Gender and age also intersect with employment barriers. Nearly two-thirds of participants (62.5%) were female, suggesting that results are primarily a reflection of women's employment journeys. Literature suggests that immigrant women often face intersectional barriers that include gendered and racial bias, occupational segregation, and assumptions about family responsibilities, which, together, contribute to higher rates of underemployment (Man, 2004). Interview participants were generally older (50 – 59 years) than survey participants, who were concentrated in the 30 – 39 and 40 – 49 year age groups. Older immigrants often bring extensive and longer pre-migration work experiences. Still, they may face age-related discrimination that is linked to assumptions about adaptability to "Canadian workplace culture", technological proficiency and long-term employability (Ertorer et al., 2020). When combined with credential devaluation, these biases can prolong career development and often result in underemployment.

5.2.3 Educational Attainment

The education diversity was striking, with approximately 80% of participants who held a bachelor's degree or a higher qualification. Several participants reported multiple degrees, professional designations and Canadian credentials. These align with the well-documented "credential paradox" (Rudenko, 2012; Sakamoto et al., 2010), which highlights

that highly educated and skilled immigrants are less likely to find employment that matches their qualifications and skills. The additional Canadian qualifications and professional designations acquired by some participants illustrate strategies to overcome this paradox, yet literature suggests such requalification often does not yield equitable employment outcomes (Reitz, 2007).

5.2.4 Professional Background

Professional backgrounds were diverse, spanning over regulated, non-regulated and trade sectors. Fields included healthcare, engineering, finance, education, law, IT, construction, and administrative services. Many held senior roles in South Africa, with internationally recognized qualifications and extensive experience.

Despite this diversity, participants across all sectors reported facing similar employment barriers in Canada. Those in regulated professions described long, expensive, and unclear credentialing processes. Others in non-regulated fields still encountered employer skepticism toward foreign qualifications and experience. In both cases, participants reported being told they were “overqualified”, lacked “Canadian experience”, or needed to “start from scratch,” regardless of their actual skills.

These findings reflect broader systemic biases in the labour market that affect immigrants across professions (Sakamoto et al., 2010). The findings confirm that employment barriers are not isolated to specific industries, but are embedded in institutional practices that devalue international expertise and contribute to deskilling and downward mobility.

5.2.5 Timeframe in Canada

The timeframe also influenced the outcome of this study. While some participants had been in Canada for over a decade, the predominant group was in the 1 – 3 years

category, followed by the 4 – 7 years category. Those newer to Canada described more immediate struggles with survival jobs and financial stability, while longer-term residents reflected on improved outcomes over time. These findings align with literature that indicates that labour market outcomes tend to improve over time, even though structural barriers may endure long after the settlement stage (Ferrer & Riddell, 2008).

Overall, these characteristics show that participants entered the Canadian labour market with strong, professional qualifications, diverse professional expertise and varied settlement stages. Yet, their outcomes were shaped by not only individual tributes but also by structural context. Keeping this in mind, the discussion now turns to structural barriers that influenced career development, highlighting how systemic practices in the Canadian labour market intersect with personal experiences.

5.3 Labour Market Barriers to Integration

5.3.1 Career Misalignment and Downward Mobility

5.3.1.1 Underemployment and Occupational Downgrading.

Career misalignment emerged as a central theme. Nearly half of the participants reported working in jobs below their qualifications and skill level since arriving in Canada, which is consistent with broader research showing that skilled immigrants often experience employment mismatches upon arrival in Canada (Guo, 2009; Sakamoto et al., 2010). These roles were predominantly entry-level and low-paying, often accepted due to financial necessity. Participants described a mix of frustration and pragmatic acceptance in taking such positions. Reitz (2007) described this as *occupational downgrading*, a situation in which highly educated immigrants are reduced to lower-skilled positions due to employer bias, lack of “Canadian experience”, and credential recognition barriers (Foster, 2015; Oreopoulos, 2009). Employment status alone, therefore, does not adequately reflect the

complexity and struggles of labour market integration. As Sakamoto et al. (2010) noted, securing *any* employment can not be mistaken or confused for successful labour market integration, since long-term employment barriers prevent immigrants from securing roles that are in line with their level of education and expertise (Sakamoto et al., 2010).

5.3.1.2 Field Shift, Credentialing, and Skill Erosion.

A significant number of participants reported that their Canadian career trajectories bore little resemblance to their pre-immigration professions, while several participants have shifted fields entirely. Numerous participants noted that acquiring Canadian credentials or licenses improved alignment, supporting Sweetman & Warman's (2014) argument that local accreditation enhances employment alignment. Underemployment and the misalignment of work, qualifications and skills might result in a gradual loss of professional expertise over time due to prolonged absence from the trained field (Sweetman & Warman, 2014).

5.3.1.3 Adjusted Aspirations and Migration Intent.

Many participants who reported a shift in career goals retained their initial aspirations and sought promotions within their current roles, while others adjusted their goals towards stability, requalification and entrepreneurship. This adjustment reflects the observation by Somerville & Walsworth (2010) that skilled immigrants revise their expectations in response to structural barriers (Somerville & Walsworth, 2010). Some participants exhibited a pragmatic shift in career goals, concentrating on the accumulation of adequate retirement savings or the preservation of their current roles.

For some individuals, increasing disillusionment led to considerations of return on onward migration, or even pursuing a total career transition. The findings correspond with the observations of Crush et al. (2013) that skilled immigrants encountering ongoing barriers to professional integration may consider returning to their country of origin or migrating

onward to a third country (Crush et al., 2013). These decisions underscore the long-term implications of misalignment, showing how systemic barriers affect not only career development but also broader settlement and mobility pathways (Thomas, 2021).

The analysis of career misalignment and downward mobility shows that many skilled South African immigrants entered the Canadian labour market in positions that did not reflect their qualifications and skills. These outcomes were closely connected to how international qualifications are assessed and valued in Canada. For some, the inability to fully use their qualifications contributed to growing frustration, and some participants even considered returning to South Africa or migrating onwards to a third country. This disconnect between recognition on paper and recognition in practice illustrates the systemic devaluation of international credentials. The following section examines how credential recognition processes and employer perceptions reinforce exclusion from appropriate employment, deepening the obstacles to professional integration.

5.3.2 Credential Devaluation and Exclusion

5.3.2.1 Assessment Outcomes and Partial Recognition.

The findings revealed that while most participants had their credentials assessed, the outcome was inconsistent, partial or conditional on Canadian requalification. These findings resonate with Bauder's (2003) work on "immigrant penalty", where foreign qualified professionals are systematically disadvantaged in licensing and credential processes (Bauder, 2003). It also aligns with Sakamoto et al. (2010), who argued that institutional privileging of Canadian education reinforces a hierarchy that systematically disadvantages foreign qualified professionals. Although just over half of participants' credentials were formally accepted, this recognition rarely translated into equivalent and meaningful

employment experiences, and most participants needed Canadian requalification or licencing to gain access to professional roles (Guo, 2009).

5.3.2.2 Professional Identity and Emotional Impact.

Credential devaluation not only undermines professional identity but also delays career development. Participants with doctorates, advanced professional designations or trade certifications described the devaluation of credentials as deeply demoralizing. As Sakamoto et al. (2010) noted, the devaluation of credentials undermines not only labour market prospects but also professional self-worth. Participants described how this loss of recognition diminished their sense of identity and led to frustration and disillusionment, and in several cases led to a re-evaluation of future career goals.

