The jobseeking experiences of skilled migrants in Australia: An exploration of occupational mobility outcomes

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Don Asanka Sanjeewa Livera Tennakoon

Master of Manufacturing Management – University of Colombo

Bachelor of Science – University of Kelaniya

School of Management

College of Business

RMIT University

September 2018
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed. Further, I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Don Asanka Sanjeewa Livera Tennakoon

17 September 2018
Acknowledgements

First of all, I am eternally grateful to the participants of this research for their generosity in sharing the lived experience of being skilled migrants to Australia. The way they have navigated through the obstacles of life was truly inspiring. I hope that this thesis has delivered the value and the recognition that their experience has well deserved.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my senior supervisor Associate Professor Darryn Snell and associate supervisor Dr Margaret Heffernan OAM. Without their mentoring, invaluable comments, constructive criticism and collegiality my journey of doing this thesis would have been a lot more difficult.

Much appreciation should also be given to Dr Keith Toh for the invaluable insights on critical realism led research and generous support in formatting the thesis. Further, my thankfulness should also be extended to all of my colleagues at RMIT for the joyful and pleasant moments throughout this journey.

Special thanks should also be extended to Lucy Gatto and her team in the Melbourne based career counselling service from which the qualitative phase participants of the research were sourced. Her generous support in hosting focus group discussions, research interviews and sharing a wealth of information and insights has enriched the qualitative phase of the research. Similarly, many thanks should also be given to Terry O’Reilly for letting me benefit from his extensive experience in the career counselling industry and sharing his webinar series with skilled migrant jobseekers.

Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt indebtedness to my parents for their selflessness in raising me to who I am today and instilling the value of education. Similarly, I owe my wife Vishani, and children Akein and Kiara, for their love and unwavering support throughout many endeavours in life including this thesis.
Table of Contents

DECLARATION .......................................................................................................................... I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ II
TABLE OF CONTENTS ......................................................................................................... III
LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................ VIII
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................ IX
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ................................................................................................. X
ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................ XI
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................... 1
  1.1 The context of the study .............................................................................................. 2
    1.1.1 The change of policy orientation ..................................................................... 3
    1.1.2 Divisions in the migration literature ................................................................. 4
  1.2 The importance of the occupational mobility perspective ....................................... 8
  1.3 Research objectives ................................................................................................. 9
  1.4 Research questions .................................................................................................. 10
  1.5 The researcher’s position in the research: An attempt to understand reflexivity ..... 10
  1.6 Thesis structure ....................................................................................................... 13
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................. 16
  2.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 16
  2.2 The terminological complexity of international mobility ....................................... 17
    2.2.1 Terminology to demarcate skilled migrants ..................................................... 18
  2.3 Key themes highlighted in the migration literature ................................................. 21
  2.4 Downward occupational mobility as a global issue: Evidence from countries around
    the world ....................................................................................................................... 21
  2.5 Skilled migrants’ employment outcomes in Australia: Some quantitative findings . 25
    2.5.1 Official findings and mobility explanations from the DIBP ....................... 25
    2.5.2 Alternative perspectives on skilled migrants’ employment outcomes .......... 27
  2.6 Occupational mobility barriers for skilled migrants in Australia ......................... 28
    2.6.1 The challenges in qualification recognition ........................................................ 29
    2.6.2 The role of professional bodies, recruiters and other forms of labour market
      ‘gatekeepers’ ............................................................................................................. 30
    2.6.3 Australian policies and regulations for equal employment opportunity (EEO) 32
2.7 Structure–agency interplay in migrant employment ........................................ 33
2.8 Chapter summary .......................................................................................... 35

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .......................................................... 37
3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................... 37
3.2 Rejecting methodological individualism: Ontological, analytical and methodological dualism ............................................................ 37
3.3 Structure–agency interplay: Ontological assumptions and epistemological orientation ................................................................. 38
3.4 The critical realists’ pathway: Ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality ...................................................... 41
3.5 Methodological options for critical realist research ........................................ 42
3.6 Adoption of mixed research methodology .................................................... 44
3.7 Defining research participants ....................................................................... 45
3.8 Research design .............................................................................................. 46
3.8.1 Phase 1: Quantitative phase ...................................................................... 48
3.8.2 Phase 2: Qualitative phase ....................................................................... 50
3.9 Reliability and validity .................................................................................... 55
3.10 Ethics consideration of the research .............................................................. 56
3.11 Chapter summary .......................................................................................... 56

CHAPTER 4 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS ............................................................. 57
4.1 Introduction .................................................................................................... 57
4.2 Background to the CSAM dataset .................................................................. 57
4.2.1 CSAM sample selection ........................................................................... 59
4.2.2 Outliers, weighting and data coding ........................................................ 60
4.2.3 The sample used in this research: Skill stream primary applicants ........... 60
4.3 Characteristics of migrants skills and educational qualifications .................. 62
4.3.1 The extent of home country educational qualifications and skills ............ 62
4.3.2 Skilled migrants’ attainments of Australian qualifications ....................... 64
4.3.3 Skilled migrants’ visa reporting categories .............................................. 64
4.4 Skilled migrants’ employment outcomes: A deeper examination .................. 66
4.5 The extent of employment among skilled migrants ........................................ 70
4.6 The quantity of work secured by the skilled migrants .................................... 72
4.7 Mapping skilled migrants’ occupational mobility ........................................... 73
4.7.1 Occupational mobility in terms of language background .................................. 73
4.7.2 Occupational mobility in terms of visa sponsorship status .................................. 76
4.7.3 Occupational mobility in terms of gender ......................................................... 79
4.8 Benefits of using CSAM data .................................................................................... 81
4.9 Limitations of using CSAM data ............................................................................... 83
4.10 Chapter summary ....................................................................................................... 84
CHAPTER 5 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS ............................................................................. 85
5.1 Introduction................................................................................................................ 85
5.2 Focus group findings: Occupation specific mobility barriers ..................................... 88
  5.2.1 Common occupational mobility barriers for accountancy and finance sector workers .................................................. 88
  5.2.2 Common occupational mobility barriers for administrative and office assistance workers ........................................ 90
  5.2.3 Common occupational mobility barriers for education and scientific industry workers .................................................. 91
  5.2.4 Common occupational mobility barriers for engineers and other technical sector workers .................................................. 91
5.3 Pre-arrival experience and occupational mobility .................................................. 93
  5.3.1 Selected 10 individuals: More detailed personal accounts of the skilled migrant experience .................................................. 93
  5.3.2 Preparation strategies and participants perceptions on Australian labour market in the pre-arrival stage .................................................. 110
  5.3.3 Skill assessment process: Participants’ understanding of the complicated sourcing process .................................................. 112
5.4 Post-arrival jobseeking experience and occupational mobility barriers .................. 116
  5.4.1 The similarities and differences between skilled migrants’ previous jobs and comparable Australian jobs .................................................. 117
  5.4.2 The need for Australian context-specific knowledge as a mobility barrier ......... 119
  5.4.3 The lack of local work experience as an occupational mobility barrier .......... 120
  5.4.4 Recognition of foreign qualifications and work experience ................................ 121
  5.4.5 Availability of jobs: Participants’ experiences in low job growth industries ..... 123
  5.4.6 Participants’ experiences with recruitment services and labour market intermediaries .................................................. 125
  5.4.7 English language proficiency and cultural distance as an occupational mobility barrier .................................................. 127
List of Tables

Table 1: Key diversity descriptors ........................................................................................................ 19
Table 2: Employment outcomes; after 6 months of arrival or has been granted visa (cohorts 1 to 5 pooled); DIAC (2011) ............................................................................................................ 25
Table 3: Summary of literature review (compiled by author) ............................................................ 36
Table 4: The properties of realists’ stratified ontology .......................................................................... 42
Table 5: Cross-tabulated data variables: developed by the author based on CSAM codebook (DIBP, 2015c) ........................................................................................................................ 50
Table 6: Sample descriptive statistics .................................................................................................. 61
Table 7: Top 5 pre-immigration educational qualifications .................................................................. 64
Table 8: Migrants’ visa reporting categories ...................................................................................... 65
Table 9: Labour force status of primary visa applicants, based on demographic characteristics .......... 67
Table 10: Labour force status of primary visa applicants, based on visa grant location ................. 68
Table 11: Labour force status of offshore primary visa applicants, based on demographic identities ........................................................................................................................................... 69
Table 12: Labour force status of offshore primary visa applicants, based on gender identities .......... 70
Table 13: Number of hours migrants have worked during the reference week in all jobs ............ 72
Table 14: Skill stream primary applicants’ occupational mobility in terms of language background .......................................................................................................................................................... 75
Table 15: Skill stream primary applicants’ occupational mobility in terms of visa sponsorship .......................................................................................................................................................... 77
Table 16: Skill stream primary applicants’ occupational mobility in terms of gender ................. 80
Table 17: Participant details of the qualitative phase .......................................................................... 86
Table 18: Push and pull factors influencing Neha’s migration decision ............................................ 94
Table 19: Push and pull factors influencing Farah’s migration decision ............................................ 98
Table 20: Individual in-depth interview phase participants’ employment status ......................... 109
Table 21: Occupational mobility barriers/facilitators identified through the post-arrival jobseeking experience ............................................................................................................................................... 116
Table 22: Participants’ reasons to anglicise their names .................................................................. 134
Table 23: The evolution of participants’ perceptions of Australian society with prolonged stay in Australia ........................................................................................................................................... 137
Table 24: Comparison of employability skills .................................................................................... 156
List of Figures

Figure 1: Major migrant sourcing regions from 2007–08 to 2016–17; adapted from (DIBP, 2017a) ........................................................................................................................................ 2

Figure 2: Employment outcomes of degree-qualified migrants who arrived in Canada in 1996–2001, by country/region; Hawthorne (2008) ................................................................. 24

Figure 3: The critical realists’ stratified ontology; Bhaskar (2013) ............................................. 41

Figure 4: An illustration of sequential mixed-method approach; adapted from (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 154) ........................................................................................................ 47

Figure 5: The research design .................................................................................................. 48

Figure 6: CSAM data collection waves; adapted from DIBP (2015b) .................................... 58

Figure 7: The DIBP’s statistical treatment of the population file ............................................ 59

Figure 8: ANZSCO skill levels of migrants’ nominated occupations ..................................... 63

Figure 9: Neha’s jobseeking process ....................................................................................... 94

Figure 10: Garry’s jobseeking process .................................................................................... 96

Figure 11: Farah’s jobseeking process ..................................................................................... 97

Figure 12: Tashmiha’s jobseeking process .............................................................................. 98

Figure 13: Felix’s jobseeking process .................................................................................... 100

Figure 14: Tino’s jobseeking process .................................................................................... 102

Figure 15: Gayan’s jobseeking process ................................................................................ 104

Figure 16: Ahmed’s jobseeking process .............................................................................. 106

Figure 17: Kevin’s jobseeking process ................................................................................ 107

Figure 18: Cynthia’s jobseeking process .......................................................................... 109

Figure 19: The morphogenetic sequence; adapted from (Archer, 1995) ............................... 146

Figure 20: Major skill categories; adapted from Balcar et al. (2011) .................................... 159

Figure 21: A comparison of skills necessary for two town planning jobs in India and Australia .......................................................................................................................... 160

Figure 22: The theoretical framework to better understand skilled migrants’ occupational mobility .................................................................................................................. 167
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZSCO</td>
<td>Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZSIC</td>
<td>Australian New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCED</td>
<td>Australian Standard Classification of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCHEAN</td>
<td>Business College Human Ethics Advisory Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALD</td>
<td>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Certified Practicing Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSAM</td>
<td>Continuous Survey of Australia’s Migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSOL</td>
<td>Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIAC</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBP</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Border Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEO</td>
<td>Equal Employment Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSM</td>
<td>General Skilled Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HACCP</td>
<td>Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSC</td>
<td>Key Selection Criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSIA</td>
<td>Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>Mainly English-speaking Background Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLTSSSL</td>
<td>Medium and Long-term Strategic Skills List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>Non–English-Speaking Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHS</td>
<td>Occupational Health and Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROL</td>
<td>Regional Occupation List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOL</td>
<td>Skilled Occupation List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSOL</td>
<td>Short-term Skilled Occupation List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSS</td>
<td>Temporary Skill Shortage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

The success of migrant workers in the Australian labour market has been a persistent theme of discussion in the Australian research and policy landscape for decades. The extant literature suggests a level of migrant disadvantage for skilled migrants from non–English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) compared to their mainly English-speaking background (MESB) counterparts. However, these explanations have divided between structural and agency-oriented perspectives, consequently impacting the understanding of the complex interplay of structural and agential concerns of occupational mobility conditioned by the dynamics of contemporary labour markets. This research seeks to understand the interplay of structure and agency in shaping the jobseeking experiences of NESB skilled migrants in Australia. The mixed-method research is underpinned by the meta-theoretical approach of critical realism and uses the Continuous Survey of Australia’s Migrants (CSAM) quantitative secondary data and qualitative semi-structured interviews with NESB skilled migrants in Australia. The quantitative phase identified that the NESB skilled migrants experience some downward occupational mobility in finding work commensurate with the skill levels of their nominated occupations. Further, visa sponsorship categories and gender were also found to influence their employment outcomes. The qualitative phase revealed (a) further evidence to existing occupational mobility barriers; (b) some emergent occupational mobility barriers/facilitators; and (c) skilled migrants’ agential responses to the identified occupational mobility barriers and facilitators. This research has contributed to the development of theory through its utilisation of critical realism as a methodological paradigm for migration research. Further, the findings inform research and policy through the identification of skilled migrants’ responses to the changing Australian labour market via their constantly modifying agential projects.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Migration plays a prominent role in post-colonial Australia. From a land owned and inhabited by generations of Indigenous Australians to a young settler society, Australia’s journey is filled with migration stories and the lived experience of millions of migrants. Diverse waves of migration such as convict settlers, early European free settlers, Chinese and European miners during the gold rush period, indentured labourer from Pacific islands, post–World War migration waves, asylum seekers from Asia, the Middle East and Africa and waves of contemporary migrants through recent migration programs have played an important role in shaping a once penal deportation colony to a multicultural society. Consequently, the contribution of migration towards the economic and social development of Australia has widely been acknowledged by the governing federal department (DIAC, 2013; DIBP, 2014a, 2017a), a variety of organisations working in the migration space (MCA, 2015; OECD, 2012; PC, 2015) and the academic literature (Cully, 2012; Jupp, 2007; Markus, 2014; Seetaram, 2012).

Whilst migration is considered to be a pivotal contributor to Australia’s nation-building process and economic prosperity, the size, nature and composition of migration intakes have consistently been politically contested (Jupp, 2007). Therefore, Australian immigration policies and programs have been shaped to reflect the socioeconomic challenges as well as the political sentiments towards migration at given times. In order to operate effectively in such a contested atmosphere, the policy-making process should be guided by rational research outcomes. Therefore, conducting migration research in Australia is imperative given the substantive nature of the Australian migration program (DIBP, 2017a). Moreover, the outcomes of the migration program are inherently and inevitably emergent in nature, since they are conditioned by the changing dynamics of the Australian society, economy and the labour market. This research is an attempt to contribute to the emergent body of migration research in Australia, through the perspective of occupational mobility of skilled migrants.

The mixed-method research is underpinned by the meta-theoretical approach of critical realism. In the quantitative first phase, the research seeks to understand the occupational mobility of a selected cohort of NESB skilled migrants through the Continuous Survey of Australia’s Migrants (CSAM) secondary dataset. Consequently, it outlines the insufficiency
of labour force status based statistics in understanding the full extent of employment. Through the jobseeking experience of NESB skilled migrant jobseekers, the qualitative second phase of the research seeks to understand how skilled migrants exercise their individual agency in response to structural labour market barriers and facilitators.

1.1 The context of the study

The changing dynamics of the Australian labour market has redefined once racially exclusive, physical labour-oriented Australian immigration policies into racially inclusive, skill-oriented immigration policies (Hawthorne, 1997, 2005, 2008). Consequently, the proportion of skill-based migration intakes has increased drastically compared to the other forms of migration. For example, the skilled permanent intake of the Australian migration program has increased from 19,697 to 127,774 from the 1996–97 program year to 2014–15, while the humanitarian intake has just increased from 11,902 to 13,748 within the same period, except the momentous hike of 19,988 in the 2012–13 program year (DIBP, 2015d, 2017a). In terms of migrant-sourcing countries, higher proportions of NESB migrants have become visible in Australian migration demographics. For instance, the Indian subcontinent and East Asia represented 30.2% and 16.9% of migrants respectively in the 2016–17 Australian migration program, making India and the Republic of China the highest migrant providing countries in the program. Conversely, the proportion of migrants from the region of the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man has declined since 2006–07. Figure 1 adapted from DIBP (2017a) illustrates the changing demographics of migrant-sourcing countries within the last decade.

![Figure 1: Major migrant sourcing regions from 2007–08 to 2016–17; adapted from (DIBP, 2017a)](image-url)
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1.1 The change of policy orientation

Subsequent to the skill-oriented focus of the Australian migration program, human capital endowments such as prime working age, higher English language proficiency, higher educational qualifications and job-related skills are considered as critical to apply as skilled migrants to Australia (DIAC, 2012; DIBP, 2016, 2017d, 2017f). Therefore, these credentials are highly rewarded in the points-tested skilled migration application processes\(^1\). Further, the skills and qualifications in the fields associated with low labour market demand are discounted through the labour market tested Skilled Occupation List (SOL) and Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List (CSOL) used in the skilled migration selection process (DIBP, 2017c; Hawthorne, 2014b). The introduction of a pre-immigration English test for 100+ occupations in 1993, the extension of mandatory English language testing for all skilled occupations in 1999, and the social security legislation reforms in 1997, which delayed the welfare access for the new migrants, can be considered as important policy changes that cemented the skill-oriented focus of the Australian migration program (Hamid, Hoang, & Kirkpatrick, 2018; Hawthorne, 2011, 2014b; Junankar & Mahuteau, 2005).

Apart from the skill-oriented focus, Australia recently adopted a two-step migration policy where a large number of temporary migrants with work entitlements enter into the Australian labour market annually under various visa schemes (Gregory, 2014; Hawthorne, 2011, 2014b). The study–migration pathway that facilitates former international students to apply for the skilled visas along with a range of short-term uncapped temporary skilled visas feed into the two-step migration pathway (Gregory, 2014; Hawthorne, 2014b, 2014d). Currently, these temporary visa holders fulfil approximately half of the vacancies in the permanent settlement program as onshore applicants (DIBP, 2015a, 2017a). Therefore, these applicants maintain a constant fluidity between visa categories. These migrants condition the employment outcomes of the Australian migration program due to the prior exposure to Australian society and the labour market during their time in Australia as temporary migrants (Ng Chok et al., 2018; Rajendran, Farquharson, & Hewege, 2017).

---

\(^1\) Australian migration program offers some point-tested skilled visas for skilled independent category applicants. The points are allocated for attributes such as age, English language skills, skilled employment in Australia and overseas, education qualifications and some other considerations such as partner skills and accredited community language skills (DIBP, 2017d, 2017e).
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1.2 Divisions in the migration literature

The employment outcomes of the Australian migration program have been explained through the contrasting perspectives of agential responsibilities against structural influence in the migration and occupational mobility literature (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Birrell, 2018; Cameron et al., 2013; Czaika, 2018; Dantas et al., 2017; Fleming, Kifle, & Kler, 2016; Giampapa & Canagarajah, 2017; Gimenez & Morgan, 2017; Hamid, Hoang, & Kirkpatrick, 2018; Harvey, Groutsis, & van den Broek, 2018; Hawthorne, 2016a, 2016b; Rajendran, Farquharson, & Hewege, 2017; Resia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2016; Westcott & Vazquez Maggio, 2016). Those who incline towards the individualists’ approach put individual agency in the centre of concerns in explaining migrants’ motivations to migrate, labour market participation, and social and occupational mobility. Career, social cohesion and welfare (in)-dependency are considered as outcomes of individual choices and responsibilities of migrants (Bakewell, 2010). The other end of the spectrum takes a more structuralist position and veers into the confinement of structure that barricades social and occupational mobility of migrants. Under such structuralist explanations, the frail individual agency has minimum choices and less room to manoeuvre (Bakewell, 2010; Fleetwood, 2008; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009; Vlase & Voicu, 2014). However, such a division in the migration literature is neither sufficient nor desirable in understanding the complexity, contextuality, variability and interconnectedness of human mobility in the increasingly complex postmodern world (Bakewell, 2010; Vlase & Voicu, 2014).

The division of research literature between structure and agency orientation in explaining migrants’ occupational and social mobility aligns with a similar division in migration theories across structure and agency perspectives (Bakewell, 2010; Castles, 2007, 2016b). However, these theories are capable of explaining certain parts of the migration process such as the role of sending countries, the role of receiving countries, the extent of individual agency in migration decision-making, the role of structural determinants, and how social transformation influenced the migration process (Massey et al., 1999; Massey et al., 1993; Portes, 1997). Some theorist (Castles, 2007, 2016b; Castles & Miller, 2009) argue this as a fundamental limitation of migration theory and seek to develop general migration theories that reflect the complexity of human mobility in contemporary society. The structure and agency-oriented perspectives offered by the prominent migration theories that explain voluntary migration can be summarised as below.
Neoclassical economics macro theory considers the wage differentials between developed and developing regions of the world as the prime motivator for migration (Massey et al., 1999; Massey et al., 1993). Consequently, migrants as individual rational actors respond to such wage differentials by moving to a region where they get the maximum return for their labour, skilled or otherwise. Therefore, labour markets are considered to be the primary determinants of migration instead of the other socio-political determinants. This perspective of migration places the individual agency of migrants’ in the centre of migration decision-making processes.

Neoclassical economics micro theory shares a similar agency-oriented perspective. Agents deliberate on the cost-benefit analysis of their migration decision and decide to move to a destination where they can receive the highest net-positive return for their investment on human capital (Massey et al., 1999; Massey et al., 1993). Contrasting the macro theory, which predominantly considers wage differentials; micro theory considers a variety of labour market moderating variables such as the material cost of moving, opportunity cost of moving, cost of acquiring new skills necessary for the destination such as new languages, the psychological cost of lost identity and earning potential in the destination. Migrants exercise their individual agency to a greater extent by calculating such cost-benefit analyses for alternative destinations and migrating to a destination which provides the highest net-positive return for their human capital attributes (Arango, 2017; Massey et al., 1993).

In contrast to neoclassical economic perspectives, the new economics of migration theory considers the role of families and households in migration decision-making processes. Instead of migration decisions being confined to migrants, both nuclear and extended family units of migrants contribute to the migration decision by collectively managing risks and optimising returns (Massey et al., 1993). Family units are in a better position to mitigate risks and optimise returns through collective labour. Examples such as grandparents taking care of children while parents migrate for work, in return receiving remittance to support families, substantiate the perspective of the new economics of migration. Remittance and other forms of micro finances provide the much-needed capital, in usually labour surplus and capital deficit migrant-sending countries. Therefore, the new economics of migration does not necessarily confine to the wage differentials between sending and receiving countries in explaining the voluntary migration process. However, both neoclassical economic theories
and the new economics of migration are essentially micro-level decision models where the migration decision is made by individuals against households (Massey et al., 1993).

Standing distinctly apart from the agency-oriented perspectives is dual labour market theory. Dual labour market theory suggests the demand for migrant labour in developed nations drives labour migration more than the structural push factors in the migrant-sending countries (Arango, 2017; Massey et al., 1993). The hierarchical occupational structures in labour markets have proven to be used as symbolic apparatuses for social status and affluence throughout the world. This creates a permanent demand for labour for the secondary labour market jobs that usually involve low paid, dirty, demanding and dangerous work (Anderson, 2010; Arango, 2017; Massey et al., 1993; Pajnik, 2016; Standing, 2014). Consequently, natives in developed nations with substantial social welfare systems have relatively low motivations to undertake such work.

Increasing wages to attract more workers for such secondary labour market jobs sometimes becomes difficult since the wage confers to status and prestige. Raising wages for the bottom tier of the occupational hierarchy would disrupt the socially defined status-remuneration link, calling for higher wages for all occupational levels above. This is often referred to as structural inflation in the dual labour market theory (Piore, 1979). Migrant labour provides an attractive compromise to structural inflation, where migrants do not necessarily conform to social status mechanisms in host countries, at least for a few years until they become acculturated with the host country value systems. Therefore, labour migration typically happens from developing countries to developed countries to fulfil the demand in secondary labour market jobs. The structure-oriented macro perspective of migration offered by dual labour market theory does not fully explain the skill-oriented Australian migration policies since the primary objective of the Australian migration program was to fulfil skilled shortages instead of sourcing migrant workers for the secondary labour market jobs. However, it has some strength in explaining the downward occupational mobility of NESB skilled migrants in Australia, where some skilled migrants ended up in secondary labour market jobs that are not commensurate with their skills, qualifications and prior work experiences.

The world system theory of migration provides another macro perspective to human mobility across national and international borders. This theory suggests migration as a natural consequence of the penetration of the capitalist system from its core in developed countries to
the periphery in developing countries (Arango, 2017; Massey et al., 1993). Therefore, international migration does not necessarily reflect the wage deferential patterns between countries. Instead, the capitalist market penetration creates a path for goods and capital to flow across national borders, consequently forging ideological and cultural links leading to transnational movement of labour from labour surplus to labour deficit regions.

Capitalist investment foments changes that create an uprooted, mobile population in peripheral countries while simultaneously forging strong material and cultural links with core countries, leading to transnational movement. (Massey et al., 1993, p. 447)

Further, migration utilises colonial ties between colonial masters and their former colonies. The cultural, linguistic, administrative and political links built during the colonial era facilitate the relatively smooth flow of economic migration between these countries.

Similar to the world system theory, network theory, institutional theory and the theory of cumulative causation also provide macro-level perspectives to the determinants of migration (Arango, 2017; Brettell & Hollifield, 2014). According to network theory, the interpersonal ties between former migrants and new migrants in origin and destination increase the likelihood of international migration by reducing the cost and risk of movement over time. The new migrants benefit from the social capital of former migrants such as with early settlement help, shared labour in taking care of dependents and better employment prospects through established networks. The migration programs with specific focus on family reunification provide prime examples for migration of this nature. However, migrants’ active agency still plays a prominent role in the migration decision-making process, since migrants exercise their individual agency in establishing and drawing on networks (Danchev & Porter, 2016).

Institutional theory (Brettell & Hollifield, 2014) explains how the process of institutionalisation and institutional bureaucracy sustain migration in the long run. Migration commonly faces the challenge of managing supply and demand for migration towards more attractive destinations. This creates a range of direct and indirect economic activities around migration such as migration agencies, labour contracting and employment agencies, consultancy and legal services providers, microfinance and credit providers, a real estate industry targeting migrant communities, and various not-for-profit initiative providing
services to migrants. Once started, migration becomes pivotal for these organisations to survive. Therefore, it creates a mutual dependency between migration and institutions working on migration-related affairs, leading to a system of migration dependent economies, which ultimately sustain migration.

Cumulative causation theory (Massey, 2015) further elaborates on some aspects of the network theory and institutional theory of migration. In addition to the establishment of migrant networks and institutional processes, when happening for a sustained period of time, migration alters the social context in favour of sustained migration in a cumulative way.

Social scientists have discussed six socioeconomic factors that are potentially affected by migration in the cumulative fashion: the distribution of income, the distribution of land, the organization of agriculture, culture, the regional distribution of human capital, and the social meaning of work. (Massey et al., 1993, p. 451)

Cumulative causation theory views international migration as a dynamic process which transforms societies by shifting values over time (Massey, 2015; Massey et al., 1993). For example, once a job is labelled as an “immigrant job” due to the higher concentration of immigrants working in that occupational category, it becomes less attractive among native workers; consequently, the need to recruit more migrant workers to fulfil the labour shortage in that particular occupation (e.g. care work and cleaning work in most developed countries). Therefore, cumulative causation theory takes a structure-oriented perspective in explaining the initiation and propagation of migration.

1.2 The importance of the occupational mobility perspective

As elaborated above, the migration literature uses various perspectives to understand different aspects of the migration process such as migrants’ motivations, employment outcomes and social mobility. Employment outcomes are considered to be an important performance measurement in the highly skill-oriented Australian migration program. The labour force status and income measurement criteria such as the unemployment rate, labour force participation rate and median annual full-time earnings have widely been used in the Australian Immigration Department led research as well as numerous other researches in Australia to measure the success of immigration policies and programs (DIAC, 2011; DIBP,
Chapter 1: Introduction

2014b, 2015b, 2015c; Hawthorne, 2014b; Junankar, Paul, & Yasmeen, 2010; Nguyen & Duncan, 2015, 2017). However, the above measurements possess limitations in understanding the extent of employment, since they are merely equipped to measure one’s ability to secure paid employment of some sort. These limitations will be analysed and exemplified in the quantitative findings chapter.

The current Australian migration program is driven by the demand for skilled labour to fulfil chronic skill shortages in identified areas of the Australian economy (Cameron et al., 2013; DIBP, 2014b, 2015b, 2017a), albeit that the existence of such skill shortages in some areas of the Australian labour market is questioned in some research (Birrell, 2018; Howe, 2013). Consequently, two-thirds of the migration program quota is allocated for the skilled stream while the remaining is allocated for family reunion and special eligibility purposes (DIBP, 2017a). Further, other forms of migration such as student migration, short-term employment visas and humanitarian movements are managed as separate programs.

As long as the desire for skilled labour drives the Australian migration program, occupational mobility (Fleming, Kifle, & Kler, 2016; Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2016) becomes vital to measure the effectiveness of Australian migration program outcomes. Occupational mobility is a better indicator of to what extent skilled migrants are capable of obtaining jobs commensurate with their skills, educational qualifications and prior work experiences. Therefore, this research uses occupational mobility as a perspective to understand skilled migrants’ transition from their home country occupations to Australian occupations. Consequently, it identifies the occupational mobility barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in Australia and how NESB skilled migrants’ exercise their individual agency in response to labour market barriers and facilitators. The following section will elaborate on the objectives of the research and the research questions.

1.3 Research objectives

The research aims to achieve the following objectives.

1. Identify the factors contributing to the jobseeking experience and occupational mobility of NESB skilled migrants in the Australian context.

2. Identify the structural and agential influences that condition skilled migrants’ jobseeking experiences and occupational mobility in Australia.
3. Understand how ‘migrant status’ impacts on the labour market experience and occupational mobility of NESB skilled migrants in Australia.

1.4 Research questions

The following two research questions have been addressed in this research.

Q1: What are the barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for in Australia?

Q2: How does their ‘migrant status’ affect NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for in Australia?

1.5 The researcher’s position in the research: An attempt to understand reflexivity

Contemporary sociological research questions the degree to which social research can be completely objective and value free; a popular positivist claim for a legitimate inquiry of reality (Berger, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Therefore, the interpretation of the social reality can be influenced by the socially positioned researcher and the research subject under investigation. As Berger (2015) explained, it is vital for every researcher to recognise their socio-political and cultural stance in order to understand the influence of the personal experience on their research work. Therefore, my background as a skilled migrant to Australia has a noteworthy impact on this research in terms of my interpretation of the research findings (Berger, 2015; Palaganas et al., 2017). Hence, it seems worthwhile to discuss my experience as a skilled migrant coming to Australia under the skilled permanent residency visa category. However, this is not an attempt to be claimed as ‘neutral or passive’ as a social researcher. It is rather a recognition of my position within the research.

I came to Australia as a skilled migrant ‘manufacturing manager’ under the permanent residency visa category from Sri Lanka, one of the top migrant-sourcing countries (DIAC, 2013) in the Australian migration program. The economic benefits have widely been considered as important motivational factors for migration (Arango, 2017; Castles, 2010; Castles & Miller, 2009; Massey et al., 1999). This had an impact on my decision to migrate to Australia. However, I have never suffered from desperate economic disadvantage, since both I and my spouse benefited from well remunerated and recognised primary labour market
jobs, thanks to public-funded higher education available in Sri Lanka. From the other push factors for migration, fleeing from persecution has never been a consideration in my migration decision-making process even though I migrated from a country that had suffered from a longstanding civil war. However, it is sensible to think that the social upheavals of a war-torn country could have had a subconscious impact on my migration decision. Therefore, our decision to migrate to Australia as a household had been highly influenced by the long-term socioeconomic benefits derived from the citizenship of a developed nation, international career exposure and access to a better higher education system.

Obtaining the permanent residency visa was a pleasant experience in my case compared to some of my colleagues who applied at that time. This relative ease could have been a result of my application, where I applied under the most desirable age category (25 to 32 years) with the highest point allocation, higher education qualifications, work experience and English language proficiency (DIBP, 2017d). Therefore, I was very optimistic about my future in the Australian manufacturing industry at the point I left Sri Lanka. Prior to migration, I did some ‘backyard research’ for job opportunities in Australia. I was fascinated by the number of job opportunities that had been available on popular job search websites and job portals for manufacturing and quality assurance professionals. All of these positive impressions served as further endorsements for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) (the Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC] at that time) claims for higher career success rates for skilled migrants, portrayed in the success stories on its website and its annual migration program outcome reports (DIBP, 2014b, 2015b, 2015c). In this sense my pre-arrival perception is quite similar to some of my research participants’ experiences as described in the qualitative findings chapter.

My post-arrival experience in terms of seeking jobs and getting settled in Australia is worthwhile to mention. Endowed with so-called ‘labour market favourable human capital attributes’ such as prime working age, higher education and English language proficiency, I started my settlement in Australia with much enthusiasm. The process of going through the administrative requirements for early migrants such as the enrollment for medical benefits and other government services was never a challenge for me. However, my jobseeking experience in Australia has similarities with some of my research participants. I started seeking jobs in the same occupational category, senior to middle management, where I was positioned in Sri Lanka, with expectations for horizontal occupational mobility. Struck by
constant failure often justified through lack of local work experience, prior educational qualification recognition difficulties and lack of Australian qualifications, I shifted my focus to entry-level jobs with the expectation of getting a foothold in the Australian labour market by heavily trimming my resume to fit the requirements for entry-level jobs. This time most employers and recruiters perceived me as overqualified and ‘too old’ for these entry-level jobs; something that I have heard in my constant follow-up inquiries. After applying for more than a hundred jobs commensurate with my skills and qualifications ultimately I decided to accept a couple of physically demanding and emotionally stressful secondary labour market jobs such as process work and cleaning to support my settlement costs and living expenses.

Baffled by the entrenched mobility barriers in the jobseeking process and motivated to regain my lost professional identity, I decided to take a 180 degree turn in my career to become who I am today; a social researcher with interests in international mobility. Instead of becoming victimised by the system, I decided to investigate and understand the system by using my migrant identity as strength; a decision, however, that came at a cost of leaving some of my prior education and occupational experience as a practising manufacturing manager behind. The same decision has given me the opportunity to explore an ocean of knowledge in a thought provoking and inspiring manner. Today, at the point of writing this thesis, I thoroughly enjoy my work that paved a pathway for me to get a glimpse of the life experiences of thousands of migrants. Further, it has broadened my world by providing access to a wider audience to discuss ‘the question of migration’ through my university teaching work and my engagement with migrant communities.

Being a researcher of migration and related affairs from a skilled migration background enabled me to access migrant communities, communicate effectively with migrants, and understand their stories from the migrants’ perspective. The first-hand migration experience, as well as the experience of numerous migrants whom I have encountered, have provided the inspiration for this research on top of my interests in the politics of human movements, wealth distribution and social order. The reflexivity embedded in the life experience through my migration journey can cast some preconceptions in my mind about the migration experience. However, rather than rejecting such reflexivity I am endeavouring to remain aware of it and equally prepare myself to challenge such preconceptions as the research progresses.


1.6 Thesis structure

The thesis contains seven chapters from the introduction to the conclusion. The following section summarises the content and purpose of each chapter.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction chapter introduces the topic by elaborating on the context of the research such as the nature of the Australian migration program, the changes that have taken place in the last few decades (1990–2018) in migration policies in Australia, and the division within migration literature. Then the chapter makes the case for an occupational mobility perspective in order to better understand skilled migration program outcomes in Australia. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the researcher’s position in the research as a skilled migrant to Australia in order to understand the effect of reflexivity in interpreting the research findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review chapter discusses a range of literature on Australian and international skilled migration. Starting with a discussion on the various terms used in the literature to demarcate different forms of skilled migration, the chapter endeavours to develop a definition to be used in the research to identify skilled migrants from non–English-speaking backgrounds or English-as-a-second language backgrounds. Then, the key themes highlighted in the research literature in terms of skilled migrant employment outcomes and occupational mobility are elaborated. Further, some statistics illustrating the nature and the magnitude of the occupational mobility challenges faced by skilled migrants are presented.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The research methodology chapter elaborates on the mixed research method used in the research. Starting with the rejection of methodological individualism, the chapter proposes methodological pluralism through the ontological assumptions and epistemological orientation of the research. Then, the chapter suggests the benefits of the critical realist approach in migration research to understand the structure–agency interplay in skilled migrant employment discourse. While proposing a mixed research methodology for the
research the chapter attempts to contribute to the development of critical realism led migration research.

**Chapter 4: Quantitative Findings**

Informed by the research methodology chapter, the quantitative findings chapter first introduces the CSAM secondary dataset used in the research. Subsequently, the chapter presents the research findings on the characteristics of migrants’ educational attainments, a key employment enabler for skilled migrants. Then, the research findings on the skilled migrants’ employment outcomes are presented. The chapter then exemplifies the insufficiency of mere employment status statistics in understanding the full extent of employment. Consequently, the chapter presents an occupational mobility map developed from the CSAM secondary dataset that illustrates skilled migrants’ transfer between the skill levels of home country occupations and the jobs they secured in Australia.

**Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings**

The qualitative findings chapter first presents the common occupational mobility barriers and facilitators identified through four focus group discussions with 26 NESB skilled migrant jobseekers in Australia. Subsequently, it elaborates on the jobseeking experience of 10 NESB skilled migrant jobseekers selected from the 26 participants. The jobseeking experience of the selected 10 individuals is presented in three phases: the pre-arrival experience; post-arrival jobseeking experience; and post-employment career progression and work experience. The chapter provides further evidence for some previously identified occupational mobility barriers and facilitators while proposing some emergent occupational mobility barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in Australia.

**Chapter 6: Discussion**

The discussion chapter discusses the quantitative and qualitative findings through the intersectionality of structural determinants and morphogenetic perspectives. It attempts to better understand the jobseeking experience of NESB skilled migrants by differentiating participants’ perceptions of the occupational mobility barriers and facilitators from the causally efficacious emergent properties of social structures. The chapter discusses how skilled migrants exercise their constrained agency under the influence of structural labour
market determinants. Further, the chapter proposes a theoretical framework to understand the occupational mobility barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in Australia.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The conclusion chapter closes the thesis with identified occupational mobility barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in Australia. Further, it elaborates how the thesis contributes to migration research and the development of critical realism led research methodology. Several policy recommendations leading to better integrate NESB skilled migrants into the Australian workforce are proposed. Finally, the chapter suggests areas for future research in skilled migration in Australia.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the Australian and international literature on skilled migration. The purpose of the literature review is to better understand the research area and inform the research’s inquiry approach. Such a review of migration literature is an imperative given the complex and multifaceted nature of migration research (Castles, 2007, 2016b). Informed by a critical realist orientation, no effort was put to develop a deductive conceptual framework as an outcome of the literature review (Bakewell, 2010; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). Instead, research findings are discussed with regard to migration literature. A theoretical framework to understand skilled migrants’ occupational mobility is developed as an outcome of the research.

The following discussion starts with an exploration of the terminological complexity of migration literature. This helps to demarcate the boundaries of the research (Al Ariss, 2010; Al Ariss et al., 2012; Andresen et al., 2014; Berry & Bell, 2012; Cerdin & Selmer, 2013; Peltokorpi & Jintae Froese, 2009). Subsequently, the chapter explores the international migration literature (Hawthorne, 2011, 2014b; Maher & Cawley, 2016; McGinnity et al., 2006; Mcphee, 2012; OECD, 2012; Pearson et al., 2012) with the purpose of understanding the spatiality of the problem under consideration. Then, some quantitative findings (DIAC, 2011; DIBP, 2015b, 2015c; Junankar & Mahuteau, 2005, 2007, 2008; Junankar, Paul, & Yasmeen, 2010) of the skilled migrants’ occupational mobility outcomes are discussed. These findings help to understand the magnitude of the occupational mobility barriers experienced by skilled migrants in finding skilled work, through a quantitative perspective. Later, some occupational mobility barriers/facilitators in the Australian context are explored through qualitative research literature (Asghar, Cameron, & Farivar, 2017; Birrell, 2018; Boese et al., 2013; Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Dantas et al., 2017; Misko, 2012; Ng Chok et al., 2018; Rajendran, Farquharson, & Hewege, 2017; Reid, 2012; Russia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2016, 2017; Rynderman & Flynn, 2016; Wen & Maani, 2018). Then the interplay between structural labour market determinants and migrants’ individual agency is discussed to inform the inquiry approach of this critical realism led research. The chapter finishes with a summary of the key literature and their highlighted themes.
2.2 The terminological complexity of international mobility

In order to theorise skilled migration, it is worthwhile to define the term ‘migrant’. The definition carries different values of migration rooted in multiple disciplines of literature such as sociology, labour economics, management, law, and policy studies. Some noteworthy differentiations in migration are ‘voluntary’ migration and ‘forced’ migration. ‘Voluntary’ migration is often defined by a variety of terms such as corporate expatriation, self-initiated expatriation, and migration (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Andresen, Biemann, & Pattie, 2015; Baruch & Forstenlechner, 2017). ‘Forced’ migration often refers to refugee and asylum seeker movements (Al Ariss, 2010; Berry & Bell, 2012; Faist, 2018). The focus of this research is limited to voluntary migration.