5.3.2.3 Systemic Discrimination and Policy Recognition.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2013) has successfully argued that excluding competent foreign qualified individuals from equitable employment opportunities by devaluing credentials amounts to systemic discrimination (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013). Recent legislative reforms, such as Ontario's *Working for Workers Four Act, 2023 (Bill 149)*, which requires employers to disclose when "Canadian experience" is a stated job requirement, signal a recognition of deep-rooted credential and "Canadian experience" barriers that continue to undermine immigrant labour market participation. These findings reinforce the literature on how institutionalized credential recognition processes perpetuate inequality and limit labour market participation (Bauder, 2003; Foster, 2015).

5.3.3 The "Canadian Experience" Requirement

The notion of "Canadian experience" emerged both as an explicit and implicit barrier, with 7 out of 10 participants encountering these barriers. This finding aligns with

Sakamoto et al. (2010), who described it as a gatekeeping mechanism that allows employers to mask discriminatory practices framed as “local familiarity and culture”. Participants noted that the term itself was vague and not a neutral or purely technical criterion. More than half of the participants understood “Canadian experience” as prior work or volunteer services with a Canadian company. At the same time, the minority interpreted it as a combination of soft skills and cultural nuances. Sakamoto et al. (2010) emphasized that the notion of “Canadian experience” functions as tacit knowledge, shaped by subjective cultural expectations rather than by objective or measurable criteria.

The vagueness of the requirement made it difficult for participants to challenge it, as it lacked defined criteria. Both Rudenko (2012) and Foster (2015) have highlighted how this requirement reinforces Eurocentric labour market norms by privileging Canadian-born individuals while excluding equally qualified immigrants. Notably, several participants linked the “Canadian experience” requirement directly to human rights concerns, echoing the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s (2013) argument that constitutes it as indirect discrimination.

5.3.4 Human Rights and Discrimination

The findings revealed that participants experienced the requirement for “Canadian experience” as a vague and exclusionary condition that also functions as a gatekeeping mechanism to meaningful employment. This finding aligns with broader human rights frameworks that have identified this practice as discriminatory. The *Canadian Human Rights Act (1985)* established that employment-related decisions must be free from both direct and indirect forms of discrimination, which provides a legal basis for challenging systemic barriers that marginalize immigrants (Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985).

At the provincial level, only two jurisdictions have enacted legislation to address this barrier. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2013) explicitly identified the “Canadian experience” requirement as a discriminatory practice, unless it is proven to be a bona fide occupational requirement. Building on this recognition, the Government of Ontario passed *Bill 149, Working for Workers Four Act,* in March 2024, which effectively banned this requirement across more than 30 regulated professions, including engineering, accounting, teaching and healthcare (Government of Ontario, 2024; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013). More recently, British Columbia introduced the *International Credentials Recognition Act (2023)*, which prohibits regulatory authorities from requiring the “Canadian experience” as a condition for licencing in 18 of the regulatory bodies (Government of British Columbia, 2024), effective July 1, 2025. These reforms represent a direct policy response to long-standing concerns by human rights bodies and the voices of immigrants.

The acknowledgement of this barrier at the provincial level highlights that the “Canadian experience” requirement is not merely an administrative criterion, but a mechanism for systemic discrimination. The convergence of evidence underscores that employment barriers experienced by skilled South African immigrants are not simply individual setbacks, but a form of discriminatory practices that conflict with the principles set out in Section 7 of the Canadian Human Rights Act (Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985). This misalignment between formal policy commitments and labour market practices reflects what Bauder (2003) referred to as “immigrant penalty”, where structural inequities persist despite formal guarantees of equality. The lived experiences from most participants revealed that this requirement prevented them from entering their chosen field on a recognized level, despite strong international qualifications and skills (Government of Ontario, 2024; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013). Both Sakamoto et al. (2010) and

Foster (2015) emphasized that privileging Canadian-trained professionals while marginalizing foreign credentials perpetuates systemic inequality.

5.4 Other Employment Barriers

In addition to significant employment barriers already addressed, participants identified two additional challenges that shaped their career development: the lack of professional networks and language and accent bias. These findings mirror broader literature showing that social capital and networking are essential to accessing employment opportunities in Canada (Wald & Fang, 2008). Accent discrimination also often resembles deeper exclusionary attitudes than actual communication deficits (Creese & Kambere, 2003).

5.4.1 Lack of Networks

Nearly half of the participants rated the lack of networks as a significant or major barrier, emphasizing that gaining recognition with employers often required an existing personal or professional contact. As one participant explained, "*you have to have a community or network of* people" to be considered. This finding aligns with Wald & Fang (2008), who noted that immigrants without established social capital face structural disadvantages in securing meaningful employment (Wald & Fang, 2008).

5.4.2 Language and Accent Bias

Although a minority of participants viewed accent bias as a significant barrier, interview narratives revealed its everyday impact. This finding resonates with Creese and Kambere (2003), who found that language and accent bias limited access to employment opportunities and reinforced stereotypes of incompetence even when language proficiency was strong (Creese & Kambere, 2003). Despite South Africa's English-based education

system, participants' experiences suggest that accent often served as a marker of being an "outside", rather than an indication of inadequate English ability.

Together, these two barriers highlight how informal and often hidden barriers intersect with systemic ones, compounding the challenges that immigrants face to secure equitable and meaningful employment opportunities.

5.5 Navigating Barriers: Resilience and Adaptive Strategies

Despite the employment barriers identified in previous sections, South African immigrants demonstrated resilience and agency in navigating the Canadian labour market by adopting a variety of strategies to overcome these challenges. Strategies included pursuing requalification and licensing, shifting career goals, building networks and engaging in entrepreneurship. These responses reflect what Sommerville and Walsworth (2010) described as the "adaptive recalibration" of immigrant expectations and strategies in the face of structural constraints (Somerville & Walsworth, 2010).

5.5.1 Resilience and Adaptive Strategies

Participant illustrated resilience through pragmatic adaptation to their circumstances. Some chose to requalify and pursue Canadian accreditation, which aligns with Sweeman and Warman's (2014) observation that local qualifications improve employment alignment. Others shifted their careers to adjacent or sometimes entirely different fields, reflecting flexibility and a "never give up" attitude. One participant noted the importance of "starting over" in a different field as a way to secure stability, even if it meant abandoning long-term professional aspirations. This finding mirrors Picot et al.'s (2023) finding that immigrants often accept downward mobility in occupation as part of the settlement process. While resilience highlights the determination and even creativity of

immigrants, it also underscores the persistence of barriers that require systemic solutions rather than individual adaptation.

5.5.2 Adjusted Aspirations and Migration Intent

Many participant were pragmatic and adjusted their long-term aspirations to prioritize stability and financial security over professional alignment. Others turned to entrepreneurship or self-employment as a way to bypass discriminatory hiring practices, which is consistent with Basran and Zong (1998), who found that entrepreneurship often becomes a "survival strategy" for marginalized immigrants (Basran & Zong, 1998). For some, resilience manifested as a growing disillusionment that led to considerations of return migration or migration to a third country. This finding aligns with Crush et al. (2023), who found that skilled immigrants facing persistent exclusion reconsider their long-term settlement plans.

While participants' resilience and adaptive strategies reveal determination, adaptability and flexibility, it should not be a substitute for overcoming employment barriers and structural inequities. From these findings, it is clear that resilience is not about perseverance alone, but also about shifting goals in ways that can reshape career development. Requalifying, shifting career goals or adjusting aspirations often require significant financial and emotional investment, with long-term implications for economic stability. As Reitz (2017) and Somerville & Walsworth (2010) noted, the cumulative effects of deskilling and adaptation strategies contribute to divergent economic outcomes between immigrants and Canadian-born workers. The following section examines how these adaptations shaped participants' financial stability (Reitz, 2007; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010).

5.6 Economic Outcomes and Financial Stability

The adaptive strategies employed by participants shaped their career development and economic outcomes. While most of the participants secured employment, the prevalence of underemployment, survival jobs, and career shifts translated into lower earnings, reduced savings and delayed investment opportunities. This situation would not have been the case if they had not faced credential devaluation and other employment barriers as described. These findings align with Reitz (2007), who argued that systemic barriers contribute directly to wage gaps and economic inequality between immigrants and Canadian-born workers. For participants, financial stability was not solely determined by employment status, but by the quality and alignment of their work, the ability to save and invest, support family, and the long-term consequences for retirement planning.

5.6.1 Income, Savings, and Investments

Several participant reported that their employment outcomes limited their ability to save and invest, particularly in the first few years following immigration. While most participant was employed full-time, underemployment and survival jobs contributed to lower levels of income, resulting in constrained financial capacity to invest in property or contribute meaningfully to retirement plans. Sakamoto et al. (2010) cautioned against thinking that *any* employment means successful integration into the labour market, noting that persistent employment on lower-skilled and lower-paying jobs could lead to loss of professional skills. This finding aligns with participants' experiences that even full-time employment did not automatically translate to financial stability.

A notable contradiction emerged between participants' financial stability and their financial capacity. While steady employment provided day-to-day stability, underemployment and survival jobs limited their ability to save, invest, or build long-term

wealth. As Sakamoto et al. (2010) cautioned, employment alone should not be mistaken for successful integration, since the quality of work ultimately determines economic outcomes.

5.6.2 Long-term Financial Stability

The gap between financial stability and financial capacity carried long-term consequences for the economic security of participants. Some participants emphasized that working in lower-skilled roles restricted their ability to accumulate adequate retirement savings, while others noted difficulties in supporting dependents, both in Canada and South Africa. These concerns align with Thomas (2021), who highlights that immigrants often make financial sacrifices to secure settlement and that these sacrifices usually extend into long-term insecurities (Thomas, 2021). Picot et al. (2023) also observed a persistent wage gap between immigrants and Canadian-born workers over time, affecting the financial stability of immigrants. For many participants, the financial challenges were not only immediate but projected into the future, reflecting the compounding effect of systemic barriers and economic integration.

These financial insecurities did not exist in isolation but profoundly influenced participants' broader sense of belonging and long-term settlement decisions, which will be explored in the next section.

5.7 Belonging, Identity and Migration Intent

Participants revealed that employment outcomes and financial stability were closely tied to identity and further settlement choices. For some, the experiences of exclusion and limited economic mobility led to disillusionment, prompting considerations of return migration or onward migration to a third country. Others expressed determination to persevere, "never give up," and drawing on family commitments, community ties and cultural adaptation to sustain their integration. These findings resonate with Bauder (2023),

who highlighted that systemic barriers have an impact on immigrants' sense of belonging. In contrast, Crush et al. (2013) observed that migration intent is often shaped by whether long-term expectations of opportunities and inclusion are fulfilled. Belonging was not fixed, but constantly reshaped, influenced by both systemic opportunities and resilience that immigrants demonstrated to navigate them.

5.7.1 Belonging and Identity

The definition of belonging depended on how participants were recognized within the labour market and broader society. There were many positive experiences of community support and social inclusion, leading to a stronger sense of settlement. In contrast, ongoing exclusion and deskilling weakened participants' sense of belonging and identification with Canada as their new "home". Sakamoto et al. (2010) argued that the "Canadian experience" requirement not only shapes employment outcomes, but also signals who is considered an "insider" or an "outsider". This finding aligns with Guo's (2009) critique that systemic barriers in credential recognition undermine not only professional identity but also immigrants' sense of self-worth and belonging. The narratives of participants suggested that identity was continually renegotiated, balancing aspirations of integration with the realities of systemic marginalization.

5.7.2 Migration Intent

The findings suggested that participants' long-term plans were closely influenced by their labour market experiences and sense of belonging. While some revised their aspirations to be able to remain in Canada, others openly considered return migration to South Africa or onward migration to a third country. One participant reflected that the inability to progress professionally made them question "*what was the point of all the effort*", illustrating how employment outcomes shape broader settlement choices. These

findings correspond with Crush et al. (2013), who observed that persistent professional exclusion drove immigrants to re-examine their migration pathways. Similarly, Thomas (2021) noted that unmet expectations can reduce long-term commitment to the new host country, leading to strategic mobility decisions. From the findings, it was clear that migration intent was not a fixed decision, but negotiated against both available opportunities and ongoing exclusion.

In conclusion, this discussion highlights that the complex interplay of systemic barriers, institutional practices, and personal strategies shapes labour market integration of skilled South African immigrants. Despite having high levels of education and professional expertise, participants faced persistent obstacles such as the “Canadian experience” requirement, credential devaluation, career misalignment, the lack of professional and social networks and language and accent bias, which limited economic outcomes and their sense of belonging. At the same time, this group of immigrants demonstrated resilience, adaptability and strategic responses to underscore both the agency of immigrants and the limitations of individual efforts in overcoming structural inequities. Together, these findings suggest that meaningful change requires not only immigrant perseverance but also systemic reform to create equitable pathways for professional recognition and economic inclusion.

5.8 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study carry significant implications for both policy and practice. While participants demonstrated resilience and adaptability in navigating these barriers, their individual strategies alone can not overcome systemic inequalities. This section outlines the broader policy reforms and organizational practices that are needed to address these barriers and strengthen equitable pathways and integration for skilled immigrants.

5.8.1 Policy Implications

The findings highlight the urgent need for consistent and transparent credential recognition processes across all provinces, as well as the elimination of the "Canadian experience" requirement in both regulated and non-regulated sectors. While Ontario's *Working for Workers Four Act (2024)* and British Columbia's *International Credentials Recognition Act (2023)* made significant progress, these reforms remain fragmented, leaving immigrants dependent on uneven provincial approaches (Government of British Columbia, 2024; Government of Ontario, 2024). Anchoring such reforms within the broader framework of the *Canadian Human Rights Act (1985)* and the Ontario Human Rights Commission's (2013) recognition of the "Canadian experience" requirement as a form of systemic discrimination, underscores the need for a more vigorous national enforcement (Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985; Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985). To be effective, policy reforms must shift from incremental changes to a unified, rights-informed approach that ensures skilled immigrants have fair and consistent access to professional opportunities across Canada (Bauder, 2003; Foster, 2015; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013).