The term ‘migrant/s’ or ‘migration’ is a generic term that refers to the values of ‘the people in movement’, often marked by lines of race, gender and social class (Berry & Bell, 2012; Faist, 2018). The distinction between corporate expatriation, self-initiated expatriation and migration is not inherently clear, and thus often carries some confusion (Andresen et al., 2014). This encouraged some authors (Al Ariss, 2010; Andresen et al., 2014; Berry & Bell, 2012; Brewster & Scullion, 1997; Cerdin & Selmer, 2013; Peltokorpi & Jintae Froese, 2009) to theorise and demarcate conceptual clarity of these terms describing international mobility.

Corporate expatriates are often defined as individuals holding international appointment by their organisations (Brewster & Scullion, 1997). They enjoy collective responsibilities between them and organisations in terms of employment outcomes and career advancement (Al Ariss et al., 2012). Self-initiated expatriates refer to people having higher social mobility, therefore, crossing borders by self-initiation and pursuing better career opportunities (Cerdin & Selmer, 2013). The significant point of deviation is the initiation of the migration decision and career responsibility, as it is organisationally responsible for corporate expatriates and self-responsible for self-initiated expatriates.

The division of expatriation in international mobility literature is important in analysing skilled migrant careers, particularly if it is marked by ethnic and racial lines as Al Ariss (2010); Al Ariss et al. (2012); Berry and Bell (2012); Faist (2018) have argued. The implicit distinction between the terminological dichotomy of migrant and expatriate in international mobility literature place migrants in a more disadvantaged, less assimilative group marked by the politics of ethnic and racial boundaries. Consequently, their careers are described as
oppressed (Essers, Benschop, & Doorewaard, 2010), discriminated against (Bell, Kwisiga, & Berry, 2010) and “less dependent on their choices” (Al Ariss et al., 2012, p. 94). In contrast, self-initiated expatriation usually refers to more positive and inclusive expatriation for individuals “accustomed to interacting and motivated to interact with host country nationals” (Peltokorpi & Jintae Froese, 2009, p. 1106).

Nevertheless, these structural demarcations carry no inevitable obligations to define every use of expatriation terms in both academic and policy purposes. However, they have a significant value in skilled migration research, since they set the premise to discuss structural barriers in front of skilled migrants and their agential capacities to overcome such barriers. Therefore, migrants instead of expatriates in labour markets and migration literature substantiates the gender, race and class-based disparities in international skilled labour markets (Berry & Bell, 2012).

Considering the implicit distinctions in the migration literature and associated negative connotations with the term ‘migrant’, the term ‘skilled migrant’ has a particular purpose in this research. The use of the term ‘skilled migrant’, therefore, is intended to provoke greater awareness on associated mobility issues beyond its dictionary meaning. The term is considered as an appropriate mobility descriptor in Australia, where people come through the skilled visa stream referred to as ‘skilled migrants’ rather than ‘skilled expatriates’ (DIBP, 2017a, 2017c).

### 2.2.1 Terminology to demarcate skilled migrants

In classic migration nations such as Australia (Castles & Miller, 2009) where the population is ethnically diverse, there is a need to identify people based on their complex demographics identities. However, demarcating people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds under terminological umbrellas such as ‘non–English-speaking background (NESB)’, ‘culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)’ people and ‘ethnic communities’ pose some challenges. Such terms might possess negative connotations on ‘ethnic others’. In response to these challenges, various government and non-government agencies that provide services to the Australian public have introduced different diversity descriptors. Table 1 summarises the key attributes of those descriptors.
## Table 1: Key diversity descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainly English-speaking background countries (MESB)</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2014)</td>
<td>The list of mainly English-speaking countries provided here is not an attempt to classify countries on the basis of whether or not English is the predominant or official language of each country. It is a list of the main countries from which Australia receives, or has received, significant numbers of overseas settlers who are likely to speak English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-mainly English-speaking countries/Non–English-speaking background (NESB)</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2014)</td>
<td>Non-mainly English-speaking countries describe people originating from countries where a language other than English is likely to be spoken by migrants. It is important to note that being from a non-mainly English-speaking country does not imply a lack of proficiency in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australian Public Service Commission (APSC, 2015)</td>
<td>People from non–English-speaking backgrounds are defined as those who were born overseas and arrived in Australia after five years of age and whose first language was not English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | New South Wales Government (NSW, 2014) | The term ‘non–English-speaking background’ is appropriate, but only when it accurately describes the person or group. For example, it may accurately describe: 
- the clientele of English as a second language programs
- Clients who need, or may need, the service of interpreters, bilingual workers etc.
- a person whose first language is not English, when that is relevant to the issue at hand; e.g. when there are communication difficulties. |
| | Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria (ECCV, 2012) | NESB describes a subgroup of CALD communities who come from culturally diverse backgrounds and, in addition, do not speak English as a first language. ECCV is aware that people from non-English-speaking backgrounds often experience discrimination and face inequality and advocates for service providers to support multiculturalism through inclusive service provision including language service support. |
| | Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP, 2014) | Non–English-speaking background (NESB) is used most frequently to describe people who were born in a country where the predominant language is not English. They are first generation NESB. Their children are second generation NESB. |
| Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) | Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP, 2014) | Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) refers to the wide range of cultural groups that make up the Australian population and Australian communities. The term acknowledges that groups and individuals differ according to religion and spirituality, racial backgrounds and ethnicity as well as language. The term ‘culturally and linguistically diverse background’ is used to reflect intergenerational and contextual issues, not only migrant experience. 
Culturally and linguistically diverse background is a term used in policy documents but is often poorly defined. The term is commonly used to refer to people living within culturally diverse communities in Australia that may differ from the mainstream dominant culture. |
| | Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria (ECCV, 2012) | Culturally and linguistically diverse is a broad and inclusive descriptor for communities with diverse language, ethnic background, nationality, dress, traditions, food, societal structures, and art and religion characteristics. |
The historical development of the term NESB refers back to Martin et al. (1995), where the concept was broadly defined as overseas-born people, speaking a language other than English at home, who arrived in Australia less than 10 years ago. However, from the inception the term NESB has been considered as an oversimplified diversity descriptor considering the term’s inability to describe cultural diversity to a greater extent due to its higher inclination towards English language usage (DIMA, 2001). Therefore, followed by a decision taken at a meeting of the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in 1996 the term was discouraged for use in official communication in Australia, wherever it may impose identification difficulties (DIMA, 2001). Nevertheless, the term NESB is still widely used in Australia for both government and non-government communication, often interchangeably with other diversity descriptors such as CALD.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), an entity that frequently uses the term NESB, has identified English-speaking countries and non–English-speaking countries as per the definition stated in Table 1. However, the ABS does not classify countries on the basis of whether English is a predominant/official language or otherwise. Therefore, it excludes the lingua franca of English in places such as India, Singapore, Hong Kong and some parts of Africa. ABS describes NESB countries as the countries where a language other than English is likely to be spoken (ABS, 2014). It treats NESB as a demographic descriptor rather than a language ability indicator.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people is another contemporary descriptor of cultural diversity, considered as a preferred term in some government publications in Australia. According to the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, CALD is a broader diversity descriptor encapsulating elements such as language, social structure, nationality, customs, religion and dress (ECCV, 2012). As a leading professional organisation dealing with the Australian public, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has also recognised both NESB and CALD as diversity descriptors. However, it encourages the use of NESB over CALD, stressing the poor definition abilities of the term CALD (RACGP, 2014). The methodology chapter will draw on the above discussion to define the participants in this research.
2.3 **Key themes highlighted in the migration literature**

Investigating a multifaceted problem such as migrants’ occupational mobility is benefited by an exploration of the problem from multiple perspectives. Such perspectives entail (a) labour market supply and demand based utility maximisation and rational choice approaches; (b) more structure-oriented cultural diversity and discrimination focused approaches; and (c) skill and training concentrated human capital approaches (Boese et al., 2013; Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Cully, 2011; Hawthorne, 2011, 2014b, 2014c; Junankar, Paul, & Yasmeen, 2010; Misko, 2012; OECD, 2012; Peterson, Pandya, & Leblang, 2014; Reid, 2012; Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2016; Rynderman & Flynn, 2016; Syed & Kramar, 2010; Syed & Murray, 2009; Thomson, 2014; Thornton & Luker, 2010).

2.4 **Downward occupational mobility as a global issue: Evidence from countries around the world**

In order to understand the spatiality of the issues related to skilled migrants’ occupational mobility, it is worthwhile to discuss the international mobility literature on skilled migrants’ employment outcomes. This will contribute to a better understanding of the Australian situation by illustrating the magnitude of the problem in global labour markets; and comparing the Australian situation with other comparable migrant hosting countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recognised the issues of underutilisation of skilled migrants’ human capital and insufficient recognition of their qualifications (OECD, 2012). According to one report, from 23 OECD countries for which data is available, 36.1% foreign-born skilled migrants with a university degree are employed in low or medium skill jobs as opposed to 29.2% of native university graduated workers. The percentage of highly educated people working in low or semi-skilled jobs reaches significant heights in demographic decomposition analysis, where migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean reach 47.8% and migrants from non-OECD European and central Asian countries reach 46.6% respectively (OECD, 2012, p. 14). This suggests the problem is widespread and not limited to Australia.

The work of Pearson et al. (2012) discussed the situation of Polish immigrants in Ireland, who migrated during the period of strong economic growth known as the ‘Celtic Tiger’.
Their findings revealed that host country language (English) proficiency and foreign qualification recognition have acted as occupational mobility barriers for this cohort of migrants. The Polish migrants’ exercise of their individual agency in terms of career choices and interest to pursue skilled occupations were also investigated. Some migrants were found to have less interest in pursuing jobs that were commensurate with their skills due to reasons such as short-term career and settlement interests and relative satisfaction of income obtained from working in Ireland compared to Poland. The migrants who had an interest in using their qualifications to find employment tended to have a greater probability of finding skilled jobs than those who did not have such interests.

Pearson et al. (2012, p. 107) have explained their findings as ‘relatively low barriers’ for those Polish skilled migrants in contrast to the experience of “visible minorities and immigrants from non-EU countries in Ireland”. The reasons behind the apparently favourable conditions were multiple. This entailed aspects such as the Irish, who once had been migrants, thus experiencing the hardship of migrant life and therefore being more sensitive and sympathetic towards migrants; or the religious and ethnic similarities between Polish migrants and the native Irish population may have also assisted the assimilation. Most of the Polish migrants were explicit about their plans when they first arrived in Ireland. For most of them, migrating to Ireland linked to short-term career goals, which were more ‘remuneration focused’ short-term employment opportunities irrespective of skill utilisation or otherwise. Given the situation of some of the unskilled or semi-skilled jobs having the potential for earning better remuneration compared to some of the skilled jobs back in Poland, some skilled migrants considered them as appropriate short-term career layovers (Pearson et al., 2012). However, influences such as the need to regain their professional identity, social comparison, age milestones or unexpected career opportunities pushed some migrants to reconsider their career trajectories and leant towards more skill-oriented career choices.

Whilst the Pearson et al. (2012) findings differ from the Maher and Cawley (2016); McGinnity et al. (2006); Mcphee (2012) findings in the Irish context, they share some common themes in migrant employment such as the positive influence of cultural, ethnic and religious similarities. Further, these studies provide a useful example of how short-term mobility interests can compromise long-term career objectives such as professional recognition or skilled employment.
A series of migration policy comparisons between Australia, Canada and New Zealand by Hawthorne (2006, 2008, 2011, 2014a) has revealed similar policy trends between the three classic migration destinations. Similarities include priority for economic migrants (skill endowments) over humanitarian intakes, diversified sourcing countries with higher proportions of NESB skilled migrants, highly deregulated temporary labour intakes, and two-step migration process to facilitate the retention of temporary workers and former international students (Hawthorne, 2014a).

The Hawthorne (2008, 2011) comparisons of Australian, Canadian and New Zealand statistics have shown that Australia and New Zealand have comparatively higher employment outcomes for skilled migrants over Canada. According to Hawthorne (2008, 2011), the ‘select for success’ strategy deployed through the 1999 policy reforms which introduced higher ‘point incentives’ for labour-market favourable human capital endowments such as young age, higher competency of English language, recognised credentials and higher education qualifications has paid off for Australia. However, Hawthorne (2014a) has also reported significant skill discounting practices for engineers from NESB backgrounds as:

> By contrast, severe labour market displacement had occurred for Indian, Chinese and Filipino engineers, with large numbers not in the labour force or unemployed as they struggled to secure professional engineering positions. (Hawthorne, 2014a, p. 3)

Hawthorne (2008, 2014a) has identified the employment outcomes of the Canadian skilled migration program as inferior to Australian and New Zealand skilled migration programs. According to Hawthorne (2008, 2014b) the lack of policy emphasis on much needed labour market attributes such as higher host country language competencies, recognised qualifications, and high-demand skills have contributed to the poor outcomes. Further, the Canadian skilled migration program is more generous in applicants’ age than both the Australian and New Zealand programs, by assigning a relatively low amount of points to age. Hawthorne (2014a, p. 5) describes this issue as one in which the selection system has become “out of sync with the labour market”, therefore wasting the human capital of newly arrived skilled migrants. Under these circumstances, substantial skill discounting has occurred for skilled migrants from NESB countries as indicated by the higher levels of skilled workers accumulated in low-skilled employment in the Canadian labour market, as shown in Figure 2 (Hawthorne, 2008).
Hawthorne (2014a) has identified a marked preference from employers for skilled migrants characterised by fluent English ability from other OECD countries. The strong preference for skilled expatriates from other Anglophone countries (generally OECD) for employer-sponsored skilled occupations in all three labour markets has substantiated this trend. Misko (2012); Ng Chok et al. (2018) have also identified a similar trend among Australian employers. However, these employers’ inclination towards Anglophone skilled workers is contradicted by general policy trends in both Australia and Canada. Both countries are heavily dependent on NESB countries as sourcing grounds for their migration programs, particularly for the recruitment of general skilled (non-employer-sponsored) migrants. Therefore, this can be considered as a reason for relatively inferior employment outcomes for general skilled migrants from NESB countries in Australian and Canadian labour markets.

The labour market comparisons in the Hawthorne (2006, 2008, 2011, 2014a) studies are particularly useful resources in understanding common labour market trends in classic migrant labour economies such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. However, these studies were based on statistics up to 2005–2006 in most cases. Therefore, their findings/explanations may have limitations in explaining recent labour market trends informed by aspects such as current economic downturn and higher unemployment experiences in some OECD countries, the mining downturn in Australia, and the tendency of
manufacturing and services outsourcing in contemporary economies. Therefore, further research in skilled migrant employment is highly warranted.

2.5 Skilled migrants’ employment outcomes in Australia: Some quantitative findings

This section first explores the work of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) in its regular survey of Australian migration programs, namely the Continuous Survey of Australia’s Migrants (CSAM). CSAM is an annual survey that has been conducted by DIBP since 2009 as a response to the need to monitor labour market integration and other settlement prospects of recently arrived skilled and family stream migrants (DIBP, 2015b). The findings and associated explanations in the department’s ongoing series of annual publications about the CSAM survey have been summarised below as official findings and mobility explanations.

2.5.1 Official findings and mobility explanations from the DIBP

The CSAM cohort 1 to 5 report (DIAC, 2011) has summarised the employment outcomes of recent migrants (after six months of arrival or has been granted visa) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Employment outcomes; after 6 months of arrival or has been granted visa (cohorts 1 to 5 pooled; DIAC (2011))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment outcome</th>
<th>Skill Stream</th>
<th>Family Stream</th>
<th>All Skill and Family Stream Migrants</th>
<th>General Australian Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary Applic</td>
<td>Migrating Unit Spouse</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>All migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In skilled job</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In other job</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in labour force</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation rate</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median full-time earnings</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Skilled employment is defined as working in an ANZSCO skill levels 1 to 3 occupation, that is, in a job classified under the categories of managers, professionals, or technicians and trade workers. Results are for adult migrants only.

At a very aggregate level these outcomes shows an positive picture, given skilled migrants showing low unemployment rates (5% for skilled primary applicants) and higher participation rates (96% for skilled primary applicants) compared to the general Australian
population (5% unemployment rate and 67% participation rate). As the CSAM report explains, this is due to the high presence of prime working age individuals in migrant cohorts compared to the ageing Australian general population. Further, 68% of primary skilled visa applicants are doing skilled jobs even after six months of arrival or have been granted visas. This 68% further increases to 73% after 12 months. However, wage disparities were evident, with the annual median full-time wage $7,900 below the Australian national average of $59,900 (DIAC, 2011). This low median full-time wage among skilled primary applicants contradicts the higher employment outcomes listed above for the skilled primary applicants. This research will explore the discrepancy in DIBP’s explanation in the Quantitative Analysis chapter through the perspective of the extent of employment.

In the case of employer-sponsored skilled migrants, the outcomes are far superior given the unemployment rate is just 0.5% during both wave 1 and 2 surveys. Further, 90% and 91% of people found skilled employment after six months and 12 months of arrival respectively. These employer-sponsored visa holders also enjoy less wage disparity, with $75,000 annual median full-time earnings (DIAC, 2011). This is owing to their employer sponsorships, which require employers to undertake obligations to recruit their sponsored employees under agreed remuneration and working conditions.

Opposed to these positive employment outcomes, 24% of the skilled primary visa applicants found work in non-skilled jobs during wave 1 of CSAM. This percentage decreased to 22% in wave 2 of CSAM with 2% improvement. In the case of migrating unit spouses of the skilled stream, the percentage of skilled job engagement declined from 30% to 26% after 12 months of arrival. Consequently, the proportion of unskilled work increased from 35% to 40% after 12 months of arrival. At the same time, the unemployment rate decreased from 15% to 11%.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) explanation for the migrating unit spouses’ apparent increase of unskilled employment by 5% and decrease of skilled employment by 4% states “this suggests that some of these spouses may have chosen to move to other employment once the skilled migrant was able to find skilled work and become the main income earner in the household” (DIAC, 2011, p. 9). This DIBP/DIAC speculation is problematic since there is no research evidence that suggests migrant spouses compromise

---

2 Unless otherwise stated, all the comparable statistics in this section refer to 2009 to 2011 statistics.
3 The employer-sponsored visa categories considered in this paper do not cover the large, uncapped, temporary stay, employer-sponsored visa streams such as 457 visas.
skilled jobs to take unskilled jobs even if their financial status is improved. Further, the decreased unemployment rate (by 4% between wave 1 and wave 2) within these migrating unit spouses suggests that they still have an interest in engaging in a remunerated activity. Therefore, there is no evidence for the proposition that in most circumstances someone would forego their skilled job and take on an unskilled job, which are usually less well paid and often have unappealing work conditions.

2.5.2 Alternative perspectives on skilled migrants’ employment outcomes

Contrasting the DIBP (2014b, 2015b, 2015c) optimistic picture of Australian migration program outcomes, some research (Birrell, 2018; Junankar, Paul, & Yasmeen, 2010) has identified inferior employment and occupational mobility outcomes, particularly for NESB skilled migrants. By using 2016 Census data, Birrell (2018) found just 24% of NESB skilled migrants managed to secure skilled jobs compared to 50% of MESB skilled migrants. Birrell (2018) explains these findings as the outcome of an overcrowded labour market with skills not in demand. Consequently, he has suggested drastically reducing migration intakes. Whilst some (Birrell, 2018) are sceptical of the entire migration program, others identify skills shortages in particular geographic areas such as regional Australia (Pyke et al., 2007; Taylor, 2018; Taylor, Bell, & Gerritsen, 2014) and some industries such as the care industry (Brennan et al., 2017; Negin et al., 2016).

An attempt to quantify employment probability of Asian skilled migrants in Australia against their non-Asian counterparts was made by Junankar, Paul, and Yasmeen (2010). They used the set of data collected in all three waves of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA 1) conducted by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (at that time) between March 1994 and March 1997. The probability of unemployment among Asian male migrants was shown to be significantly higher than that of non-Asian migrants throughout all three waves. The decomposition analysis revealed evidence of discrimination against Asian male migrants in all three waves. Discrimination against Asian females was only detected in wave 1. Even though Junankar, Paul, and Yasmeen (2010) have identified the labour market discrimination they have not explained or identified the reasons for the apparent discrimination.

of ethnic networks affected the quality of jobs skilled migrants were getting after arriving in Australia. For this purpose, they defined a good job in both objective and subjective means:

We defined a good job objectively as where the migrant employs their educational qualifications in the current job, and on a similar rank in the occupational ladder. A subjective definition was in terms of satisfaction with the job held and not wanting to move jobs. (Junankar & Mahuteau, 2005, pp. 44-45)

Their findings suggest that the policy changes have made a positive impact on migrants in finding a job relatively quickly after arrival in Australia, with a negative impact on finding a ‘good job’ (refer to their definition of a ‘good job’ stated above). They explained this as migrants initially tend to accept jobs in lower occupational ranks due to economic pressure created by stringent social security benefits. Later skilled migrants were shown to expand efforts in finding jobs for which they can utilise their skills and qualifications. However, these findings pose comparability challenges as the authors acknowledged, given the higher employability of the second cohort of participants in the LSIA 2 survey. According to the authors, this perceived higher employability resulted from more strict selection criteria deployed in the selection of LSIA 2 migrants (Junankar & Mahuteau, 2005, 2007, 2008).