5.8.2 Practice Implications

At the organizational level, employers must critically examine hiring practices that privilege local experience and reinforce underlying bias. Literature suggests that the devaluation of foreign credentials, limited access to professional networks, and language and accent bias reinforce structural exclusion (Creese & Kambere, 2003; Wald & Fang, 2008). To address these practices, organizations should adopt inclusive recruitment processes, structured mentorship programs, and targeted professional development pathways that recognize the value of international expertise. Embedding equity and inclusion principles into workplace culture aligns with human rights obligations (Canadian

Human Rights Act, 1985) and also strengthens organizational performance. Employers who effectively integrate immigrant talent will benefit from not only fulfilling social responsibility, but also from increased innovation, global perspectives and long-term competitiveness in an interconnected economy. Viewed through a systems thinking lens, such integration enhances organizational adaptability and resilience by recognizing diversity as a critical driver of sustainable success (Laszlo, 2012; Picot et al., 2023; Reitz, 2007).

These implications affirm that addressing employment barriers requires both systemic reform and organizational commitments. The next chapter builds on these insights by presenting conclusions and recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This study has examined the employment experiences of skilled South African immigrants in Canada, revealing how systemic and institutional barriers have shaped their labour market integration. Despite arriving with advanced qualifications, professional expertise, resilience, and a “never give up” attitude, participants often faced persistent challenges such as the “Canadian experience” requirement, credential devaluation, career misalignment, limited professional and social networks, and language and accent bias. These barriers constrained not only their career development, but also their financial stability, professional identity and long-term sense of belonging.

At the same time, participants demonstrated remarkable adaptability by pursuing Canadian requalification, shifting careers, or turning to entrepreneurship. While these strategies highlight resilience, they also underscore the limitations of relying on individual perseverance to address deeply embedded structural inequities. The findings confirmed

that immigrant exclusion is not simply a matter of personal adjustment but reflects broader systemic discrimination and uneven policy responses across Canadian provinces.

Ultimately, this study concludes that meaningful inclusion of immigrant talent requires more than individual determination. It calls for coordinated policy reform, organizational responsibility, and a collective recognition that international expertise is an asset to Canada's social and economic future.

6.2 Revisiting the Research Questions

This study was guided by four questions. The findings provided the following responses:

6.2.1 How do the notions of "Canadian experience" shape the career development and economic outcomes of skilled South Africans in Canada?

The findings confirmed that the "Canadian experience" requirement, along with credential devaluation, lack of professional networks, and language and accent bias, significantly strained participants' access to meaningful employment. These barriers often led to career misalignment, underemployment, and downward mobility, which in turn limited financial capacity and stability, delayed investment, and created long-term insecurities in retirement and family support.

6.2.2 In what ways does systemic discrimination intersect with the "Canadian experience" requirement to shape the labour market integration experiences of skilled South African immigrants?

Participant described the "Canadian experience" as vague and exclusionary, functioning as a gatekeeping mechanism that reinforced discriminatory hiring practices. This finding aligns with human rights bodies that identified the requirement as indirect

discrimination. By privileging Canadian-born or Canadian-trained candidates, employers perpetuated systemic inequalities that excluded otherwise highly qualified immigrants.

6.2.3 How do the pre-arrival employment expectations of skilled South African immigrants compare to their actual labour market experiences in Canada, particularly in relation to the "Canadian experience" requirement and other employment barriers they face?

Pre-arrival expectations were high and shaped by Canada's reputation for valuing skills and offering opportunities. However, actual labour market experiences revealed significant mismatches, showing many participants were unable to work in their trained fields, were forced to accept survival or lower-skilled jobs, or had to requalify at considerable financial and emotional cost. This mismatch between expectations and reality led to frustration, disillusionment, and, for some participants, reconsideration of their long-term settlement plans.

6.2.4 In what ways does the "Canadian experience" requirement intersect with issues of human rights and discrimination in the labour market?

The study found that the "Canadian experience" requirement not only perpetuated systemic discrimination, but also conflicted with principles from the *Canadian Human Rights Act (1985)*. While reforms in Ontario and British Columbia represent steps towards greater fairness, participants' lived experiences demonstrated that exclusionary practices remain widespread. This disconnect between policy commitments and workplace realities highlights the persistence of structural discrimination within Canada's labour market.

Together, these findings confirm that the "Canadian experience" requirement is not a neutral hiring standard, but a systemic barrier with profound implications for skilled

immigrants' professional recognition, career development, economic security and sense of belonging in Canada.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Policy Recommendations

6.3.1.1 Credential Recognition Framework.

Create a standardized, transparent system for recognizing international qualifications across all provinces and territories of Canada, reducing reliance on fragmented provincial approaches.

Participants shared how provincial inconsistency in credential recognition created confusion and injustice. As one participant shared: *"I had to start the process again when I moved provinces. Each regulatory body has different requirements, it's exhausting and demoralizing".* This fragmentation leads to duplication, delays, and a sense of injustice, particularly for those in regulated professions.

A harmonized framework would enhance labour mobility, reduce administrative burden, and affirm Canada's commitment to valuing international talent through clear and consistent processes.

6.3.1.2 Elimination of the "Canadian experience" requirement.

Extend policy reforms in Ontario and British Columbia to all provinces and sectors in Canada, ensuring hiring practices are based on competencies rather than vague criteria.

Nearly 70% of participants reported being told, both directly and indirectly, that they lacked "Canadian experience". One participant noted: *"They said, 'You don't have Canadian experience. ' I said, 'But I have 10 years of experience doing the same job.' It felt like a code for saying they don't trust my background."* This vague and ill-defined requirement acts as a

systemic gatekeeping tool, reinforcing bias and preventing access to meaningful employment.

Eliminating this requirement would foster competency-based hiring, reduce employer bias, and uphold the spirit of the Canadian Human Rights Act by preventing indirect discrimination.

6.3.1.3 Human Rights Enforcement.

Strengthen oversight and accountability mechanisms to ensure that employment practices align with the *Canadian Human Rights Act (1985)* and explicitly address indirect discrimination.

Several participants felt powerless to challenge unfair treatment due to fear of retaliation or a lack of awareness. A survey participant noted: *"This isn't just unfair, it is discrimination. If they said it out loud, it would be illegal".*

Robust oversight would improve employer accountability, protect vulnerable workers, and demonstrate Canada's commitment to justice, equity, diversity, decolonization, and inclusion (JEDDI). Enforcing human rights will support a more equitable labour market.

6.3.1.4 Targeted Settlement Support.

Expand federally funded bridging programs, mentorship programs, and requalification programs, particularly for immigrants in regulated professions and for older workers who face compounded barriers.

Participants highlighted the lack of affordable and accessible support. Older participants and those in licensed fields faced compounding barriers. Only 9 participants had access to bridging programs, despite high demand. One participant noted: *"I could not*

afford to requalify and still pay rent. The bridging programs are too few and don't cover my profession".

More accessible support would reduce underemployment, rebuild professional identity, and unlock the potential of internationally trained professionals.

6.3.2 Practice Recommendations

6.3.2.1 Inclusive Recruitment and Hiring.

Employers should implement bias-reducing recruiting practices, including blind resume screening, structured interviews, and competency-based assessments.

Participants often felt that their applications were dismissed solely based on foreign education or unfamiliar company names, despite having strong qualifications and experience. A survey participant responded: *"I wish they assessed what I could bring to the table, not where I was from"*.