The large survey data based explanations such as Junankar and Mahuteau (2005, 2007, 2008); Junankar, Paul, and Yasmeen (2010) possess a higher degree of generalisability due to their use of inferential statistics. Conversely, they have limitations in explaining more context-specific grounded issues that condition skilled migrants’ occupational mobility such as their agential choices and structural constraints hindering their mobility pathways (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Syed, 2008). Therefore, this research will investigate NESB skilled migrants’ occupational mobility through a more pragmatic mixed research methodology with the aid of both quantitative and qualitative data.

### 2.6 Occupational mobility barriers for skilled migrants in Australia

This section explores the literature on occupational mobility barriers for skilled migrants identified and substantiated through the literature (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Birrell, 2018; Brennan et al., 2017; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Dantas et al., 2017; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014; Misko, 2012; Ng Chok et al., 2018; Rajendran, Farquharson, & Hewege, 2017; Reid, 2012; Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2016, 2017; Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016; Syed & Murray,
2009; Thornton & Luker, 2010; Wen & Maani, 2018). The occupational mobility barriers discussed in the literature entail both structure and agency-oriented barriers such as recognition of foreign gained qualifications or work experience, accessibility to labour market information and professional networks, the role of labour market gatekeepers, and direct and systemic labour market discrimination.

2.6.1 The challenges in qualification recognition

Australia currently possesses a rigorous process of skill recognition for skilled workers who seek to migrate to Australia or work temporarily in Australia. This covers occupations under the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO). Each occupation is assigned a particular ANZSCO code. For the purpose of assessing skills, the abovementioned occupations are directed to an array of skills assessing authorities comprising (a) a vast number of regulatory or professional bodies; (b) federal and state government department accreditation services; and (c) vocational education and training (VET) assessment providers (DIBP, 2016). The outcome of this assessment is only valid until the expiry date specified on the assessment, or for a period of three years from the assessment date of issue, whichever occurs first (DIBP, 2016). The skill assessment outcome solely serves the purpose of obtaining a skilled visa to enter Australia. Thus, the process lacks recognition in the labour market as an endorsement for skilled jobseekers’ suitability to the Australian labour market (Hawthorne, 2015, 2016b; Misko, 2012). The following section discusses some of the challenges in skill recognition faced by foreign skilled workers in the Australian labour market.

The theme of qualification/skill recognition in migrant employment has been a matter of concern in research throughout recent decades in Australia (Dantas et al., 2017; Hawthorne, 2015, 2016b; Misko, 2012; Sardana, Zhu, & Veen, 2016). The lack of recognition or downgrading of foreign qualifications/experience has been identified as a possible barrier to skilled migrant employment (Dantas et al., 2017; Hawthorne, 1997; Wagner & Childs, 2006). The question put forward by the Wagner and Childs (2006) investigation of the skill recognition problem denotes:

Are the skills for which a migrant may have been permitted entry to a country under the rubric of public policy then recognized at the local level by labour
market gatekeepers such as employers, universities, social services and professional bodies? (Wagner & Childs, 2006, p. 49)

Their findings indicate that the recognition process has several impediments to the full professional recognition of skills for migrant workers in the Australian labour market. Barriers include the historical nexus of migrant labour with physical labour, therefore, the connective assumption of migrant labour as unskilled labour; complicated, lengthy and time-consuming skill recognition processes in Australia discouraging skilled migrants to pursue skilled employment; and active encouragements to undertake local education/training to obtain full professional recognition especially by skilled professional associations (Dantas et al., 2017; Sardana, Zhu, & Veen, 2016; Wagner & Childs, 2006).

In a series of studies investigating the role of qualifications/skills in the occupational mobility of foreign workers particularly with no employer sponsorships (e.g. General Skilled Migration), Dantas et al. (2017); Misko (2012); Sardana, Zhu, and Veen (2016) identified significant levels of underutilisation of educational qualifications/skills among skilled migrants in Australia. Misko (2012) recognised that nearly one-third of the primary applicants with ‘before-arrival non-school qualifications’ had not used their qualifications in their current jobs. Further, considerable amounts (62.6%) of those primary applicants who were not using their qualifications in their current jobs were shown to have made no effort to find jobs commensurate with their qualifications. Misko (2012) explained this phenomena as recent migrants prioritising their income and job security over skill utilisation, particularly if they had to financially support their families by sending remittance. This practice is common among migrants from developing countries if the income that they can earn by non-skilled jobs is higher than that of the highly skilled jobs in their home countries (Pearson et al., 2012). Misko (2012) also found that the cost and effort of obtaining formal recognition and upgrading qualifications discouraged skilled migrants from pursuing jobs commensurate with their qualifications.

2.6.2 The role of professional bodies, recruiters and other forms of labour market ‘gatekeepers’

Employers play a significant role in the Australian skilled migration program, particularly in the employer-sponsored visa stream. Employer-sponsored visas represented 39% of the total

---

4 Non-school qualifications are awarded for educational attainments other than those of pre-primary, primary or secondary education (ABS, 2010).
skill stream outcome in 2016–17 program year (DIBP, 2017a). Employers have obligations for the employment of the employer-sponsored visa holders through the sponsorship process. However, the employers’ role in Australian skilled migration has been found to go beyond sponsorship obligations, given their role as a pressure group in deciding skill demands in Australia (DIBP, 2016, 2017d, 2017e).

Labour market ‘gatekeepers’ such as professional bodies, recruitment agencies, skill assessment authorities, and VET providers have a vital role in the Australian migrant labour market due to the highly demand-driven skilled migration program (Cameron et al., 2013; Hamid, Hoang, & Kirkpatrick, 2018; Harvey, Groutsis, & van den Brock, 2018). Some of the skill assessment responsibilities for the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) and Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List (CSOL) rely on professional bodies (DIBP, 2016, 2017d, 2017e). These professional bodies play an equally important role in the Australian skilled migration program by informing peak bodies in the decision process such as the Department of Jobs and Small Business, the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency and the Department of Industry.

Misko (2012); Ng Chok et al. (2018) identified the need for qualifications, accreditations, licences and registration in regulated occupations such as nurses, doctors, accountants, engineers and electricians, particularly who have certification and signing privileges. Lack of local qualifications and registrations can act as major impediments for these workers since employers, recruiters and labour hiring agencies often look for these attributes in recruitment (Dantas et al., 2017; Sardana, Zhu, & Veen, 2016; Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016; Watson, 2012). Further, some employers and recruiters were found to make their judgements on the value of qualifications based on the “reputation of the provider awarding the qualifications” (Misko, 2012, p. 26) rather than the content of the qualifications. Perhaps this is an area where the government can assist employers with policy directions by building more confidence in recognising overseas-gained qualifications (Misko, 2012), the missing link between qualification/skill assessment processes and job market skill recognition.

---

5 Subsequent to the dismantling of the subclass 457 visa and the introduction of Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visas such as subclass 482 visas on 18 March 2018, the skilled occupation lists were replaced by a combined current list of eligible skilled occupations, which consists of the Medium and Long-term Strategic Skills List (MLTSSL), the Short-term Skilled Occupation List (STSOI) and the Regional Occupation List (ROL).

6 These departments and government agencies held or currently hold various responsibilities in terms of deciding the supply and demand of skills in the Australian labour market.
2.6.3 Australian policies and regulations for equal employment opportunity (EEO)

According to Jameison (2008, p. 96), equal employment opportunity (EEO) means:

An organization will be managed according to a regime where the best person for the job (in terms of promotion, opportunity for training or transfer, etc.), irrespective of matter of group identity such as gender, race, colour …., will be able to perform in that position according to their intrinsic merit. (Jameison 2008, p. 96)

However, it is uncertain how many Australian organisations operate according to this type of EEO regime in dealing with employment matters of local and migrant workforces. Australia as a country with a federal system of governance has federal and state/territory legislation to cover some aspects of EEO. Whilst federal and state/territory legislation share some broad considerations of workplace discrimination, there are differences between the states/territories in terms of the scope and depth the legislation (Bray et al., 2018). The prominent statutes in terms of race and gender discrimination such as the Race Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth), Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth), Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and Human Rights and Equal Employment Opportunity Act 1986 (Cth) are evident in Australia despite their arguable success in achieving their set objectives.

EEO legislation usually falls into two broad categories: complaint-based regulatory models and affirmative action models. Australian legislation is more tilted towards the complaint-based regulatory model than the affirmative action legislation (Bray et al., 2018). Consequently, individual employees are provided with a legal procedure to enforce their employment rights and potential remedy if the rights have been violated. Laws modelled in this way usually:

Tolerate discrimination on merit or on the ground that discrimination is warranted consistent with the ‘inherent requirements of the job’, but prohibit discrimination on grounds which are not merit-based and which are immutable. (Bray et al., 2018, p. 321)

Accordingly, Australian organisations usually take a ‘risk-management’ approach in workplace EEO matters by introducing anti-discrimination principles into human resources functions in order to maintain the appropriate level of compliance (Bray et al., 2018). The
affirmative action models, on the other hand, impose obligations on organisations to discriminate in favour of some historically disadvantaged categories of employees. Approaches such as assigned quotas for the number of women in senior positions can be considered as an example for this model of legislation. Whilst Australian legislation refers to minimal provisions in affirmative models, the 1986 Hawke government’s Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986 (AA Act) was an attempt that put forward eight-step affirmative actions and certain reporting requirements for private sector employers with more than 100 employees. However, the requirements were changed subsequently under the Howard government’s replacement of the AA Act with Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999 (Cth) and its replacement by the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (Cth) under the Gillard government.

Australian policies for EEO remain largely dependent on voluntary corporate initiatives prioritising the business benefits of managing cultural diversity (Syed & Kramar, 2010). Consequently, less emphasis was given to the employment conditions for more vulnerable groups such as women and migrants. Further, some criticise anti-discrimination legislation in Australia, stressing that the legislation is only capable of addressing surface issues such as direct discrimination (Thornton & Luker, 2010). In the case of grounded issues such as systemic discrimination:

If complainants allege discriminatory harms of a systemic kind, their complaints are likely to fail because of the limitations of legal form and the seemingly rational explanations that serve to legitimise the discriminatory conduct. (Thornton & Luker, 2010, p. 3)

Thornton and Luker (2010) have further identified issues entrenched in the legislative system such as difficulties in proving indirect discrimination, the burden of proof, the use of a normative ‘white’ comparator, and the poor track records of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) in addressing discrimination.

2.7 Structure–agency interplay in migrant employment

Employment is considered to be an outcome of individual preference and choice of offering employment as well as being employed. An agent’s capacity to take these decisions on their behalf (individual agency) can be influenced by various social structures such as race, gender
and social class. Thus, the longstanding debate of interplay between social structure and individual agency in sociology (Bakewell, 2010) inevitably applies to migration as well. As much as agency is important in this discussion, so too are its links to social structures and institutions. Social structures and institutions are important, as employment or unemployment are, rather, composite outcomes of agents’ habits, reflexive deliberations and agential concerns upon social structures and institutions (see next paragraphs) rather than mere functional relationships between supply and demand of labour markets (Fleetwood, 2008). Therefore, problems relating to employment such as unemployment or underemployment for any community including skilled migrants can be influenced by a multitude of structural and functional barriers or facilitators.

The labour market implications of interplay between social structure and individual agency oriented occupational mobility determinants, have been discussed in Al Ariss and Syed (2011); Bakewell (2010); Nishii and Özbilgin (2007); Syed (2008); Syed and Kramar (2010); Syed and Özbilgin (2009); Vlase and Voicu (2014). Their work suggests how structural conditions, agential concerns and organisational processes, all of which are responsible for the underpinning concerns of (in) equality, have largely been overlooked in occupational mobility literature. They have stated how structure–agency interplay creates a unique position for skilled migrant jobseekers from particular sourcing countries such as NESB countries in host country labour markets. The following section discusses the research literature that stresses the need to explore the interplay between social structure and individual agency in migrant employment discourse.

The link between individual agency and social structures has been explained variously by different schools of thought. According to Archer (1982, 2000, 2003), it is morphogenesis, where agents use reflexive deliberations through the process of internal conversation. According to Hodgson (2002), it is habits, where institutions operate through a process of habituation resulting in the adoption of habits. Habits can result in agents holding or modifying their intentions and actions. Hodgson (2002) refers to this capacity as re-constitutive downward causation. Complementing this discussion is intersectional scholarship (Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; McDowell, 2008) where the social emergence of multiple and intersecting identities through the axis of race, gender or social class has been elaborated extensively. Even if the mechanisms linking social structures to individual agency have been explained differently, the significance of understanding their
relationship is pivotal in explaining social order (Bakewell, 2010). Therefore, having a clear understanding “structure-agency apparatus” (Fleetwood, 2008, p. 183) informs labour market decision-making, policy and research processes.

The division in expatriation literature as described earlier leads to deliberate on the structure–agency interplay in migrants’ occupational mobility. The line of demarcation between expatriation and migration often put migrants into a prejudicial category (Al Ariss et al., 2012). Consequently, the outcome of migrants’ career experiences appears patchy and less dependent on individual choices (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011). This, although implicitly, shows the structural constraints for migrants whereby they are considered as having a lack of agential capacity to overcome such barriers. Contrarily, in international mobility literature, both corporate and self-initiated expatriation is designated as being gifted with agency, therefore individuals are better equipped to make career choices (Carr, 2010). Nevertheless, this distinction between ‘migration and ‘expatriation’ in terms of agential capacity is established on weak evidence, as both of these categories have shown their success in crossing national boundaries and pursuing new lives and careers in foreign lands (Al Ariss et al., 2012).

2.8 Chapter summary

The literature review has explored key themes in skilled migrants’ occupational mobility and the diverse influences on skilled migrant experiences, both nationally and internationally. Table 3 summarises the key themes arising from the literature discussed in this chapter. The occupational mobility barriers/facilitators sit on the intersection of social structures and skilled migrants’ individual agency. Therefore, this research investigates how skilled migrants exercise their constrained agency under the influence of structural barriers/facilitators. The methodology chapter will illustrate how this research and its critical realist led inquiry approach is equipped to embark on such a mission. Whilst the extant literature informs research objectives, research questions and research methodology, the literature was not treated as theoretical pockets for deductive reasoning due to the emergent nature of the critical realism led inquiry approach used in this research (Bakewell, 2010; Danermark et al., 2002; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). Instead, a more developed theoretical framework to better understand skilled migrant experiences will be presented in the discussion chapter as an outcome of the research.
### Table 3: Summary of literature review (compiled by author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key themes in the literature</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual clarity of migration, definitions of major categories of migration</td>
<td>Al Ariss et al. (2012); Andresen et al. (2014); Andresen, Bemann, and Pattie (2015); Berry and Bell (2012); Cerdin and Selmer (2013); Faist (2018); Peltokorpi and Jintae Froese (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative findings on the skilled migrants employment and occupational mobility outcomes</td>
<td>Birrell (2018); DIAC (2011); DIBP (2014b, 2015c); Junankar and Mahuteau (2008); Junankar, Paul, and Yasmeen (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill wastage and atrophy</td>
<td>Asghar, Cameron, and Farivar (2017); Cameron et al. (2013); Dantas et al. (2017); Sardana, Zhu, and Veen (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications/skills recognition and transferability difficulties</td>
<td>Hawthorne (2015, 2016b); Misko (2012); Ng Chok et al. (2018); Sardana, Zhu, and Veen (2016); Wagner and Childs (2006); Wen and Maani (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of labour market gatekeepers</td>
<td>Colic-Peisker (2011); Hamid, Hoang, and Kirkpatrick (2018); Misko (2012); Ng Chok et al. (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market discrimination, anti-discrimination legislation and Australian policies for equal employment</td>
<td>Booth, Leigh, and Varganova (2012); Bray et al. (2018); Junankar, Paul, and Yasmeen (2010); Syed and Kramar (2010); (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and agency interplay in migrant employment</td>
<td>Bakewell (2010); Fleetwood (2008); Fletcher (2017); Hodgson (2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research aiming to understand skilled migrants’ occupational mobility should be informed by a methodology sensitive to the subtleties of the phenomena to be investigated yet rigorous enough to provide a comprehensive research outcome. Development of such methodology would not happen without understanding the underpinning ontological assumptions and epistemological orientations of the intended inquiry. This chapter attempts to articulate the nature of the problem to be investigated, ontological assumptions, possible pathways to investigate, epistemological orientation, the choice of methodology and the justification for the choice. In addition to outlining the methodology adopted in this research, this chapter further contributes to the ongoing effort of developing critical realism led migration research methodology.

3.2 Rejecting methodological individualism: Ontological, analytical and methodological dualism

The ontological reductionism entrenched in the individualist approach of understanding social reality – that is, ‘society can be understood as an aggregate of individuals’ (Bakewell, 2010) – has been rejected in this thesis. If society is irreducible to component individuals, that begs the question of the nature of interactions between individuals and how they interact with social structures. Do these structures have an independent existence apart from agents? How do we go about these interactions and explain the stratified social reality? If not individualism, then dualism may provide answers to some of these questions.

Drawing on Bhaskar (2010, 2014), critical realists suggest dualism as a compromise to individualism. The strongest form of dualism, ontological dualism, suggests that social structures have an objective existence similar to physical structures beyond the actions and deliberations of individual actors, which indeed reify structures (Bakewell, 2010). This means that such reality can be investigated in a manner similar to physical structures.
A mellower alternative, analytical dualism, suggests:

There is a ‘reality’ – the important caveat being that our ways of knowing and understanding ‘reality’ are subject to modification and revision. A practical way to work through and demonstrate this point is the consideration of the status of ‘truth’ in critical realism. (Pratt, 1995, p. 65)

This means that social structures can exist independent of our knowledge of them and not necessarily constrained to the individual agency that produces them. However, the most important feature is the emergent properties of social structures and their capacity to hold causal powers. The third form of dualism is the methodological dualism suggested in structuration theory (Bakewell, 2010). Drawing on the work of Archer (1982, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2007); Bhaskar (2010, 2013, 2014); Giddens (1979, 1984); Giddens and Pierson (2013) the following section discusses all three forms of dualism (ontological dualism, analytical dualism and methodological dualism) in relation to structure–agency interplay in order to realise the ontological assumptions and epistemological orientation of the research.

3.3 Structure–agency interplay: Ontological assumptions and epistemological orientation

Employment is an outcome of preference and choice on the part of employees for being employed and employers for offering employment. An agent’s capacity to take these decisions on their behalf (individual agency) can be influenced by various societal structures and institutions (Archer, 2000; Bakewell, 2010; Bhaskar, 2014; Fleetwood, 2008; Giddens & Pierson, 2013). Therefore, failure to recognise such influence holds the social order in a reductionist view of explaining the world as an aggregate of individuals, which is neither sufficient nor desirable in the explanation of complex and multifaceted phenomena of migration and occupational mobility. The structure and institutions are important in this discussion as employment or unemployment are composite outcomes of agents’ habits (Hodgson, 2007), reflexive deliberations (Archer, 2003) and agential concerns upon social structures and institutions rather than mere functional relationships between supply and demand of labour markets (Fleetwood, 2008). Therefore, the problems related to employment such as unemployment or underemployment for any community including skilled migrants can be influenced by a multitude of structural and functional barriers or facilitators.
Individual agency and its link to social structure have been a long-standing question in sociological debate (Bakewell, 2010). Yet the fully unresolved challenge is how to effectively link them without conflating them, to explain stratified social reality (Archer, 2000, 2003). Rehearsing the vigorous debate around structure and agency is clearly a deep dive into the murky depths of theoretical waters, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, for the benefit of getting an adequate theoretical insight to the problem, the eminent explanations of structure–agency interplay as proposed through Giddens’ theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) and Archer’s morphogenetic cycle (Archer, 1995) will be summarised, followed by a discussion on methodological routes entrenched in realist ontology.

The Giddens’ theory of structuration (Bakewell, 2010) attempts to draw on the mutually dependent duality of structure and agency. According to Giddens (1984, p. 25) structure has a duality in nature as both “the medium and outcome of the social order that it recursively organise”. Under the lens of structuration, society only has a form and that form has effects on agents as long as agents take knowledgeable actions in a regularised manner (Giddens & Pierson, 2013). These series of recurrent social practices form institutions. Therefore, individual practices when they occur with regularities give rise to social structures and those structures then become moderators of individual behaviour in a form of a mutual dependence.