Shifting to competency-based assessment would reduce gatekeeping based on origin or unfamiliar qualifications. These practices would broaden access, mitigate unconscious bias, and create a more diverse and equitable talent pipeline.

6.3.2.2 Professional Networking and Mentorship.

Employers should develop structured mentorship opportunities with pathways into professional associations to help immigrants build social capital.

Networking emerged as the most essential survival strategy in Canada. Participants highlighted the value of guidance and connection in navigating unfamiliar systems. As one participant described: *"Having someone to guide me made all the difference. Without that, I'd still be lost"*.

Mentorship and networking structures would help immigrants build social capital, gain insider knowledge, accelerate integration, and foster belonging and retention.

6.3.2.3 Workplace Equity and Retention.

Employers should embed JEDDI principles (justice, equity, diversity, decolonization, inclusion) into organizational culture, ensuring not only equitable hiring practices but also fair promotion and advancement opportunities.

Participants described feeling undervalued, underutilized, stuck in stagnant roles, and excluded from leadership opportunities or promotions. One participant noted: *"They don't see your past. It's like none of it counts"*. Many spoke of feeling tolerated, but not truly included.

Inclusive cultures would foster long-term retention, innovation, build leadership pipelines, and unlock immigrant contributions by creating a workplace where immigrant talent can thrive and advance equitably.

6.3.2.4 Recognition of International Qualifications and Experiences.

Employers should actively value foreign qualifications and skills as a source of innovation, adaptability, and competitiveness in a global economy.

Participants reported that their foreign qualifications and experiences were dismissed or devalued by employers. One participant noted: *"They acted like I came here with nothing"*. Participants described feeling undervalued or having to *"start over"* despite having years of experience.

Recognition of international qualifications and experiences would lead to better job alignment, promote fair career advancement, reduce the waste of skills, and strengthen organizational competitiveness in a globalized economy. It will also reduce the long-term economic and psychological toll of professional downgrading.

6.3.3 Future Research

Possible future research includes the following:

6.3.3.1 Provincial Comparisons.

Explore how differences in provincial legislation and labour markets affect immigrant employment outcomes.

The findings highlighted stark contrasts in policy impact between Ontario, British Columbia and other provinces. A participant noted: *"If you move to the wrong province, your career dies before it starts"*.

Such research could inform national policy harmonization efforts and identify effective provincial practices.

6.3.3.3 Intersectional Analysis.

Examine how gender, age, race, and family responsibilities intersect and shape immigrant employment experiences.

Data revealed that women, especially mothers and older participants, faced unique barriers and slower integration. One survey participant noted: *"As an older black woman, I tick all the wrong boxes"*.

An intersectional lens would guide inclusive policy and ensure equity efforts reach those facing compounded exclusion.

6.3.3.4 Employer Perspectives.

Investigate employer perceptions of international credentials to better understand and address underlying biases in hiring practices.

Several participants reported vague or contradictory feedback from employers and recruiters, with some noting a disconnect between stated diversity values and actual practices.

Understanding employer decision-making would inform targeted interventions, training, and advocacy. It would also help address unconscious bias and refine assessment tools.

6.4 Final Reflection

This study set out to explore how employment barriers, particularly the "Canadian experience" requirement, shape the career development and economic outcomes of skilled South African immigrants in Canada. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined semi-structured interviews, survey data, and document review, this study examined how these barriers intersect with systemic discrimination, challenges related to credential recognition, and the resilience of individuals striving to rebuild their careers. The intention was to centre the lived experiences and expertise of immigrants who, despite holding advanced qualifications and extensive professional experience, continue to face exclusion from meaningful employment opportunities.

Although there is a growing body of literature on immigrant labour market integration in Canada, few studies have explicitly focused on the experiences of South African skilled immigrants or applied a community-engaged methodology grounded in Appreciative Inquiry and Action Research. This study helps address that gap by offering detailed, empirical insights and community-informed reflections on how skilled immigrants navigate complex systems of exclusion. It also proposes practical and justice-oriented recommendations aimed at transforming policy and practice in ways that honour immigrant potential.

At its core, this study is about more than employment outcomes. It is about people whose skills, dreams, and resilience deserve recognition. The voices of South African immigrants in this research remind us that talent knows no borders, yet systemic barriers

too often constrain opportunity. Canada now stands at a crossroad; by choosing fairness and equity, it can create a future where immigrant expertise is fully valued and where belonging and prosperity are shaped by all.

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Appendix A - Glossary

Canadian Experience

There are no clear guidelines on what "Canadian experience" or "Canadian work experience" entails. "Canadian work experience" generally refers to experience gained while working in Canada, a requirement of the Canadian Express Entry Program (Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2024a). On the other hand, "Canadian experience," as tacit knowledge, could include a broader range of experiences that include cultural and language understanding and familiarity with the Canadian workplace and society (Rudenko, 2012; Sakamoto et al., 2010). Through my inquiry, I will explore how the definition of "Canadian experience" is perceived by participants.

Credential Discounting

The nature of education and skills acquired abroad may not be adequately suited to the Canadian economy, contributing to a lower perceived value (Alboim et al., 2005).

Democratic Racism

The paradoxical existence of racialized attitudes toward immigrants, despite the official narrative promoting inclusivity and meritocracy (Sakamoto et al., 2010).

Human Capital Model of Immigrant Selection

A model for selecting immigrants that prioritizes individuals with strong human capital characteristics, such as higher levels of education, professional qualifications, skills, and experience, as this type of selection is advantageous for long-term economic benefit (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Settler-colonial norms

Values and practices are shaped by colonial systems that prioritize European ways of knowing, being and doing (Glenn, 2015).

Skilled Immigrants

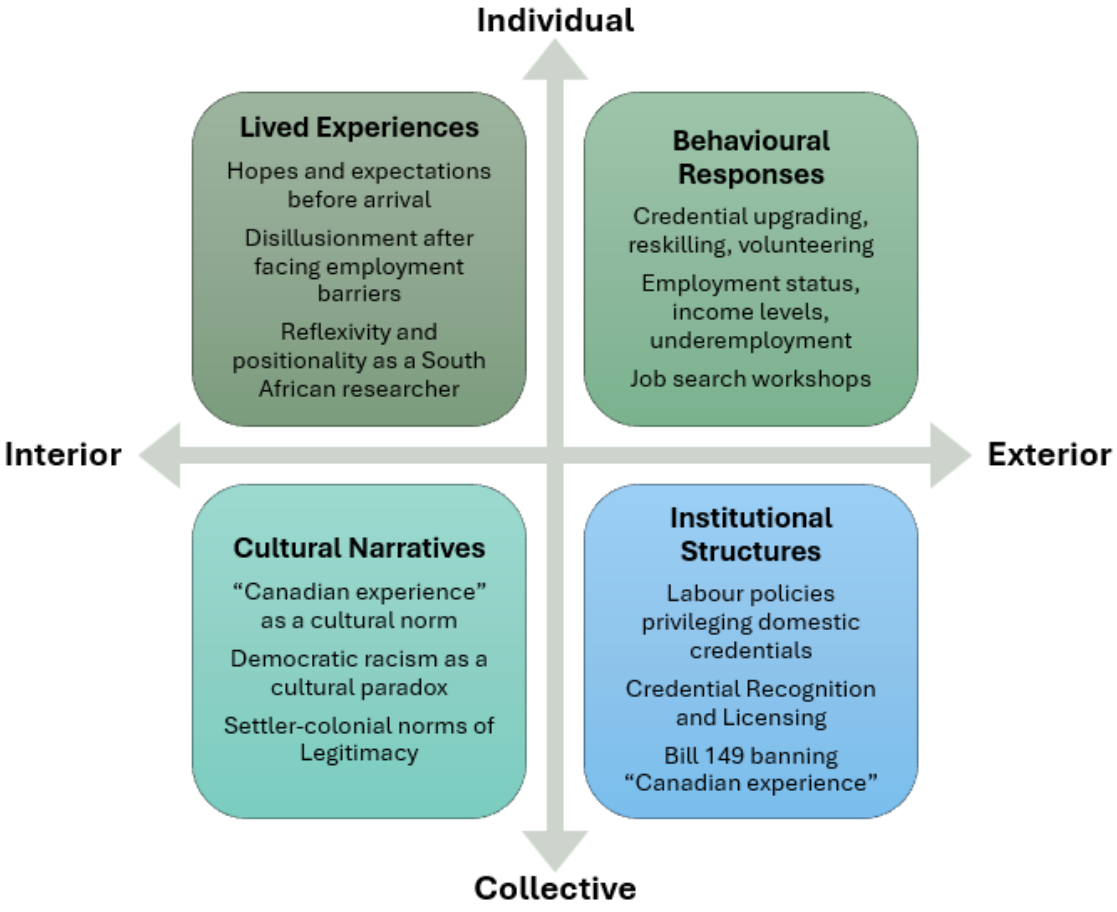
For this inquiry, a skilled immigrant will refer to an immigrant with the education, experience, and language skills to fill a job that typically requires a university degree, a college diploma or a skilled trade with apprenticeship training (Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2024b).

Tacit Knowledge

Tacit knowledge is that component of knowledge widely held by individuals but not readily expressed. It is gained through experience and personal insight and is often difficult to articulate (Dampney et al., 2007; Sakamoto et al., 2010).

Appendix B – Integral Theory

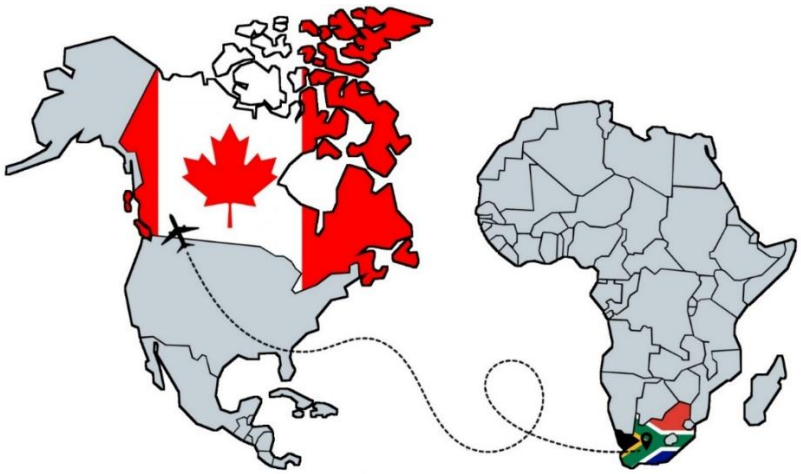
This quadrant mapping demonstrates that employment exclusion operates not only through structural mechanisms (LR) but also through cultural assumptions (LL) and internalized experiences (UL). Meaningful intervention requires engagement across all four quadrants: individual interior (UL - thoughts, emotions, identity), individual exterior (UR - behaviours, skills), collective interior (LL - culture, values, shared meanings), and collective exterior (LR - systems, institutions, policies)– personal, behavioural, cultural and systemic (Landrum & Gardner, 2005; Wilber, 2005).



Appendix C – Recruitment Flyers

Interviews

The Credential Paradox: Skilled, Educated and Excluded



Original artwork by Karla Kukkuk

Did you face employment barriers that impacted your career and financial well-being?

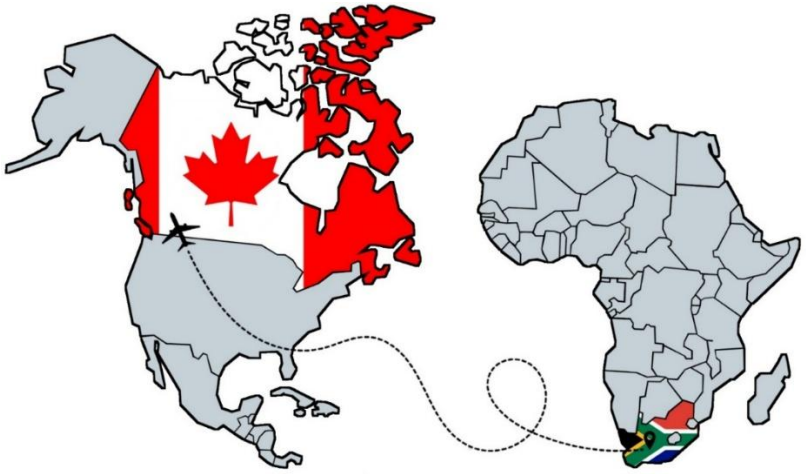
You are invited to participate in an interview to explore how the notion of "Canadian experience" and other employment barriers impact the labour market integration, career development and economic outcomes of skilled South Africans in Canada.

The aim of this project is to gain deeper insight into the experiences, challenges, and barriers that skilled South Africans face. By listening to your stories, the goal is to develop thoughtful recommendations and ensure your voices help inform and enrich ongoing research efforts to improve outcomes for skilled immigrants.

Participation is voluntary.
This interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes.

Online Surveys

The Credential Paradox: Skilled, Educated and Excluded



Original artwork by Karla Kukkuk

Did you face employment barriers that impacted your career and financial well-being?

You are invited to participate in an online survey to explore how the notion of "Canadian experience" and other employment barriers impact the labour market integration, career development and economic outcomes of skilled South Africans in Canada.

The aim of this project is to gain deeper insight into the experiences, challenges, and barriers that skilled South Africans face. By listening to your stories, the goal is to develop thoughtful recommendations and ensure your voices help inform and enrich ongoing research efforts to improve outcomes for skilled immigrants.

Participation is voluntary. This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes.
Please click on the link if you are willing to participate in this survey voluntarily.

Provide Survey Monkey Link here.

(Participant Information Sheet, followed by Participant Consent Form and Survey Questions)

Appendix D – Participant Information Sheet for Interviews

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

You are invited to participate in my research project, **The Credential Paradox: Skilled, Educated and Excluded.**

Researcher
Marlize Underhay
MA Candidate, Global Leadership,
Royal Roads University
Marlize.underhay@royalroads.ca
Tel 250 – 668 6970

Academic Supervisor
Dr Haval Ahmad, PhD
Academic Supervisor
Associate Faculty, Royal Roads University
Haval.1Ahmad@royalroads.ca
Tel 250 – 391 2600

Funding source
n/a

Purpose of the project
My project aims to investigate how employment barriers impact the labour market integration, career development and economic outcomes of skilled South Africans in Canada. This project aims to co-create resourceful strategies to navigate these barriers.