Structuration recognises structural properties of social systems as real properties. However, in contrast to critical realism, it neither advocates its existence nor its causal effects as physical. “They are real properties in the sense in which they depend upon the routine qualities of people’s actions” (Giddens & Pierson, 2013, p. 77). The structure makes no sense under structuration if agents do not take actions in a knowledgeable manner, in a context that can produce particular consequences. Giddens and Pierson (2013, p. 77) referred this agential capacity to reproduce or recursively organise social order as “practical consciousness”. Ipso facto, structuration leaves room for social transformation since social constraints are only constraints in terms of motives or interests of actors who constantly negotiate with social structures in order to advance their interests (Bakewell, 2010; Giddens & Pierson, 2013). However, structuration can impose limitations for social structures as it is necessarily contingent to knowledgeable acts of agents (Vandenberghe, 2005). Applied to skilled migrants’ occupational mobility, this suggests that structural determinants may become barriers or facilitators to skilled migrants depending on agents’ perceptions and knowledgeable agential responses.
As a profound and vociferous critique of structuration, Archer offers the morphogenetic approach as a realist alternative to structuration. Archer (1995) endorsed the realists’ ontology of stratified social reality, emergent properties of social objects and their causal powers as:

Since structure and agency constitute different levels of stratified social reality, each possesses distinctive emergent properties which are real and causally efficacious but irreducible to one another. (Archer, 1995, p. 1)

In the quest to understand the link between structure and agency, Archer (1995, 2000, 2003) distanced herself from conflation by suggesting ‘conflationary tendencies’ in all individualist, structuralist and structuration approaches. The individualist approach, which is more lenient towards individual actors and explains structure as an aggregate effect of individual actions, commits the fallacy of upward conflation. The structuralist approach, which is more tilted towards structural determinants, suffers from downward conflation. Structuration suffers from central conflation where the link is explained as more “dialectically implicated and mutually constitutive” (Vandenberghhe, 2005, p. 228).

Archer (1982, 1995, 2000, 2003) takes the route of analytical dualism to investigate the link between structure and agency. Analytical dualism asserts the stratified ontology of critical realism. Therefore, it acknowledges the emergent properties of structure and agency as analytically separable entities that are irreducible to one another. Secondly, it affirms structure and agency as temporarily distinguishable entities, which provides space to discuss structure and agency in terms of “posteriority and pre-existence” (Archer, 1995, p. 66); for example, how agents’ previous awareness of structure can influence their current actions. As a strategy to operationalise analytical dualism, Archer (1995, 2000, 2003) proposes the cycle of morphogenesis. Therefore, the morphogenetic approach provides an answer to the problem of temporal disjuncture in structuration (Bakewell, 2010). By considering the theoretical merits of the morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1982, 1995, 2000, 2003), this thesis will apply morphogenesis against structuration to explain the interplay between structure and agency in skilled migrants’ jobseeking experiences, since the structuration is commonly criticised as being incapable of handling temporal disjuncture (Bakewell, 2010).
3.4 The critical realists’ pathway: Ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality

The meta-theoretical approach of critical realism, particularly drawn on the work of Bhaskar (2010, 2013, 2014), is considered a middle ground between strong positivist empiricism and more structuralist interpretivism (Bakewell, 2010; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). Continuing the realist tradition, critical realism maintains a strong emphasis on ontology, thus embracing the existence of ‘objective reality’ that is independent of our knowledge of understanding it (Archer, 1995; Bakewell, 2010; Bhaskar, 2010, 2013, 2014). Realists’ stratify ontology into three domains: real, actual and empirical (Bhaskar, 2013). Figure 3 from Bhaskar (2013) explains the critical realists’ stratified ontology.

![Figure 3: The critical realists' stratified ontology; Bhaskar (2013)](image)

The domain of real comprises objects and structures (both physical and social) with causal powers. Under critical realism “causality is a matter of real causal powers exerted by social objects due to their structure” (Vargas-Silva, 2012, p. 40). Such causal powers may not be empirically observable, but do exist within the real domain with emerging properties. The capacity of objects to hold emerging properties, social emergence, is defined as:

a situation in which the conjunction of two or more features or aspects give rise to new phenomena, which have properties which are irreducible to those of their constituents, even though the latter are necessary for their existence. (Sayer, 2000, p. 12)
The actual domain, which is a subset of the real domain, subsumes the event generated by both exercised and unexercised causal powers which may or may not be empirically observable. The empirical domain, a subset of the actual domain, refers to the empirically observable events called phenomena. The realists’ stratified ontology and its properties are illustrated in Table 4, adapted from Bhaskar (2013).

Table 4: The properties of realists’ stratified ontology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of Real</th>
<th>Domain of Actual</th>
<th>Domain of Empirical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanisms</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analytical distinction of stratified reality explained in critical realism does not merely have an intuitive theoretical appeal. Its methodological implications go far deeper in the quest for understanding reality. Critical realism admits knowledge as an imperfect, political and historically emergent entity (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). Therefore, the understanding and explanations of reality are subjected to the tools and mechanisms that produced them. This provides the space to recognise fallibility in varying degrees. Whilst all knowledge claims are fallible, they are not necessarily fallible in equal ways. This epistemological relativism entrenched in critical realism creates space for different individuals to hold different explanations of reality with varying degrees of validity. Some explanations can be considered as much closer approximations to reality than others (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). Ontological realism coupled with epistemological relativism within the critical realist inquiry, therefore, helps inquirers to build robust working methodology with judgemental rationality. The development of the methodology for this research, informed by critical realism, will be discussed in the following sections.

3.5 Methodological options for critical realist research

The stratified ontology of critical realism is important in formulating an appropriate research methodology for this research. Realist ontology provides space to observe the empirical domain for empirically observable objects/events, and interpret the behaviour of mechanisms
that give rise to such events. Therefore, in the critical realist inquiry, exploration of social objects/events only become relevant to the extent that they show emergent properties (Bakewell, 2010). This is because critical realism admits social phenomena as concept-dependent entities that need interpretive understanding (Giddens, 1979) and accepts knowledge as an imperfect, political and historically emergent entity (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). Therefore, the methodological challenge in formulating critical realism led research is to craft a methodology that can approximate the properties of the real domain from observations drawn from the empirical domain through a process of social emergence.

In response to the challenge of developing a research methodology that aligns with the ontological assumptions and epistemological orientations of critical realism, the following section will discuss the complementarity of three major methodological paradigms: quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method research and their relationship to critical realism. The following discussion illustrates how the meta-theoretical approaches of critical realism can be a compromise to longstanding but increasingly diminishing 'paradigm wars’ between quantitative and qualitative camps. This helps to understand the space for mixed-method research under a realist’s inquiry and supports the adoption of a mixed-method research methodology for this research.

The quantitative research methods characterised by their focus in finding observable regularities, both temporally and spatially, is misaligned with critical realism’s stratified ontology (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). According to Sayer (2000, p. 4) “what causes something to happen has nothing to do with the number of times we observe it happening”. Therefore, the empirical observations gathered through quantitative techniques such as correlations between variables possess a limited capacity to unearth the causal mechanisms that generated those events. Instead, such techniques report the regularity or probability of such events to happen. Consequently, the sole use of the quantitative techniques to equivocate correlation to causation leads to an *epistemic fallacy* (Lawson, 2006). However, such a fallacy does not necessarily close the space for quantitative methods within critical realism inquiry since the fallacy has arisen from the popular misuse of quantitative findings within the generalisation process rather than a problem of quantitative methods themselves.

Compared to quantitative methods, qualitative methods are more complementary with the stratified ontology of critical realism (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Owing to the nature of qualitative methods such as interviews, ethnography, case studies and narratives, the causal
statements generated through such techniques are more capable of explaining why a particular phenomenon has happened. Further, qualitative techniques are more consistent with the epistemology of critical realism since social phenomena are concept-dependent entities that need interpretive understanding (Bhaskar, 2013).

The stratified ontology of critical realism embraces *methodological pluralism* (Danermark et al., 2002; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013) where there is space to rearrange existing methodological paradigms to achieve ontological assumptions (House, 2010). The realists’ view of social phenomena as contextually defined entities that need interpretive understanding (Bhaskar, 2013) supports the adoption of multiple methodologies since some of those mechanisms may not be empirically detectable. Therefore, a different methodological approach is needed to understand the causal powers of such mechanisms through the apparatuses that enable them to become visible. Therefore, a combination of methodologies is often necessary to understand such mechanisms. This provides an answer to the *incompatibility thesis* (Denzin, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) in research methodology, which believes it is inappropriate to mix quantitative and qualitative research methodology due to their fundamental differences. From the above discussion, it is apparent that critical realism provides justification for mixed-method approaches in social research that leads to the development of more robust meta-inferences.

### 3.6 Adoption of mixed research methodology

The selection of a particular methodology for research is determined by the nature of the problem under investigation (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2012; Patton, 2002; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The exploratory research questions that are intended to be answered in this research have led to the adoption of a sequentially mixed research methodology (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Further, the above discussion has elaborated on the role of mixed-method research in critical realist social inquiry. Therefore, the adoption of sequential mixed-method approach complements the ontological assumptions, epistemological orientations and emergent design of the research.

The first research question: what are the barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for in Australia?, will be explored through both quantitative and qualitative methods as it intends to identify occupational mobility barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in Australia. The second
question: how does their ‘migrant status’ affect NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for in Australia?, will utilise a qualitative approach as it needs an interpretive understanding and an exploratory approach of inquiry. Therefore, the combination of these two research questions creates a more pragmatic research inquiry that can be achieved through a combination of numeric and narrative data.

3.7 Defining research participants

Diversity descriptors commonly used in Australian policy documents, statistics and other research publications include ‘mainly English-speaking background (MESB) migrants’; ‘non–English-speaking background (NESB) migrants’; ‘culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people’; and ‘ethnic communities’ (ABS, 2014; DIMA, 2001; ECCV, 2012; NSW, 2014; RACGP, 2014). As discussed in the literature review, each of these descriptors has its own capabilities and limitations to accurately describe the intended diversity groups. By considering those capabilities and limitations, and their relative presence in past policy and research publications, the term NESB is considered to be the appropriate descriptor for cultural and linguistic diversity in this research. Its substantive usage in research during last two decades is evident in the research undertaken by Almeida and Fernando (2017); Dantas et al. (2017); Junankar and Mahuteau (2005, 2007); Junankar, Paul, and Yasmeen (2010); Mahmud, Alam, and Härtel (2014); Rajendran, Farquharson, and Hewege (2017); Ressia, Strachan, and Bailey (2016, 2017); Syed (2008); Syed and Kramar (2010); Thornton and Luker (2010). With the quantitative approach exploring statistical data, the ABS still uses the definition of ‘mainly English-speaking background countries’ and provides a list of such countries in its glossary of terms (ABS, 2014).

The definition of NESB skilled migrants that will be utilised this research is:

First generation migrants or overseas-born people who have a greater probability of speaking languages other than English as their first language, and who acquired the majority of their educational qualifications and work experience from countries other than listed MESB countries by ABS (ABS, 2014). People who define their linguistic and cultural identities partly or wholly on the basis of the above criteria are therefore considered as NESB migrants for the purpose of this research. (Author developed)
Therefore, the term NESB refers to a demographic descriptor rather than a sole language ability indicator. The above definition proposed for the purpose of this research intends to intensify the discussion of a wider variety of mobility barriers/facilitators rather than ‘language ability’ or ‘culture’, as implied by NESB or CALD in their typical dictionary meanings.

3.8 Research design

When considering the diverse collection of methods available in mixed research methodology it is important to address concerns such as why a particular approach is more appropriate than others; how a particular approach brings rigour to the analysis; and how a particular approach complements the research’s philosophical stance, research design and inquiry approach. Various authors (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Eisenhardt, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1990; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Yin, 2014) have provided answers to these questions in terms of different methodological choices. This research applies the Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) mixed-method research classification matrix (see Figure 4) where the research process is divided into three stages, namely conceptualisation, experiential and inferential stages. The Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) model is not limited to experimental research. Their model combines the data collection and analysis stages of a research as the ‘experiential’ stage. This research used two methodological phases, quantitative and qualitative, in a sequential manner in all the conceptualisation, experiential and inferential stages of the research. Figure 4 adapted from Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 154) shows the sequential mixed-method process employed in the research.
Figure 4: An illustration of sequential mixed-method approach; adapted from (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 154)

Aligned with the sequential mixed-method approach, this research is structured into two phases: Phase 1, a quantitative secondary data analysis; followed by Phase 2, a qualitative focus group and semi-structured interview data analysis. The purpose of the quantitative secondary data analysis was to understand the occupational mobility of the survey participants in terms of their transition between home country and host country occupations. The *demi-regularities* (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013) and data patterns revealed in this phase in terms of identified occupational mobility barriers/facilitators then informed the formulation of the second qualitative phase.

The purpose of the qualitative phase is to (a) further explore the influence of the identified factors in the first phase; (b) identify emergent occupational mobility barriers and facilitators; and (c) understand how NESB skilled migrants craft their agential projects to overcome perceived mobility barriers under the influence of structural constraints or facilitators. The final inferences will be based on the findings of both phases. The research design is illustrated in Figure 5.
3.8.1 Phase 1: Quantitative phase

The quantitative data analysis phase of this research entails a descriptive statistical analysis of a large national survey dataset, namely, the Continuous Survey of Australia’s Migrants (CSAM). The rationale for using CSAM data, the characteristics of the CSAM dataset, and the advantages and disadvantages of using the CSAM dataset will be elaborated in the quantitative findings chapter (Chapter 4). The written permission to use the CSAM dataset for this research was obtained from the Economic Analysis Unit of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) on 01/06/2016.

The methodological choice of descriptive statistics against inferential statistics was informed by the exploratory nature of the research question intended to be answered in the quantitative chapter and the critical realists’ epistemology of the research (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). The critical realists’ epistemology of the research has been characterised by the space to use multiple methodological probes. This entails both quantitative and qualitative techniques, as explained in the previous section. Contrasting with positivist and post-positivist inquiry, critical realism does not fully embrace the use of inferential statistical
techniques as a way of approximating the real domain through events occurring in the empirical domain (Mingers, 2004). According to critical realists, empirical observations gathered through inferential statistical techniques, such as correlations between variables, possess a limited capacity to unearth the causal mechanisms that generated those events (Mingers, 2004; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). Therefore, while distancing themselves from positivists’ laws and empiricists’ regularities, critical realists advocate demi-regularities emerging through general exploration of quantitative data in descriptive statistical approaches (Bakewell, 2010; Mingers, 2004; Reed, 2005; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013).

In order to understand the effect of skilled migrants’ language background, gender, visa sponsorship status and visa grant location over their employment and occupational mobility outcomes, a series of data variables of CSAM were cross-tabulated against migrants’ language background, gender, visa sponsorship status and visa grant location. Further, the ANZSCO skill levels of skilled migrants’ visa nominated occupations were cross-tabulated against the ANZSCO skill level of their Australian occupations. This helps to understand the level of skills that skilled migrants bring with them and how they transit between their home country occupations to Australian occupations, a vital element of occupational mobility. The quantitative findings chapter elaborates on the outcomes of these cross-tabulations. Table 5 summarises the cross-tabulated data variables and the intended purposes of the cross-tabulations.
### Table 5: Cross-tabulated data variables: developed by the author based on CSAM codebook (DIBP, 2015c)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data item</th>
<th>CSAM coding</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour force status of the primary applicant in wave 1 and 2</td>
<td>w1_lfs_pa_rev, w2_lfs_pa</td>
<td>To determine unemployment rates, labour force participation rate and employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of working hours primary applicant has worked in all jobs</td>
<td>w1_hours_pa_range, w1_Q23_pa</td>
<td>To determine the amount of paid work secured by the primary applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skill level of primary applicant’s visa nominated occupation</td>
<td>nom_skill_pa</td>
<td>To identify the level of skills brought along with skilled migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To track the skilled migrants’ transition between nominated occupation skills levels and Australian occupation skill levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skill level of primary applicant’s wave 1 and wave 2 Australian jobs</td>
<td>w1_skill_pa, w2_skill_pa</td>
<td>To track the skilled migrants’ transition between nominated occupation skills levels and Australian occupation skill levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest pre-immigration qualification</td>
<td>w1_Q9_pa</td>
<td>To determine the primary applicants’ pre-immigration educational attainments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main field of study for overseas qualification</td>
<td>w1_Q10_pa</td>
<td>To determine the field of education for overseas qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attainment of Australian qualifications</td>
<td>w1_Q11_pa</td>
<td>To determine whether the primary applicant has an Australian qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary applicant’s national visa reporting category</td>
<td>rep_cat</td>
<td>To determine primary applicants’ visa reporting categories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.8.2 Phase 2: Qualitative phase

The qualitative phase consists of a thematic analysis of qualitative data gathered through focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews. The first stage entails four focus group discussions with 26 NESB skilled migrant jobseekers who immigrated to Australia as offshore permanent residency visa holders between 2010 and 2015. Subsequently, for the individual in-depth interviews, 10 individuals were purposively selected from the previous 26 respondents who participated in the focus group discussions. These 10 individuals contributed to the qualitative data through two rounds of interviews over an 18-month period. Firstly, they were interviewed while they were actively looking for skilled work. This generated 10 in-depth interview responses. Secondly, they were re-interviewed once they...
reached a significant career milestone, either by securing skilled work or after abandoning the pursuit of skilled employment. Nine participants underwent follow-up interviews as one participant has repatriated after being unsuccessful in finding skilled work in Australia during the course of the research. Overall, the qualitative data collection process generated 23 interview transcripts (4 focus group transcripts and 19 in-depth interviews). The qualitative data collection process continued until the data reached the point of saturation, where the collection of new data does not provide new themes (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, 2009; Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). Figure 5 illustrates the qualitative data collection process.

Due to the above-suggested data collection procedure, the qualitative data obtained longitudinal properties where it captured participants’ constantly modifying agential responses to structural barriers and facilitators. The agential responses such as change of perceptions, modification of behaviour, attempts to upskill themselves and obtaining structural awareness have been discussed in the discussion chapter in the light of critical realists’ utility of morphogenesis (Archer, 1982; Bakewell, 2010; Fletcher, 2017; Morawska, 2011; Vandenberghe, 2005) with particular attention given to temporal distinguishability (Archer, 1995) of social structure and human agency.

### 3.8.2.1 Recruitment of participants

The population under consideration (n = 26) in the qualitative phase of the research was NESB skilled migrants living in Australia. In terms of migrant-sourcing countries, all countries except MESB countries listed by the ABS (Canada, Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, United States of America) were taken into consideration (ABS, 2014). The NESB skilled migrant jobseekers were drawn from the participants of a job preparation and career counselling course for overseas qualified professionals at a Melbourne based vocational education and training (VET) providing organisation. This program is designed and run by the said organisation as an upskilling program for skilled migrant jobseekers, providing shelter for skilled migrant jobseekers from diverse occupational and cultural backgrounds.

The recruitment of the research participants from the abovementioned job preparation program has linked to one of the key aspects of the empirical literature: the role of labour market gatekeepers/influencers (Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, 2010). The job preparation
programs as labour market gatekeepers or influencers have an influence on skilled migrant jobseekers in terms of suggestions to undertake further training, certifications and professional memberships, to modify personal behaviour and outlook, and suggestions to anglicise migrants’ names (Faulconbridge et al., 2009; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014). These strategies might have influenced and informed migrants’ agential projects in response to perceived structural barriers and facilitators. The impact of such influences will be discussed in the qualitative findings and discussion chapters.

### 3.8.2.2 Sampling strategy: Purposeful sampling

A purposeful sampling strategy was applied in Phase 2 of this research. Purposefully selected samples are common in qualitative research, given its intention to explain a phenomenon to greater depths through rich, in-depth information (Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). In deciding the qualitative sample size and type, Leedy and Ormrod (2012, p. 152) suggested some useful criteria:

1. Ensure that the sample includes not only seemingly typical but also seemingly non-typical examples.
2. When a power hierarchy exists, as it does in the workplace and in many clubs and communities, sample from various levels in the hierarchy.
3. Actively look for cases that can potentially discredit emerging hypotheses and theories.

These criteria provided useful guidance, whereby the research has covered typical and non-typical examples as well as some discrediting cases, by incorporating NESB skilled migrants with successful and not so successful jobseeking experiences. Power hierarchies were not a matter of concern among the participants since they pursued discrete occupational avenues and goals.

### 3.8.2.3 Focus groups: A quest to find common barriers and facilitators

Four focus groups each containing four to eight participants were conducted with the NESB skilled migrant jobseekers at the first phase of the qualitative data collection. The four focus groups entailed (1) accountancy and finance sector workers (n = 4); (2) engineers and other technical sector workers (n = 7); (3) administrative and office assistance workers (n = 7); and (4) education and scientific industry workers (n = 8). The focus groups were considered as an appropriate entry to qualitative data collection since they allow participants to discuss and
share their experiences, thoughts and feelings openly (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). Such an atmosphere allowed the researcher to listen, record and observe conversations and behaviour to understand the common challenges that those jobseekers shared. The understanding obtained through the focus group discussions informed the initial broad themes for the subsequent individual interviews. Further, the focus group discussions helped the researcher to identify individuals with information-rich jobseeking experiences for the subsequent in-depth interviews. Therefore, the focus groups enhanced the breadth of the data rather than the depth (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011), which was more informative and necessary at the initial stage of the data collection.

3.8.2.4 The use of qualitative in-depth interviews

The semi-structured in-depth interviews were used in the second stage of the qualitative phase. When selecting interviews as a data collection technique for a research project, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009)’s view of the interview as “an interview is literally an inter-view; an interchange of views between two persons” (p. 2) offers a useful insight. Semi-structured interviews with the aid of proper guidance (refer Appendix C) help to uncover participants’ views while valuing the way participants frame and structure their responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Uncovering this emic perspective of the problem is vital in this research, given its intended objective to investigate the jobseeking experiences of NESB skilled migrants.

3.8.2.5 The thematic analysis of qualitative data

The data gathered through focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews were analysed through thematic coding analysis techniques. QSR International’s NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to organise and code qualitative data. The qualitative data analysis was structured into three sections such as pre-arrival, post-arrival and post-employment experiences, each exploring different aspects of the NESB skilled migrants’ jobseeking and career progression experience.

This research drew extensively from the critical realists’ iterative process of abstraction and retroduction (Bakewell, 2010; Bhaskar, 2013; Reed, 2005; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013) in its inductive qualitative data analysis process. The retroductive process of critical realism involves four main phases (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). The first phase, description or appreciation, entails the consideration of extant literature to realise how the
theoretical insights shape the phenomena under consideration. However, a fully deductive analysis based on a strict coding framework derived from extant literature is not recommended under critical realism’s emergent inquiry approach (Bakewell, 2010; Maxwell, 2012). Therefore, this research has not employed a literature-driven strict coding framework as the stepping stone to qualitative data analysis. Instead, the literature was treated as an enabler to understand the skilled migrant employment discourse.

A critical realist approach significantly departs from grounded theory on its “insistence that concrete data produced by the research subjects’ narratives is not a sufficient basis in itself for theory” (Bakewell, 2010, p. 1705). If data categories are established exclusively on participants’ interpretations of their experiences, the analysis becomes constrained to the individual agency that produced the agential responses, instead of exploring the emergent properties of social structures. Therefore, with an emphasis on the causality and emergence of social structures (Archer, 1982; Bhaskar, 2013; Fleetwood, 2008; Hodgson, 2007; Morawska, 2011; Reed, 2005), the second phase, retroductive analysis, began with an open coding process of interview transcripts. This generated 86 first-order codes in the first coding round. These first-order codes were then reassigned into 30 second-order codes through iterative cycles of reflection between extant literature and data (refer Appendix A for an abstract of code arrangements).

The third phase of the analysis was the critical assessment and elimination of findings. This was done aligned with the concepts and arguments in extant literature, and a comparison between quantitative findings and qualitative findings. For example, participants’ narratives on fewer career opportunities in diminishing industries were compared to the job creation data and economic indicators of the time. The meta-inferences generated through this process are discussed in the discussion chapter.

The last phase, according to Zachariadis, Scott, and Barrett (2013), is the action phase, whereby dissemination of findings is considered. Further, development of an action agenda based on the research findings is expected. The discussions and theoretical contribution sections of the thesis deliver these outcomes. In terms of applied research outcomes, the findings are shown to have the capacity to inform policy and program development in the skilled migrant employment discourse. However, the effort has not been taken to develop any specific action agenda (similar to action research) to operationalise the findings of this
research, conducted for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

3.9 Reliability and validity

The validity of research findings indicates the quality and rigour of research (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). From the diverse interpretations of the terms ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ proposed by many authors (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1990; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, 2009; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013), three major attributes of validity remain popular: design validity, measurement validity and inferential validity. However, quantitative and qualitative research paradigms understand and treat these aspects differently. In the quantitative paradigm, design validity subsumes internal and external validity where correlation simply equivocates to causation. Measurement validity refers to the reliability of data. Inferential validity refers to the sufficiency of statistical outcomes to draw generalisable inferences (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). Whilst external validity / generalisability play a trivial role in qualitative research, the overall quality of the research design and execution in order to get more dependable, consistent and plausible findings remains important for the qualitative paradigm.

Under a critical realist approach, the role of the abovementioned aspects of validity become different since the focus of the research changed from empirical events to underlying causal mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2013; Proctor, 1998). Whilst positivists and empiricists hold concerns about the internal validity of empirical phenomena, realists are interested in the link between hypothesised generative mechanisms and observable events (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). In terms of external validity, critical realists would be concerned if the causal mechanisms that generated observable outcomes in the empirical domain generated similar outcomes in the actual and real domains.

By adopting critical realism in this research, the role of the quantitative inquiry has differed from the conventional role, where the regularity of events and correlation between variables are used to draw inferences on social events. Instead, quantitative demi-regularities are considered as “helpful simplifications” (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013, p. 862) of the behaviours of the observable events. Whilst these simplifications suggest some properties of social objects, they do not necessarily provide any causal statements of their occurrence. Therefore, this research has used descriptive statistics to uncover some regularities of skilled
migrants’ occupational mobility experiences, instead of being heavily dependent on inferential statistics to equivocate correlation to causation. Thus, the qualitative phase is fundamental for uncovering causal mechanisms.

### 3.10 Ethics consideration of the research

All research involving human participants conducted through RMIT University College of Business must obtain written approval from the Business College Human Ethics Advisory Network (BCHEAN), or where appropriate the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). RMIT University’s research ethics process is informed and aligned with the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, updated May 2015) and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007).

The ethics approval of this research was obtained from BCHEAN on 21/04/2015, Project No: 19145 (Appendix D). Each research participant was provided with a Participant Information and Consent Form and consent for participation was obtained (Appendix B). Research participation was voluntarily and participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the research process at any stage without incurring a penalty. Further, the tentative interview questions were scrutinised in the ethics approval process through the provided interview protocol. Appendix C shows the interview protocol used in the qualitative data collection process.

### 3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter elaborated on critical aspects of the methodology such as the ontological and epistemological orientation of the research, the adoption of mixed methodology, the research design, data collection and analysis procedures, measures taken to improve reliability and validity of research findings, followed by the ethical considerations of the research. Apart from providing the methodological guidance to the research, this chapter also intended to contribute to the development of migration research through its methodological suggestions for critical realism led migration research. Informed by the philosophical stance and analytical procedures discussed in this chapter, the next two chapters present the quantitative (Phase 1) and qualitative (Phase 2) findings respectively.
Chapter 4

Quantitative Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to identify the occupational mobility barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for in Australia. Owing to the exploratory nature of the research questions and the epistemological orientation of the research, the scope of this chapter was limited to the findings of a descriptive statistical analysis of a large national survey dataset, the Continuous Survey of Australia’s Migrants (CSAM). This chapter explores the nature of the employment and occupational mobility outcomes of skilled migrants who arrived in Australia on an offshore visa or had been granted an onshore visa from January 2013 to July 2013. The analysis and findings have been limited to the migrants holding permanent residency visas or visas that come with permanent settlement prospects since temporary visa holders might encounter some statutory barriers to pursuing their full career potential (Colic-Peisker, 2011; Howe, 2013; Peterson, Pandya, & Leblang, 2014).

The chapter begins with an introduction to the CSAM dataset used in the analysis, followed by an analysis of skilled migrants’ educational attainments, employment and occupational mobility outcomes based on their language background, gender and visa grant location. The demi-regularities (Fletcher, 2017; Patomäki, 2017; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013) and data patterns revealed in this phase in terms of identified occupational mobility barriers/facilitators then inform the formulation of the second phase of the research, the qualitative phase.

4.2 Background to the CSAM dataset

CSAM is an annual survey that has been conducted by DIBP since 2009 as a response to the need to monitor labour market integration and other settlement prospects of recently arrived skilled and family stream migrants (DIBP, 2015b). The CSAM used in this analysis commenced in October 2013. Under its current design, a new group of migrants who either arrived in Australia on an offshore visa or had been granted an onshore visa six months prior to the survey administration is invited to undertake the introductory mail-out survey. The same cohort of migrants is then surveyed 12 months after the introductory survey through a
follow-up computer-assisted telephone interview. Therefore, a migrant is expected to undergo two waves of data collection during the survey. Figure 6 adapted from DIBP (2015b) explains the CSAM data waves and timing of three cohorts of participants.

![Figure 6: CSAM data collection waves; adapted from DIBP (2015b)](image)

The analysis presented in this thesis has been limited to the cohort 1 informants (n = 8756) of CSAM who had their two survey rounds in October 2013 and 2014. It was the only set of recent CSAM data released to the public for both wave 1 and wave 2 at the time the quantitative phase of the research was undertaken. The purpose of the introductory survey is to find out migrants’ employment and settlement outcomes in the early stage of settlement. Therefore, the questions in the introductory survey included labour force status, occupation, education attainment, English proficiency, earnings and information on unemployment (DIBP, 2015b). The follow-up survey further investigated how the migrants’ situation changed over the 12 months between the first and second surveys.

The CSAM sample (n = 8756) was chosen by the administrator of the original survey (DIBP) from a large population file of 92,931 individual records. These migrants had been granted permanent residency visas or provisional visas with permanent residency prospects from January 2013 to July 2013. This population file was subjected to an initial data cleaning process to remove duplicate records and the records of migrants aged below 18 years. That reduced the population file size to 77,035 individual records. The population file then
underwent a ‘jurisdictional file matching process’ (DIBP, 2015b) to update contact information and assign a personal identifier number to each account. The population file subjected to jurisdictional file matching became 70,542 individual records and was taken as the eligible population for the introductory survey. Figure 7 explains the DIBP’s treatment of the initial population file.

![Diagram of population file processing]

**Figure 7: The DIBP’s statistical treatment of the population file**

### 4.2.1 CSAM sample selection

A total of 20,000 sample records were selected from the above population (n = 70,542) to participate in the introductory survey, representing 36 visa reporting categories that CSAM covers. Some 43.8% of migrants (n = 8756) from the 20,000 sample had completed the introductory survey. Migrants who had completed the introductory survey and provided their valid telephone numbers (n = 8689) were contacted to complete the computer-assisted telephone interview in the follow-up survey; 81.4% of migrants (n = 7070) completed the follow-up survey (DIBP, 2015b).

---

7 Refer to DIBP (2015b) for more details on the jurisdictional file matching process.
4.2.2 Outliers, weighting and data coding

The cleaned and coded dataset “CSAM_MARK2_CI_W1W2_CONFID” prepared by the Economic Analysis Unit of DIBP has been used in this research. Therefore, the data cleaning and coding procedure described below was adopted from DIBP (2015b, 2015c). Once collected, the data was edited according to the questionnaire logic. Then, the online and hardcopy data were merged to create a consolidated raw data file. In order to reduce the impact of income outliers on the survey estimates of annual earnings, the outliers were flagged. The plausible values were imputed by an expectation-maximisation with the bootstrapping algorithm (Barbieri, Manco, & Ritacco, 2014; Watanabe & Yamaguchi, 2003). The survey data were weighted to account for the variation in sample sizes and response rates compared to the population. The data were weighted to visa category, gender, birthplace, nominated occupation and age. The weights were calculated by the iterative proportional fitting method (Lomax & Norman, 2016) to ensure elimination of extremes. The data was classified and coded using 1-digit Australian New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC); 4-digit and 6-digit Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO); and 1-digit and 2-digit Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED) systems. The elaborate details on data collection and preparation are available in DIBP (2015c).

4.2.3 The sample used in this research: Skill stream primary applicants

From the cleansed and consolidated CSAM dataset (n = 8756), some 5237 individual cases that have been confirmed as skill stream primary applicants were selected for this research. These skill stream primary applicants were the only group of skilled migrants granted visas based on their skills to fill the skill shortages in the Australian labour market (DIBP, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Table 6 summarises the sample descriptive statistics.

The selected 5237 individual cases comprise 70.9% onshore applicants and 29.1% offshore applicants. In this sample, 64.3% of the skilled stream primary applicants were males, while 35.7% were female. In terms of demographical identities, just 15.6% of cases were from mainly English-speaking background (MESB) countries while 84.4% were from non–English-speaking background countries (NESB). Even though the skilled migrants’ age ranges in a broad spectrum, the majority (95.3%) were below 44 years. Therefore, they were in the prime working age; one of the most important labour-market attributes to secure
employment (AHRC, 2015). In terms of earnings, the median annual full-time income for skill stream primary applicants in wave 1 was AUD 60,000. This has been increased to AUD 65,000 in wave 2.

Table 6: Sample descriptive statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Frequency*</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visa grant location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offshore</td>
<td>1524</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onshore</td>
<td>3713</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5237</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National visa reporting category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>1459</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-sponsored</td>
<td>1148</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offshore independent</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onshore independent</td>
<td>1071</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other skilled</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5237</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3369</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5237</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main origin according to the country of birth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>4420</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5237</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at arrival in years (categories)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>2791</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>1118</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and over</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5237</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross annual earnings from all jobs at wave 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 or less</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,001 to $40,000</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,001 to $60,000</td>
<td>1351</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,001 to $80,000</td>
<td>743</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,001 to $100,000</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,001 to $120,000</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$120,001 to $140,000</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $140,000</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative.ZERO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5237</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Characteristics of migrants skills and educational qualifications

In order to understand skilled migrant employment outcomes, it is worthwhile to understand the levels of the skills that these migrants bring along to Australia. NESB skilled migrants have found to be disadvantaged in the Australian labour market compared to their MESB counterparts (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Hawthorne, 2014b; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Junankar, Paul, & Yasmeen, 2010; Rynderman & Flynn, 2016; Thornton & Luker, 2010). Therefore, it is worthwhile to compare the skills and educational qualifications of these two cohorts of skilled migrants in order to understand the impact on skilled migrants’ employment outcomes.

4.3.1 The extent of home country educational qualifications and skills

ANZSCO skill levels were used to identify the skills of the visa nominated occupations at the point of immigration. A migrant is classified as having highly skilled employment if they are working in occupations defined either at ANZSCO skill level 1 or 2, which requires an Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma or Diploma level qualification or higher. A migrant is considered as having semi-skilled employment if they are working in occupations defined either at ANZSCO skill level 3 or 4, which requires Certificate III or IV level qualification. A migrant is categorised as having low-skilled employment if they are working in occupations defined at ANZSCO skill level 5, which requires Certificate I or II level qualification or lower (DIBP, 2015b).

Figure 8 shows that the vast majority of skilled primary applicants came from the visa nominated occupations in skill level 1 and skill level 3. Therefore, it is sensible to consider that the majority of these migrants were either highly skilled or semi-skilled individuals.
Figure 8: ANZSCO skill levels of migrants’ nominated occupations

Similar to skill levels, qualification levels are also important to understand the human capital attainments of skills migrants. Table 7 shows the top five levels of qualifications held by the 5237 skilled migrants in the sample prior to immigrating to Australia. There were no noteworthy differences among MESB and NESB skilled migrants in these qualification categories except Doctoral degree level and Certificate III and IV level. In those two categories, MESB skilled migrants outperformed NESB skilled migrants. The considerable difference in Certificate III and IV level qualifications among MESB and NESB skilled migrants could be attributed to the lack of formal trade level qualification generation systems in NESB countries; and NESB trade level qualifications holders segregated in the short-term employer-sponsored skilled migration program (Birrell, 2018; Howe, 2013). In terms of prior immigration educational qualifications, information technology, engineering and related technology, health, management and commerce, and social and cultural studies were among the top five popular fields of education.
Table 7: Top 5 pre-immigration educational qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Level</th>
<th>MESB</th>
<th>NESB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree level</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master degree level</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma level</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III and IV</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following section discusses the skilled migrants’ attainments of Australian qualifications.

### 4.3.2 Skilled migrants’ attainments of Australian qualifications

Skilled migrants’ attainments in Australian qualifications have widely been discussed as an employability facilitator in the Australian occupational mobility literature (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Hawthorne, 2014d; Misko, 2012). Therefore, it is worthwhile to understand skilled migrants’ attainment of Australian qualifications. NESB skilled migrants were shown to have higher attainments to Australian qualifications compared to MESB skilled migrants, since 60.9% of NESB skilled migrants confirmed that they have an Australian qualification compared to 21.7% of MESB skilled migrants. This could be attributed to many reasons, such as the higher presence of former international students in NESB skilled migrant cohorts, and that employers tend to hire more MESB skilled migrants directly from overseas through the employer sponsor stream regardless of their Australian qualification attainments. These factors will be further considered in the subsequent analysis of the skilled migrants’ visa categories. However, this evidence suggests that MESB skilled migrants do not necessarily confront the same level of educational qualification recognition barriers as NESB skilled migrants. Therefore, they are less inclined to get Australian qualifications. For NESB skilled migrants, Australian qualifications are shown to become a necessary facilitator in gaining labour market entry, albeit an expensive facilitator.

### 4.3.3 Skilled migrants’ visa reporting categories

Migrants’ visa sponsorship categories can provide some useful insights into their employment outcomes in Australia. Therefore, the following discussion will explore skilled migrants’ employment outcomes based on their visa categories. The skilled stream of the Australian migration program has five national visa reporting categories; namely, employer-sponsored, state-sponsored, offshore independent, onshore independent and other skilled.
Table 8 shows the breakdown of MESB and NESB skilled migrants in the sample across five national visa reporting categories.

Table 8: Migrants’ visa reporting categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visa reporting category</th>
<th>Employer-sponsored</th>
<th>State-sponsored</th>
<th>Offshore independent</th>
<th>Onshore independent</th>
<th>Other skilled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The higher presence of onshore independent visa holders among the NESB skilled migrant cohort can be considered as an indication of the higher proportion of former international students turned to skilled migrants through the skilled graduate visa stream (Hawthorne, 2014d; Robertson, 2011). This might have provided an upward impact on the above-reported NESB skilled migrants’ attainments of Australian qualifications. Further, employers were shown to have more interest in hiring skilled migrants from MESB countries, as 43.8% of employer-sponsored skilled migrants came from MESB countries compared to 24.9% of NESB skilled migrants. Therefore one can make a reasonable assumption that these employer-sponsored MESB skilled migrants had little interest in acquiring Australian qualifications since they had already been sponsored for skilled jobs in Australia.

Even though Australian qualifications play a vital role in Australian labour market (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Misko, 2012; Ng Chok et al., 2018) the necessity of obtaining such qualifications seems not be a desperate requirement for skilled migrants from MESB countries, which presumably have education and qualification systems similar to Australia. Therefore, these MESB skilled migrants enjoyed better recognition for their overseas qualifications in the Australian labour market compared to their NESB counterparts (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Misko, 2012; Ng Chok et al., 2018; Sardana, Zhu, & Veen, 2016). Other than the similar qualification and training platforms among Anglophone countries, the institutional processes that assign values to human capital endowments such as higher perceived quality for qualifications gained from Anglophone countries might also have contributed to the relative ease of qualification recognition for MESB skilled migrants.
4.4 Skilled migrants’ employment outcomes: A deeper examination

In order to understand skilled migrants’ employment outcomes, it is worthwhile to start with the key premise of the CSAM survey – migrants’ labour force status. The CSAM has used the following criteria to access the labour force status of migrants: whether they are employed, unemployed or not in the labour force. In both wave 1 and wave 2 of the survey, the following two questions were asked of the survey respondents.

**Question 1:** Last week, did this person have a full-time or part-time job of any kind? In this respect, a paid job means any type of paid work including casual and temporary or part-time work that was for one hour or more in a week (DIBP, 2015b).

**Question 2:** Did this person actively look for work in the last four weeks? Actively looking for work includes people who are applying for a job, advertising for work, registered as a jobseeker with Centrelink or using an employment agency to help them find work (DIBP, 2015b).

The responses were analysed based on the following criteria:

If Q1 = Yes, then labour force status = ‘ Employed’.

If Q1 = No, and Q2 = Yes, then labour force status = ‘ Unemployed’.

Remaining respondents are considered = ‘ Not in labour force’.