Participation
Participants will be limited to adult South African skilled immigrants residing in Canada for at least one year. A skilled immigrant has the education, experience, and language skills to fill a job that typically requires a university degree, a college diploma or a skilled trade with apprenticeship training. Individuals who do not meet this criterion will be excluded.

Your participation will consist of a semi-structured interview, and your involvement will last between 60 and 90 minutes. The questions will refer to your employment experiences in Canada and the impact of these experiences on your career development and economic outcomes. During the interview, you will have the opportunity to co-create resourceful strategies to navigate any employment barriers or achieve successful outcomes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw, interrupt, or end your participation at any time until your data becomes part of an anonymized dataset for the exclusive use of my project report. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence. By giving consent, you have not waived any rights to legal recourse. You will be reimbursed for any travelling expenses.

Risks
Participation in this project may involve minimal risks, primarily related to the potential emotional discomfort of discussing personal experiences regarding employment barriers and exclusion. To mitigate this, a supportive environment will be fostered during the interview. Participation in this project is voluntary, and you have the right to decline to answer any questions, interrupt, or end your participation in this interview without any consequences. Your identity as a participant will be safeguarded during all stages of this project.

Please contact Island Health Crisis Line at 1-888-494-3888 or the Fraser Health Mental Health crisis line at 1-877-820-7444 for free and confidential counselling support services.

There may be a potential risk related to the use of online platforms. Using Survey Monkey, Zoom, Dropbox, Plaud Note, and Facebook may involve storing data on servers outside Canada. I intend to remove the links and data as soon as the project is concluded.

Benefits
Participation in this interview may provide personal and community benefits. Participants may find the opportunity to share their stories meaningful and empower other South African immigrants. The findings of this project may contribute to a broader awareness of employment barriers and the co-creation of practical strategies to address employment barriers. There are no monetary benefits to participating in this interview. As a researcher, I will benefit from this project as a partial fulfillment of a Master's Degree in Global Leadership.

Confidentiality and privacy
Your participation in this project will remain confidential. Any personal information collected during the interview will be used solely for logistical purposes and will be accessible only to the researcher. You will be assigned a code name to protect your identity, and only the researcher will have access to the identifying details. De-identified research data will only be accessible to the research team, as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.

Research Results
In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts in Global Leadership, I will share my research findings as a summarized report with all participants.

Digital recording of interviews and conservation of data
Interviews will be recorded digitally and summarized in an anonymous format, and the results will be incorporated into the final report. Please note that your valuable ideas and opinions will appear in the report. However, any connection to your personal information

and identity will be strictly confidential. Results will be displayed as a summary of collected data, and no comments will be directly attributed to you.

Audio recordings, transcripts, research data, notes, and informed consent forms will be kept secure for one year. Paper documents will be destroyed upon being digitized, and digital data will be stored in a secure location in a password-protected folder on a password-protected device to which only the researcher has access. Data pertaining to an individual who has withdrawn at any time will not be retained.

Positionality as Researcher

As a South African immigrant, I bring an insider-outside perspective shaped by navigating credential recognition, cultural adjustments and labour integration in Canada. This positionality provides proximity to and critical distance from the experience I aim to explore. There are no known or anticipated conflicts of interest associated with this project. The researcher has no financial, personal, or professional interests that could unduly influence the conduct or outcomes of the research.

Ethical Approval and Questions

The RRU Research Ethics Board has approved this research project. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethicalreview@royalroads.ca.

If you have any questions regarding the research process, contact the Academic Supervisor, Haval Ahmad, at Haval.1Ahmad@royalroads.ca.

If you have any questions regarding this project, contact the Researcher, Marlize Underhay, at Marlize.underhay@royalroads.ca.

It is recommended that you keep a copy of this Participant Information Sheet for your records.

Appendix E – Participant Consent Form for Interviews

Royal Roads UNIVERSITY STUDENT

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

Title of the project: The Credential Paradox: Skilled, Educated and Excluded.

Researcher
Marlize Underhay
MA Candidate, Global Leadership, Royal Roads University
Marlize.underhay@royalroads.ca
Tel 250 – 668 6970

I hereby consent to the following:

1. I have reviewed the Participant Information Sheet.
2. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications.
3. By signing this letter, you indicate your voluntary and ongoing agreement to participate in this project.
4. By giving consent, you have not waived any rights to legal recourse.

Participant

Name:	
E-mail:	
Telephone number:	
Signature:	Date:
In-person Interview: ☐	Virtual Interview: ☐

Researcher

Name:
☐ I have provided time and opportunity for the participant to ask questions or for clarification. ☐ The participant's questions have been answered before participation. ☐ I reminded the participant of voluntary, ongoing consent and that consent can be withdrawn at any time.
Signature:
Date:

It is recommended that you keep a copy of this Participant Consent Form for your records.

Appendix F – Participant Information Sheet for Online Surveys

Royal Roads
UNIVERSITY
STUDENT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR ONLINE SURVEYS

You are invited to participate in my research project, **The Credential Paradox: Skilled, Educated and Excluded.**

Researcher
Marlize Underhay
MA Candidate, Global Leadership,
Royal Roads University
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Academic Supervisor
Dr Haval Ahmad, PhD
Academic Supervisor
Associate Faculty, Royal Roads University
Haval.1Ahmad@royalroads.ca
Tel 250 – 391 2600

Funding source
n/a

Purpose of the project
My project aims to investigate how employment barriers impact the labour market integration, career development and economic outcomes of skilled South Africans in Canada. This project aims to co-create resourceful strategies to navigate these barriers.

Participation
Participants will be limited to adult South African skilled immigrants residing in Canada for at least one year. A skilled immigrant has the education, experience, and language skills to fill a job that typically requires a university degree, a college diploma or a skilled trade with apprenticeship training. Individuals who do not meet this criterion will be excluded.

The survey is via an online platform, and your involvement will last between 15 and 20 minutes. The questions will refer to your employment experiences in Canada and the impact of these experiences on your career development and economic outcomes. At the end of the survey, you will have the opportunity to co-create resourceful strategies to navigate any employment barriers or achieve successful outcomes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw, interrupt, or end your participation at any time until your survey data becomes

part of an anonymized dataset for the exclusive use of my project report. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence. By giving consent, you have not waived any rights to legal recourse.

Risks
Participation in this project may involve minimal risks, primarily related to the potential emotional discomfort of discussing personal experiences regarding employment barriers and exclusion. To mitigate this, a supportive environment will be fostered during the interview. Participation in this project is voluntary, and you have the right to decline to answer any questions, interrupt, or end your participation in this interview without any consequences. Your identity as a participant will be safeguarded during all stages of this project.

Please contact Island Health Crisis Line at 1-888-494-3888 or the Fraser Health Mental Health crisis line at 1-877-820-7444 for free and confidential counselling support services.

There may be a potential risk related to the use of online platforms. Using Survey Monkey, Zoom, Dropbox, Plaud Note, and Facebook may involve storing data on servers outside Canada. I intend to remove the links and data as soon as the project is concluded.