This approach of finding migrants’ labour force status is merely enough to identify whether the migrants were engaged in any form of remunerated activity or otherwise. Therefore, it has limitations to uncover the extent of employment or underemployment such as working hours, type of employment and skill usage in migrants’ jobs. Whilst migrants’ labour force status is a vital characteristic to understand their employment outcomes, care should be taken not to oversimplify the migrant employment discourse to mere labour status. Table 9 illustrates the skilled migrants’ labour force status based on their birth country language background, for both onshore and offshore skilled migrants as an aggregate.
Table 9: Labour force status of primary visa applicants, based on demographic characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic descriptor</th>
<th>Employed %</th>
<th>Not in labour force %</th>
<th>Unemployed %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After 18 months</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 9 demonstrates, both cohorts of skilled migrants are shown to have higher employment rates, higher labour force participation rates and lower unemployment rates compared to the Australian general population (DIBP, 2015b, 2015c). However, MESB skilled migrants had superior employment outcomes compared to their NESB counterparts since they outperformed NESB skilled migrants in all of the above three categories. Further, both cohorts of skilled migrants improved their labour force status significantly with a prolonged stay in Australia. The extent of [un]employment will be further investigated in the following sections.

The migrants’ ability to find employment can be highly influenced by factors such as their exposure to Australian social networks, knowledge of localised jobseeking techniques and availability of local referees (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Junankar & Mahuteau, 2008; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014; Reid, 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume onshore applicants have better exposure to the Australian labour market compared to offshore applicants as they have lived in Australia for a sufficient time prior to applying for permanent skilled visas. Hence, it is worthwhile to investigate skilled migrants’ labour force status based on their visa grant location in order to understand the effect of a prolonged stay in Australia over their employment outcomes. The qualitative findings chapter will further investigate how skilled migrants’ prolonged stay in Australia has helped them to respond to the labour market barriers and facilitators. Table 10 illustrates the labour force status of skilled migrants based on their visa grant location.
Table 10: Labour force status of primary visa applicants, based on visa grant location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visa grant location</th>
<th>Employed %</th>
<th>Not in labour force %</th>
<th>Unemployed %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offshore applicants</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onshore applicants</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>After 18 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offshore applicants</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onshore applicants</td>
<td>93.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data demonstrate the effect of a prolonged stay in Australia on skilled migrants’ employment outcomes given there was a clear 9% employment gap between offshore and onshore applicants after six months of arrival and having been granted a visa. Further, there was a 6.9% unemployment gap between offshore and onshore applicants. However, offshore applicants are shown to have improved their conditions significantly with increasing time in Australia as their employment rate improved by 8.4% and unemployment rate shrunk by 7.3% after 18 months stay in Australia. Consequently, the remaining sections of this chapter put a higher emphasis on the employment outcomes of offshore skilled stream visa applicants as their circumstances create a unique position for them in the Australian labour market.

Table 11 summarises the labour force status of offshore applicants based on their demographical identities. According to the table, there is a noteworthy gap in employment (11.1%) as well as unemployment (8.1%) between MESB migrants and NESB migrants at wave 1 of the data collection. This apparent favourable labour market condition for MESB migrants could be due to many reasons. MESB skilled migrants have a distinct advantage over their NESB counterparts due to their use of English as the primary language. Further to the English language skills, this may be due to more structural concerns of mobility such as social distance, cultural similarity/assimilability and race. It could also be an indication of the institutional processes that assign values to human capital endowments such as perceived quality of education and qualification/accreditation transferability platforms among Anglophone countries.
Table 11: Labour force status of offshore primary visa applicants, based on demographic identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic descriptor</th>
<th>Employed %</th>
<th>Not in labour force %</th>
<th>Unemployed %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 18 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The employment and unemployment gap between MESB and NESB skilled migrants has then reduced significantly at wave 2 of the data collection, when skilled migrants have spent 18 months in Australia. This apparent improvement of the labour force status of NESB migrants will be further investigated in the second phase of this research through a qualitative approach by using the labour market experience of a selected cohort of NESB skilled migrants in Australia.

Another useful perspective to investigate skilled migrants’ labour force status is through their gender identities. Gender represents an important intersection of individual agency and social structures (Best et al., 2011; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Syed, 2008). Table 12 reveals that the employment outcomes for female skilled migrants have generally been inferior to male skilled migrants. This was witnessed by a 10.2% and 9.1% employment gap between male and female migrants in wave 1 and wave 2 respectively. The unemployment gaps between these two cohorts were 4.3% and 3.8% respectively in two data collection waves. However, there was a considerable level (8.4% and 8%) of labour force non-participation among female migrants in both waves compared to male participants (3.4% and 2.7%).
Table 12: Labour force status of offshore primary visa applicants, based on gender identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Employed %</th>
<th>Not in labour force %</th>
<th>Unemployed %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>At 18 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>94.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to understand whether these employment patterns are a result of individual career choices of female migrants and their immigrant households or a result of structural pressure keeping female migrants away from seeking jobs. The complex interplay of how migrants exercise their individual agency in terms of career choices under the influence of structure will be investigated in the second qualitative phase of the research.

4.5 The extent of employment among skilled migrants

The analysis presented so far has used labour force status, an indicator of one’s ability to be engaged in a remunerated activity ranging from one hour per week to full-time employment usually up to 40 hours per week (ABS, 2014). Therefore, such findings still have a limited value in terms of explaining the extent of employment such as underemployment. The inability to reveal the extent of employment through migrants’ labour force status comes from the original CSAM inquiry’s approach, where there was no space to recognise the situation of someone looking for work while already engaged in a remunerated activity; a typical scenario of underemployed workers. In order to further understand the labour market status of such individuals, jobseekers can be categorised into four broad categories:

1. Employed and not seeking jobs – recorded as ‘Employed’ in CSAM
2. Employed but still seeking jobs (underemployment) – Usually hidden in labour force status based employment statistics
3. Unemployed and seeking jobs – recorded as ‘Unemployed’ in CSAM
4. Unemployed and not seeking jobs – recorded as ‘Not in labour force’ in CSAM
In the case of early migrants, there is a body of literature (Fleming, Kifle, & Kler, 2016; Junankar & Mahuteau, 2005, 2007, 2008; Misko, 2012; Wagner & Childs, 2006) that suggests migrants particularly from developing countries (this represents some of the NESB countries in the Australian migration program) tend to accept unskilled, low paid jobs with limited working hours, particularly in the early stage of their settlement. This may be due to numerous reasons, such as managing the higher cost of living and early settlement costs in Australia. Additionally, some migrants might have commitments to send back remittance to support their families or repay loans which enabled their migration journeys (Castles, 2016b; Castles & Miller, 2009; Massey et al., 1993). Applied to the situation of such migrant workers, it is apparent that the labour force status based employment statistics have the following problems in explaining migrant jobseekers’ occupational mobility:

1. The inbuilt tendency of recording limited working hour jobs as employment due to the employment definition used to gather labour force status data.
2. The inherent incapability of labour force status based statistics to identify underemployment due to the lack of space to record the experience of currently employed individuals (in usually non-skilled, limited working hour jobs) that are still seeking jobs commensurate with their skills and qualifications.

In order to further understand the limitations associated with labour force status based statistics, it is important to scrutinise the CSAM definition of employment.

In this respect, a paid job means any type of paid work including casual, temporary or part-time work that was for one hour or more in a week. It also includes self-employment or working on a farm. (DIAC, 2011, p. 23)

This definition is adapted from the ABS, which again is in line with the international definition (International Labour Organization) of employment (ABS, 2001). As ABS has correctly identified, this definition may understate the full extent of unemployment as well as underemployment, since it categorises merely one hour of work as employment (ABS, 2001). However, the two issues listed above are not just limited to migrant workers since this definition of employment has widely been utilised in most labour market surveys in Australia, including ABS surveys from which CSAM gets native labour force statistics for comparison. However, applied to Australian skilled migrants this may have a noteworthy impact (particularly on NESB migrants) on labour market outcomes due to the higher propensity to settle in less working hour jobs due to previously discussed reasons (Fleming,
Kifle, & Kler, 2016; Junankar & Mahuteau, 2005, 2007, 2008; Misko, 2012; Wagner & Childs, 2006). Therefore, the following section puts some emphasis on understanding skilled migrants’ employment outcomes further to labour force status. Whilst the first part of the twofold analysis presents the quantity of work secured by skilled migrants, the second part focuses on the skill engagements in their Australian jobs.

### 4.6 The quantity of work secured by the skilled migrants

In order to understand how skilled migrants’ visa grant location, language background and gender conditioned their ability to find sufficient amounts of work (skilled and non-skilled), the number of hours skilled migrants have worked in all jobs was cross-tabulated against said demographic descriptors. As Table 13 illustrates, the onshore applicants outperformed offshore applicants since they possessed better outcomes in terms of full-time or equivalent employment. Further, their presence in the ‘0 hrs’ category was half of that of offshore applicants. In terms of language background, NESB skilled migrants were accumulated in ‘less working hour jobs’ compared to their MESB counterparts since their presence in ‘0 hrs’ and ‘less than 35 hrs’ jobs were twice of that of MESB skilled migrants.

**Table 13: Number of hours migrants have worked during the reference week in all jobs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic descriptor</th>
<th>0 hrs %</th>
<th>1–20 hrs %</th>
<th>21–35 hrs %</th>
<th>36 hrs and above %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offshore</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onshore</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of gender, women seem to be segregated in unemployment, labour force non-participation and jobs with limited working hours compared to their male counterparts given
their presence in those categories were relatively higher than that of males. Further, female participation in full-time equivalent work was 14.4% lower than that of male participants. The female presence in ‘less working hour work’ could be influenced by a spectrum of reasons ranging from more agency-oriented individual career choice to wider structural inequality hindering occupational mobility of women (Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2017; Syed, 2007). Therefore, the determinants of higher female presence in ‘less working hour work’ will be further explored in the qualitative second phase of the research. The following section will explore skilled migrants’ occupational mobility through a still transferability perspective.

4.7 Mapping skilled migrants’ occupational mobility

The employment outcomes discussed so far do not necessarily reflect skilled employment. However, central to the Australian skilled migration program is the chronic skills shortage in the Australian labour market and skilled migrants’ capacity to fill those gaps (DIAC, 2011; DIBP, 2015a, 2017c). Therefore, it is important to understand the occupational mobility of skilled migrants through their use of skills in Australian jobs. In order to map their occupational mobility, the skill levels of the skilled migrants’ nominated occupations were compared against the skill levels of the jobs they did after six months of settlement (skill level_wave 1) and 18 months of settlement (skill level_wave 2). This analysis was limited to the nominated occupations’ ANZSCO skill level 1, 2 and 3 since the vast majority (94.6% of the sample) of skilled migrants came through those three skill levels.

4.7.1 Occupational mobility in terms of language background

Table 14 shows how the skilled stream primary applicants have transferred between their visa nominated occupation skill level and Australian job skill level. The table illustrates the aggregate occupational mobility outcomes for offshore and onshore applicants in terms of their language background. The MESB skilled migrants who came through skill level 1 nominated occupations were shown to enjoy higher horizontal occupational mobility compared to their NESB counterparts, given 84.7% of them transferred to skill level 1 jobs in Australia compared to 58.6% of NESB skilled migrants after six months of arrival or having been granted visas. The situation of the skill level 1 nominated NESB skilled migrants improved slightly after 18 months of arrival given 63.9% were found to be working in skill level 1 jobs. Some skill level 1 nominated NESB migrants experienced considerable
downward occupational mobility given 11.4% and 6.1% of them were found to have transferred to skill level 4 and 5 jobs after six months of settlement compared to 3.3% and 0.7% of their MESB counterparts respectively. Their situation remained unchanged even after 18 months of settlement. Further, some 12.2% of skill level 1 nominated NESB skilled migrants were found to be non-working (both unemployed and non-labour force participants) after six months of settlement compared to 5% of their MESB counterparts.

In terms of the skill level 2 nominated occupation skilled migrants, MESB skilled migrants were found to enjoy higher upward occupational mobility given 42.2% of them were found to be working in skill level 1 jobs after six months of arrival. Comparatively, 13.8% of skill level 2 nominated NESB skilled migrants have worked in skill level 1 jobs after six months of settlement. Both skill level 2 nominated MESB and NESB skilled migrants enjoyed considerable horizontal occupational mobility given 35.9% and 47.9% of them transferred to jobs in the same skill level respectively, after six months of settlement. The situation of the skill level 2 nominated MESB skilled migrants further improved after 18 months of arrival given some of the skill level 2 nominated MESB skilled migrants who experienced downward occupational mobility in wave 1 transferred to skill level 2 jobs, increasing the wave 2 percentage to 43.8 from 35.9.
Table 14: Skill stream primary applicants’ occupational mobility in terms of language background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill level of wave 1 Australian job</th>
<th>Demographic indicator</th>
<th>Skill level of primary applicant’s nominated occupation</th>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill level of wave 2 Australian job</th>
<th>Demographic indicator</th>
<th>Skill level of primary applicant’s nominated occupation</th>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>MESB</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4: Quantitative Findings

The skill level 3 nominated MESB skilled migrants displayed strong horizontal occupational mobility, with 65.8% transferring to same skill level occupations after six months of arrival. The comparable transfer of NESB skilled migrants was just 38.5%. Interestingly, the skill level 3 nominated NESB skilled migrants enjoyed considerable upward occupational mobility by transferring (20.6%) into skill level 2 jobs after six months. However, they also displayed some noteworthy downward occupational mobility, with 15.6% and 8.3% transferring to skill level 4 and 5 jobs respectively. Further, the non-working cohort among these NESB skilled migrants was considerably higher (8.4%) than their MESB counterparts (3.4%).

4.7.2 Occupational mobility in terms of visa sponsorship status

Table 15 illustrates the occupational mobility of skilled stream primary applicants in terms of their visa sponsorship status. The analysis illustrates the outcomes for both offshore and onshore applicants. The comparison was done on employer-sponsored skilled migrants against non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants in order to distinguish the impact of employer sponsorship on occupational mobility outcomes. The employer-sponsored visa category does not represent the short-term employer-sponsored skilled visa program (such as subclass 457 visas) since CSAM data only covers skilled migrants with permanent settlement prospects. The non–employer-sponsored category encapsulated state-sponsored, offshore independent, onshore independent and other skilled visa categories.
### Table 15: Skill stream primary applicants’ occupational mobility in terms of visa sponsorship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill level of wave 1 Australian job</th>
<th>Visa sponsorship status</th>
<th>After 6 months of settlement</th>
<th>Skill level of primary applicant’s nominated occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill level of primary applicant’s nominated occupation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill level of wave 2 Australian job</th>
<th>Visa sponsorship status</th>
<th>After 18 months of settlement</th>
<th>Skill level of primary applicant’s nominated occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill level of primary applicant’s nominated occupation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Employer-sponsored</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-employer-sponsored</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Owing to their employer sponsorship, employer-sponsored skilled migrants enjoyed considerable upward and horizontal occupational mobility compared to their non–employer-sponsored counterparts. Under visa nominated occupations’ skill level 1, 2, and 3 some 87.1%, 63.6% and 63.4% of employer-sponsored skilled migrants respectively were found to have transferred to the same skill level jobs in Australia after six months of arrival, generating some strong horizontal occupational mobility outcomes. Further, 22.1% of visa nominated skill level 2 employer-sponsored skilled migrants and 19.2% of visa nominated skill level 3 employer-sponsored skilled migrants were found to have transferred to skill level 1 and skill level 2 jobs respectively after six months of arrival, generating some considerable upward occupational mobility outcomes. Therefore, employer sponsorship seems to work in favour of skilled migrants in this sample given the abovementioned upward and horizontal occupational mobility outcomes.

Contrasting with these initial positive occupational mobility outcomes, some employer-sponsored skilled migrants reported to have achieved upward or horizontal occupational mobility in wave 1 then transferred to jobs in lower skill levels or not-working status after 18 months of settlement. This behaviour was quite explicit among visa nominated skill level 3 employer-sponsored skilled migrants given the apparent increase of skill level 4, 5 and not-working categories after 18 months of settlement. The replacement of the initial upward and horizontal occupational mobility with later downward occupational mobility can be attributed to part-time and casual employment. Some of these employer-sponsored skilled migrants who were found to have secured employment in horizontal or upwards skill levels might have later taken low-skilled second jobs if their skilled jobs were insufficient to generate the expected income due to limited working hours, or permanent low-skilled jobs due to better job security.

The occupational mobility of non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants was considerably inferior to the employer-sponsored category given just 57.1%, 25.5% and 25% of visa nominated skill level 1, 2 and 3 non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants were able to secure horizontal occupational mobility after six months of settlement. Some 13.3% of skill level 2 nominated non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants were found to have secured skill level 1 jobs, while 19.4% and 5.1% of the skill level 3 nominated non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants transferred to skill level 2 and 1 jobs respectively after six months of settlement. Contrastingly, there was considerable downward occupational mobility among these non–
employer-sponsored skilled migrants given 11.7%, 6.3% and 13.1% of skill level 1 nominated non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants were found to have fallen to skill level 4, skill level 5 and non-working situations respectively, generating some noteworthy downward occupational mobility outcomes among highly skilled migrants.

The downward occupational mobility among visa nominated skill level 2 non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants was strong given 26.5%, 10.7% and 14.3% were found to have fallen to skill level 4, skill level 5 and not-working status respectively after six months of settlement. The situation of the visa nominated skill level 3 non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants was similar given 22.7%, 12.6% and 10.7% were found to have fallen to skill level 4, skill level 5 and not-working situations at six months of settlement. The general tendency of downward occupational mobility among non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants was not improved sufficiently even after 18 months of settlement. However, labour force participation and low-skilled employment improved for this category of skilled migrants given some of the not-working (both unemployed and non-labour force participants) skilled migrants transferred to low-skilled jobs after 18 months of settlement.

4.7.3 Occupational mobility in terms of gender

The next criterion of assessment for the occupational mobility of skilled migrants was the determinant of gender identities. Gender has long been identified as an important structural determinant of occupational mobility (Berry & Bell, 2012; Iredale, 2005; Syed, 2007). Gender is usually attributed to a range of occupational mobility concerns such as unpaid family care-work and lack of availability for paid work, individual career choices and gender-based discrimination (Essers, Benschop, & Doorewaard, 2010; Syed, 2007). As Table 16 demonstrates, males outperformed females in most upward and horizontal occupational mobility outcomes. Further, there was considerable downward occupational mobility among visa nominated skill level 2 and 3 females given their higher presence in skill level 4 and 5 jobs in Australia. Gender becomes a more considerable determinant in labour force participation, particularly among visa nominated skill level 2 and 3 respondents since 10.4% and 13.2% of females were found to be non-working respectively at six months of settlement compared to 5.3% and 5.8% of male respondents.
Table 16: Skill stream primary applicants’ occupational mobility in terms of gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill level of wave 1 Australian job</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Skill level of primary applicant’s nominated occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 6 months of settlement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill level of wave 2 Australian job</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Skill level of primary applicant’s nominated occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 18 months of settlement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The quantitative findings chapter has so far elaborated on the characteristics of skilled migrants’ educational attainments, employment outcomes and occupational mobility outcomes. Evidently, skilled migrants’ language background, gender, visa grant location and visa sponsorship status have conditioned their employment and occupational mobility outcomes. More importantly, the occupational mobility map in the latter part of the chapter has sufficiently exemplified how NESB, non-employer-sponsored and female skilled migrants experience a significant level of downward occupational mobility compared to their MESB, employer-sponsored and male counterparts. Such downward occupational mobility trends are not necessarily visible in mere labour force status based analyses frequently used in DIBP publications (DIAC, 2011; DIBP, 2014b, 2015b, 2015c), where labour market success is narrowed down to employment rates.

The following section elaborates on the strengths and limitations of using the CSAM dataset in understanding skilled migrants’ employment and occupational mobility outcomes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the quantitative findings informed the formulation of the next phase of the research, the qualitative phase.

### 4.8 Benefits of using CSAM data

The CSAM is one of the largest national surveys conducted by DIBP exclusively for migrants coming to Australia through the Australian migration program. It serves the central purpose of observing migrants’ employment and settlement outcomes. Therefore, CSAM considers a large population file (n = 92,931) to extract a significantly large sample (n = 20,000) of migrants. Under the current Australian migration program about 190,000 migrants come to Australia annually for settlement purposes under all three (skill, family and special eligibility) streams. Therefore, the CSAM sample covers 10.5% of the total population of migrants reaching Australia annually under the Australian migration program. Further the CSAM sample (n = 20,000) covers 21.5% of its intended population (n = 92,931) in its population file. Other than the large size of the CSAM sample, the sampling method used in the CSAM brings value to the CSAM sample in terms of its ability to represent the intended population. Since CSAM used stratified random sampling with its 36 visa reporting categories, it is reasonable to consider the CSAM sample as representative enough for the characteristics of

---

8 The size of the Australian migration program excludes people who come through the Australian humanitarian program, as it is considered a separate program in Australia.
each category. This enhances the external validity of the findings obtained from the CSAM survey statistics (Seber & Salehi, 2012).