Benefits
Participation in this survey may provide personal and community benefits. Participants may find the opportunity to share their stories meaningful and empower other South African immigrants. The findings of this project may contribute to a broader awareness of employment barriers and the co-creation of practical strategies to address employment barriers. There are no monetary benefits to participating in this survey. As a researcher, I will benefit from this project as a partial fulfillment of a Master's Degree in Global Leadership.

Confidentiality and privacy
Participation in the online survey is anonymous. No personal identifying information will be collected, and the researcher cannot link responses to individual participants. The only demographic detail collected is the province of residence. The survey data will be accessible only to the research team, as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.

Research Results
In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts in Global Leadership, I will share my research findings as a summarized report with all participants.

Conservation of data
Survey data will be summarized in an anonymous format, and the results will be incorporated into the final report. Please note that your valuable ideas and opinions will appear in the report. However, any connection to your personal information and identity will be strictly confidential. Results will be displayed as a summary of collected data, and no comments will be directly attributed to you.

Research data and survey forms will be kept secure for one year. Data will be stored in a secure location in a password-protected folder on a password-protected device to which

only the researcher has access. Data pertaining to an individual who has withdrawn at any time will not be retained.

Positionality as Researcher
As a South African immigrant, I bring an insider-outside perspective shaped by navigating credential recognition, cultural adjustments and labour integration in Canada. This positionality provides proximity to and critical distance from the experience I aim to explore. There are no known or anticipated conflicts of interest associated with this project. The researcher has no financial, personal, or professional interests that could unduly influence the conduct or outcomes of the research.

Ethical Approval and Questions
The RRU Research Ethics Board has approved this research project. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethicalreview@royalroads.ca.

If you have any questions regarding the research process, contact the Academic Supervisor, Haval Ahmad, at Haval.1Ahmad@royalroads.ca.

If you have any questions regarding this project, contact the Researcher, Marlize Underhay, at marlize.underhay@royalroads.ca.

It is recommended that you keep a copy of this Participant Information Sheet for your records.

Appendix G – Participant Consent Form for Online Surveys

(to follow the Participant Information Sheet before the questions)

Royal Roads
UNIVERSITY
STUDENT

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR ONLINE SURVEYS

Title of the project: The Credential Paradox: Skilled, Educated and Excluded.

Researcher
Marlize Underhay
MA Candidate, Global Leadership,
Royal Roads University
Marlize.underhay@royalroads.ca
Tel 250 – 668 6970

I hereby consent to the following:

1. I have reviewed the Participant Information Sheet.
2. Completing this survey and submitting the results indicates your voluntary and ongoing agreement to participate in this project.
3. By giving consent, you have not waived any rights to legal recourse.

Participant

Province where the participant resides:
Date:

Appendix H – Interview Guide

These semi-structured interview questions are AI-based and focus on career development, economic outcomes, systemic employment barriers and return migration decisions. These semi-structured interviews will take approximately 60-90 minutes to complete.

Background

1. Can you tell me about your professional and educational background before coming to Canada?

Discovery Phase

2. What influenced your decision to immigrate to Canada, and what were your hopes or expectations about employment here?
3. How have those expectations compared with reality?
4. Can you share a moment when your international experience, skills or identity were valued or acknowledged in Canada?
5. What strengths, values or experiences from your background have helped you most in your professional journey here?

Dream Phase

6. What kind of work would you ideally be doing in Canada? (Is that different from what you are doing now?
7. How have your career goals evolved since immigrating to Canada?
8. What kind of work environment would allow you to thrive professionally?
9. What unique contributions do you believe skilled immigrants like yourself can offer the Canadian labour market if given a chance?

Design Phase

10. Can you describe any challenges or barriers you have faced while trying to find work that matches your qualifications?
11. Have you ever been told or felt that you needed "Canadian experience"? How did that make you feel?
12. How do you understand the term "Canadian experience"?
13. Do you see any human rights issues that are related to the "Canadian experience" requirement?
14. What other barriers have you experienced?
15. Have you ever had to work in a job below your skill or qualification level? How did that affect you?
16. Have any programs, services, or communities helped you to navigate these barriers?
17. If you could change one policy, employer practice, or regulation, what would it be?

Destiny

18. How have your career experiences in Canada affected your financial stability and long-term goals? Were you able to save, invest or plan as expected?
19. Do you feel a sense of belonging in your profession? Why or why not?
20. Have you ever considered returning to South Africa or migrating to another country? Why or why not?
21. What message would you like to share with new immigrants to help them be successful in the Canadian labour market?

Appendix I – Online Survey Questions

These AI-based survey questions focus on career development, economic outcomes, systemic employment barriers and return migration decisions. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Background

1. What is your gender? (Male, Female, Prefer not to say)
2. What is your age group? (18-24 years, 25-29 years, 30-39 years, 40-49 years, 50-59 years, 60-69 years, 70+)
3. What is your highest level of education? (Diploma/Certificate, Bachelor's, Honours, Master's, Doctorate, Other (please specify))
4. What was your primary profession before immigrating to Canada? (short text)
5. How many years have you lived in Canada? (1-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-10 years, more than 10 years)
6. What is your current employment status? (full-time, part-time, contract, unemployed, survival job, other (please specify))
7. Is your current job related to your previous profession in South Africa? (yes/no/partially)

Discovery

8. How confident were you about your employment prospects before moving to Canada? (scale 1-5)
9. Do you feel your South African qualifications, training and experiences are valued in Canada? (Yes/no/unsure)
10. Have you had your credentials assessed in Canada? (yes/no/planning to)

11. If assessed, how would you describe the outcome? (fully recognized, partially recognized, not recognized)
12. What skills or personal strengths have helped you adapt professionally? (short text)
13. Do you feel your cultural background is seen as an asset in Canadian workplaces? (yes/no/unsure, and optional text)

Dream

14. If there were no employment barriers, what kind of job would you ideally be doing in Canada? (short text)
15. How closely does your current work align with your qualifications, skills and aspirations? (scale 1-5)
16. What is your top career goal for the next 3-5 years? (short text)
17. What kind of support or environment would help you thrive in your profession? (mentorship, bridging program, inclusive hiring, policy change, other (please specify))

Design

18. Have you ever been told or felt that you lacked "Canadian experience"? (yes, no, not directly, but implied)
19. How do you understand the term "Canadian experience"?
20. To what extent have the following been barriers in your employment journey? Matrix: 1 = not at all, 5 = major barrier
    - Lack of "Canadian experience"
    - Credential recognition issues
    - Language or accent bias
    - Discrimination
    - Lack of networks

- Underemployment

21. Have you worked in a survival or lower-skilled job since arriving in Canada? (yes/no) If yes, how has it impacted you? (short text)
22. What type of support services have been helpful to you, if any? (short text)
23. If you could change one thing that would make it easier for immigrants to succeed professionally, what would it be? (short text)

Destiny

24. How would you describe your financial situation now compared to when you arrived? (much worse/slightly worse/same/slightly better/much better)
25. Have your employment experiences affected your ability to save, invest or support your family? (yes/no/prefer not to say/optional short text)
26. Do you feel a sense of belonging in your professional community or workplace in Canada? (scale 1-5)
27. Have you considered returning to South Africa or migrating to another country? (yes/no/considering/name the other country)
28. If yes, what are your reasons for considering this? (short text)
29. What message would you like to share with new immigrants to help them be successful in the Canadian labour market? (paragraph)