Since CSAM is a national survey, it covers migrant settlers in all six states and two territories of Australia. This makes CSAM data more valuable in terms of the capacity to explain employment and settlement outcomes across Australia. Further, CSAM data captures skill and family stream migrants originating from 188 countries. This equips the CSAM data with the capacity to examine settlement experiences of migrants from diverse backgrounds; a substantially important aspect given the diverse nature of structural barriers or facilitators in front of the people bearing different demographic identities.

The CSAM data represent a variety of visa subclasses across six national visa reporting categories; namely, employer-sponsored, state-sponsored, offshore independent, onshore independent, other skilled and family. Whilst CSAM has some limitations, as discussed in the following section, in representing the short-term skilled employment visa regime, it still represents all major visa categories in the permanent migration program for skilled and family stream visa applicants. This provides CSAM data with a great advantage in investigating employment outcomes across all major permanent visa categories.

Other than the advantages associated with the size of CSAM survey, there are some advantages associated with the breadth of the survey. CSAM runs two data collection waves with a 12 month gap. This provides both longitudinal as well as cross-sectional properties to the dataset (DIBP, 2015b, 2015c). Therefore, CSAM data can easily be used to visualise migrants’ employment and settlement outcomes at the cross-section of 6 months and at 18 months after migrating to Australia. Further, it can easily be used to track the development or deterioration of outcomes with time.

The CSAM survey asks a wide variety of questions pertaining to migrants’ employment and settlement outcomes. Therefore, it has 926 data variables in its consolidated (cohort 1) dataset of both wave 1 and wave 2. This large number of data variables provides CSAM data with some advantages in investigating a wide variety of aspects pertaining to the employment and settlement prospects of migrants. However, as discussed below, the categorical nature of most of the data variables in CSAM imposes some limitations to the data, particularly in the use of inferential statistical techniques. However, the impact of such limitations is minimal in this research due to the methodological purchase of descriptive statistical analysis.
4.9 Limitations of using CSAM data

Similar to most survey datasets, CSAM poses its own challenges in gathering data, as a large national survey covers a wide spectrum of respondents. Therefore, it has some limitations in the scope and nature of the collected data. Stated below are the limitations imposed by the nature of the data variables collected.

Most of the data variables out of 926 variables at CSAM are categorical. They are either nominal data such as gender, yes/no responses or ordinal data collected through Likert scales. Despite these data in a spreadsheet presenting as numbers, they are more like ordered categories than continuous data with meaningful intervals (Blaikie, 2003; Jamieson, 2004). The non-parametric nature of this data imposes some limitations in selecting analysis techniques since there are some methodological concerns in using Likert-type data for parametric inferential techniques such as linear regression, ANOVA, and factor analysis (Jamieson, 2004). While this longstanding debate goes on, many methodologists (Blaikie, 2003; Jamieson, 2004; Kuzon Jr, Urbanchek, & McCabe, 1996) recommend using non-parametric techniques to analyse Likert-type ordinal data (Kuzon Jr, Urbanchek, & McCabe, 1996). This imposes some limitations on using some inferential statistical techniques on CSAM data. However, the impact of such limitations is minimal in this research due to the methodological purchase of descriptive statistical analysis due to the exploratory nature of the research.
4.10 Chapter summary

Informed by critical realists’ epistemology, this chapter explored skilled migrants’ employment and occupational mobility outcomes through descriptive statistics. The analysis revealed how skilled migrants’ language background, gender, visa sponsorship status and visa grant location conditioned their employment and occupational mobility outcomes. Whilst there has not been much effort put to establish a correlation between these structural determinants to skilled migrants’ employment and occupational mobility outcomes, the *demi-regularities* of data emerging through the analysis in terms of such outcomes have substantiated the manifestation of structural constraints in the Australian labour market. Therefore the findings of this chapter have informed the formulation of the next phase of the research, the qualitative phase.

The following chapter will explore how skilled migrants have exercised their constrained agency in response to structural labour market barriers/facilitators. The cohort of skilled migrant jobseekers interviewed in the qualitative phase migrated to Australia and/or sought jobs in the same period where the CSAM survey used in the quantitative analysis had been administrated. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that this cohort experienced similar labour market conditions to those that generated the quantitative findings.
Chapter 5

Qualitative Findings

5.1 Introduction

The quantitative findings chapter extensively elaborated on the employment and occupational mobility outcomes of skilled migrants who participated in the 2013–14 CSAM survey. As identified, occupational mobility outcomes for non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants were inferior to their employer-sponsored counterparts. In terms of the language background based analysis, NESB skilled migrants showed some considerable downward occupational mobility compared to their MESB counterparts. Female skilled migrants displayed inferior occupational mobility outcomes, compared to their male counterparts. Therefore, the NESB female skilled migrants were the worst-off group as they sit on the most disadvantageous intersection of gender and race. These findings complement other research findings on the Australian labour market (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Dantas et al., 2017; Misko, 2012; Ng Chok et al., 2018; OECD, 2012; Rajendran, Farquharson, & Hewege, 2017; Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2016, 2017).

Informed by the findings of the previous chapter, this chapter aims to understand how the ‘migrant status’ affects NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for in Australia. In characterising ‘migrant status’, attributes such as, recognition of qualifications and work experience gained outside Australia, English language proficiency and cultural and religious identities were taken into consideration. This chapter discusses the experiences of 26 NESB skilled migrant jobseekers that migrated to Australia as offshore residency visa holders between 2010 and 2015. Informed by the labour market disadvantages identified and substantiated in the previous chapter, the qualitative phase sample was limited to non–employer-sponsored NESB skilled migrants. The 26 participants represented (1) accountancy and finance sector workers (n = 4); (2) administrative and office assistance workers (n = 7); (3) education and scientific industry workers (n = 8); and (4) engineers and other technical sector workers (n = 7). Table 17 summarises the participant details in the qualitative phase.
Table 17: Participant details of the qualitative phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Sending country</th>
<th>Highest educational qualifications</th>
<th>The industry of employment (most recent)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFS 1</td>
<td>India / South Africa</td>
<td>Bachelor degree and professional membership</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFS 2</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Master degree and professional membership</td>
<td>Finance worker in manufacturing industry</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFS 3</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Bachelor degree and professional membership</td>
<td>Auditing and corporate services</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFS 4</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>MBA and bachelor degree</td>
<td>Accountancy work in education sector</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 1</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Apparel manufacturing</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 2</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Logistics</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 3</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 4</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Master degree and industry certificates</td>
<td>System compliance</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 5</td>
<td>Pakistan / England</td>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>Medical services</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 6</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Bachelor degree and professional membership</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 7</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Not-for-profit</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 1</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Master degree</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 2</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Analytical / Microbiology</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 3</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Analytical / Chemistry</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 4</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 5</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Biomedical engineering</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 6</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Research / Agriculture</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 7</td>
<td>Sri Lanka / France</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Research / Polymer</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 8</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 1</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Software development</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 2</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Master degree</td>
<td>Town planning</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 3</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Town planning</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 4</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Automobile engineering</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 5</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Civil engineering</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 6</td>
<td>Philippines / Middle East</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Civil engineering</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 7</td>
<td>Sri Lanka / Singapore</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Electrical engineering</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some qualitative phase participants have spent a considerable time outside their birth country, as immigrants. Whenever the skilled migrants have stayed/worked more than one
year outside of their country of birth/residence, both birthplace and that significant other workplace were listed in the sending country column.

As explained in the methodology chapter the qualitative analysis of this thesis is twofold. The first stage entailed an initial exploration of the settlement experiences of 26 offshore NESB skilled migrants through focus group discussions. This stage helped to identify the common occupational mobility barriers/facilitators for the four occupational groups mentioned. Informed by such occupational mobility barriers/facilitators, a more detailed account of the settlement experiences of 10 selected individuals out of the above 26 respondents was undertaken in the second stage of the qualitative inquiry. The settlement experiences of these 10 individuals are presented subsequent to the focus group findings. In order to understand each individual’s experience in related to the context in which they operate, each participant’s story starts with a brief account of their de-identified personal information such as educational background, work experience, family background and commitments, cultural and religious background, and motivations to immigrate to Australia.

The individual interview phase findings entail (1) the pre-arrival experience; (2) the post-arrival jobseeking experience; and (3) the post-employment work experience of the 10 participants. Where appropriate, participants individual experiences are compared with the collective experience identified in the focus group discussions. Therefore, through a combination of collective and personal experience, the chapter attempted to identify emergent occupational mobility barriers and facilitators influenced by the dynamics of the contemporary labour market (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Dantas et al., 2017; Hawthorne, 2011; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014; Misko, 2012; Ng Chok et al., 2018; OECD, 2012; Rajendran, Farquharson, & Hewege, 2017; Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2016, 2017; Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016).

The 26 participants’ experiences discussed in this chapter exemplify the labour market experiences and circumstances of 26 individuals. Even though their narratives and circumstances are personal to them, their experiences of dealing with various social institutions, broader structural barriers and facilitators in their occupational mobility pathways are deemed to be common to many skilled migrant jobseekers in the Australian labour market (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Misko, 2012; OECD, 2007; Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2016). Therefore, these 26 participants represent the labour market situations of numerous other skilled migrant
jobseekers in Australia. Hence, the findings of the micro level analysis in this chapter provide more evidence-rich, intimate, labour market experiences of a cohort of skilled migrant jobseekers in Australia.

5.2 Focus group findings: Occupation specific mobility barriers

The forthcoming section explores the common occupational mobility barriers/facilitators emergent from the focus group discussions. Due to the dynamic nature of the contemporary Australian labour market, care has been taken to consider the temporal and spatial concerns of occupational mobility in identifying common occupational mobility barriers/facilitators. For the purpose of validity, each statement of key concerns needed to be either (a) said by multiple focus group participants; or (b) supported by all focus group participants in order to be considered as a common occupational mobility barrier/facilitator.

The focus group participants (n = 26) were asked to state the most critical occupational mobility barriers realised through their jobseeking experience thus far in Australia. Whilst different individuals in the four groups were confronted with different occupational mobility barriers depending on their occupational and ethnocultural backgrounds, the lack of Australian work experience, the recognition of overseas qualifications and work experience have been stressed as the common occupational mobility barriers for all focus group participants. However, these collective responses might have been informed by experiences with various labour market operators in Australia as well as the opinion of the job career counselling program they were enrolled in at the time of the focus group discussions. The various reasons behind these common occupational mobility barriers will be discussed in the following section.

5.2.1 Common occupational mobility barriers for accountancy and finance sector workers

Professional protectionism emerged as a common occupational mobility barrier faced by all four participants. Their experiences and perceptions were primarily focused on Certified Practicing Accountant (CPA) Australia, a peak professional accounting body in Australia. The following quotes from some accountancy and finance sector focus group participants (in agreement with others) illustrate their concerns about CPA’s role in the accountancy and finance sector skilled migrants’ employment.
I guess for us CPA is the biggest problem. (AFS 4)

You don’t need CPA to do the job, but it is hard to get a job without CPA. (AFS 2)

I didn’t know this CPA thing when I applied for PR [permanent residency]. Anyway, I am doing it now. (AFS 1)

The participants heavily weighed on CPA Australia, given it play multiple roles in the accountancy and finance sector skilled migrants’ selection and employment. CPA Australia works as a skill assessing authority in the Australian migration program by undertaking skill assessments for general accountants (ANZSCO code 221111), external auditors (ANZSCO code 221213), finance managers (ANZSCO code 132211), management accountants (ANZSCO code 221112) and taxation accountants (ANZSCO code 221113) (CPAA, 2018; DIBP, 2016). However, obtaining a CPA Australia membership is not compulsory to apply as a skilled migrant worker under the above occupations (CPAA, 2018). Further, membership is not compulsory to undertake accountancy and finance work in Australia. Therefore, none of the four participants has obtained the CPA membership at the time of focus group discussions. However, the lack of CPA membership surfaced as an occupational mobility barrier in participants’ jobseeking given (a) some accountancy and finance sector vacancies prefer CPA membership; and (b) employers and recruiters used the lack of CPA membership as an excuse for not selecting these participants.

The job role difference between home country and host country also emerged as a common occupational mobility barrier for accountancy and finance sector focus group members. The following quotes from the focus group members illustrate the problem through an example taken from the auditing industry.

Back home auditing is where you start your career, but here you need experience in other areas to get into an auditing role. (AFS 3)

One of the agents told me this thing. (AFS 2 in agreement with the previous statement)

Luckily, I resigned from [DE identified: large multinational financial audit firm] and joined [DE identified: bank] after my internship. (AFS 1)
This example will be further discussed in Section 5.4.1, where the job role difference between skilled migrants’ home country and host country occupations are explored.

5.2.2 Common occupational mobility barriers for administrative and office assistance workers

For the administrative and office assistance workers, English language competency was shown to be a major occupational mobility barrier. Their experiences and perceptions were heavily based on the linguistic challenges of grasping the ‘Australian accent’ than the lack of competent English language skills.

*I think for us [AOA workers] this accent is a big problem. Coz you have to face customers, answer phone calls.* (AOA 2)

*Sometimes I really cannot understand what they say [native speakers].* (AOA 6)

*Ask [coordinator of the job preparation program] what happened to me today because of this accent.* (AOA 5 in agreement with the previous statement)

Administrative and office assistant work entails a great deal of written and oral communication skills. Further, some of these jobs act as contact points for external parties in organisations. Therefore, being able to understand native speakers as well as a variety of other English-speaking accents in Australia can be hugely beneficial for these workers. Further, one’s language skills and accent are considered as indicators of social affluence, class identity, level of education, and urban or rural backgrounds (Frost, 2017; Giampapa & Canagarajah, 2017; Hamid, Hoang, & Kirkpatrick, 2018; Norton, 1997; Pennycook, 2014). Therefore, language can be considered as an important cultural probe leading to social and work place assimilability. Consequently, having limited capabilities to grasp an ‘Australian accent’ and lack of language bounded cultural intelligence can be critically disadvantageous to NESB skilled migrants seeking jobs in administrative and office assistant roles. Section 5.4.7 will further elaborate on how such linguistic challenges affect the confidence of NESB jobseekers and their prospects of finding skilled work.
5.2.3 **Common occupational mobility barriers for education and scientific industry workers**

The participants of the education and scientific industries focus group considered skill atrophy as a common occupational mobility barrier.

> Yeah, truly I am out of touch in simple words." (ESI 6) “I haven’t done my lab work for last two years. (ESI 3 in agreement with ESI 6 and others)

These workers possess high-order technical hard skills needed in their jobs as chemists, microbiologists, research scientists and biomedical engineers. Consequently, such high-order skills need frequent use and improvement in order to stay relevant to rapidly changing industry needs. Prolonged non-utilisation of skills through unemployment and underemployment can cause skill deteriorations (Cameron et al., 2013; Dantas et al., 2017; Wagner & Childs, 2006). Section 5.4.8 will elaborate on how skill atrophy becomes an occupational mobility barrier for skilled workers through the experience of education and scientific industry workers.

5.2.4 **Common occupational mobility barriers for engineers and other technical sector workers**

The lack of job opportunities was stressed by engineering and other technical sector workers as a common occupational mobility barrier. Their experiences and perceptions were drawn on the diminishing manufacturing industry in Australia and consequent retrenchments (Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016; Treasury, 2015). These retrenchments led to a surplus of skilled and experienced technical sector jobseekers in remaining manufacturing organisations (Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016). Therefore, any existing job opportunities in the Australian manufacturing industry have proven to be highly competitive.

> I am from an engineering background, from automotive [industry]. Here [Australia] automotive is a dead industry. (ETS 4)

> ... anyone from engineering this [lack of] manufacturing [jobs] is a problem. (ETS 7; ETS 1 and ETS 4 in agreement)

Whilst some parts of the Australian labour market suffer from engineering skill shortages (Cameron et al., 2013), the diminishing manufacturing industry has created significant
occupational mobility barriers for engineering and technical sector workers. Contrastingly, the current property market boom could provide job opportunities for some areas of engineering and technical sector skills. How skilled migrants responded to these occupational mobility challenges through their agential projects will be elaborated in Section 5.4.5 through examples taken from in-depth interviews.

The lack of Australian work experience also emerged as a common occupational mobility barrier for engineering and other technical sector works.

*I think they are looking for people who have worked in similar workplace environments. (ETS 4; ETS 2, ETS 5 and ETS 7 in agreement)*

Whilst some technical and engineering jobs involve higher levels of context-specific skills and knowledge, others are less dependent on such context-specific skills and knowledge. Therefore, the participant experience could stem from (a) the lack of contextual skills and knowledge in the former category of jobs; (b) employers and recruiters using the lack of local experience as an excuse for not recruiting these participants. These aspects will be elaborated in sections 5.4.2 and 5.4.3 through examples taken from the individual in-depth interviews. Further, the conclusion chapter suggests some policy recommendations to better align the skilled migrant selection process with changing dynamics of the Australian economy.

As identified above, skilled migrants seeking jobs in different industry sectors were confronted with different occupational mobility barriers. While some of these barriers are structural, others are more individual agency oriented. However, instead of strictly conforming to social structures or individual agency, they also exhibit some characteristics of the complex interplay between the structural and agential concerns of occupational mobility (Archer, 1982, 2003; Bakewell, 2010; Fleetwood, 2008; Hodgson, 2002). The following section will elaborate on how 10 selected NESB skilled migrants have responded to such occupational mobility barriers through the exercise of their constrained agency. The exploration begins with their pre-arrival experience and continues through post-arrival jobseeking and post-employment job retention and work experience in the Australian labour market.
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

5.3 Pre-arrival experience and occupational mobility

By using the more in-depth experiences of 10 selected individuals, this section initially explores the sociopolitical, economic, environmental and personal push factors (Arango, 2017; Massey et al., 1993) that motivated skilled migrants to come to Australia for permanent settlement. Secondly, it discusses what skilled migrants have heard and perceived about Australian society and its labour market while they were in their home countries. The literature suggests immigrants’ perceptions and understanding of their destination countries play a vital role in their migration decision-making process (Al Ariss, 2010; Andresen et al., 2014; Berry & Bell, 2012; Cerdin & Selmer, 2013; Harvey, Groutsis, & van den Broek, 2018; Peltokorpi & Jintae Froese, 2009). This plays a particular importance in attracting skilled migrants to selected host countries since skilled migrants take deliberate and carefully thought-out decisions under significant opportunity costs in most instances when compared with other forms of migration. Thirdly, this section investigates each skilled migrant’s preparation strategies before they came to Australia.

5.3.1 Selected 10 individuals: More detailed personal accounts of the skilled migrant experience

The following section unfolds the jobseeking experience of 10 selected individuals out of the 26-member cohort of qualitative phase participants. These 10 individuals provide a more detailed account of settlement and jobseeking experiences through their personal narratives. In order to get a contextual understanding of these participants’ experiences, the discussion begins with participants’ profiles, comprising details such as educational background, work experience, family background and commitments, cultural and religious background, and motivations to migrate to Australia. The participant names used in this section are pseudonyms reflecting language, cultural and religious backgrounds. Each individual’s job seeking journey is summarised in mobility diagrams.

5.3.1.1 Participant 1: Neha, a town planner from India (ETS 2)

Neha immigrated to Australia as a permanent resident under a subclass 190 residency visa in December 2014 after working five years in India as a town planner. She graduated with a bachelor degree in architecture and a master degree in town/urban planning (specialising in housing) from two Indian universities. As a part of her visa application process, Neha had to
assess her qualifications through the Australian assessment body VETASSESS and endorse her skills and qualifications as meeting Australian expectations. Further, she achieved International English Language Testing System (IELTS) competent English level band scores of six per each band. After spending one and a half years in jobseeking and going through an internship, work placement and a career counselling program, Neha ultimately secured employment in her qualified profession as a town planner in the Australian state of Victoria. Her jobseeking experience, in terms of the structural and agency-oriented concerns of occupational mobility, is summarised in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Neha’s jobseeking process

Among many factors that motivate skilled migrants to change countries, the following factors can be identified as triggers for Neha’s migration journey.

Table 18: Push and pull factors influencing Neha’s migration decision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Push</th>
<th>Pull</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociopolitical</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction on caste, race and religious influence on social and political institutions Low quality of life and poor access to resources and infrastructure</td>
<td>Political stability and the ‘perceived secular nature’ of politics in Australia Higher quality of life and access to better infrastructure and resources; e.g. first-world education, transport infrastructure, communication infrastructure such as the fast and secure internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Limited economic opportunities and low</td>
<td>Higher wages and expectations for a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

94
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Environmental pollution, poor food safety standards and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived ‘higher environmental standards’, low pollution and better food safety standards in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/Interpersonal</td>
<td>The desire for challenge and adventure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Neha hadn’t had any significant incident or utterly frustrating situation that pushed her to flee from India. However, she expressed her general dissatisfaction with social and political life and limited economic opportunities in India:

> Well, there is no such thing that I can recall. But, I think we were [she immigrated with her husband who is also a town planner] generally unhappy about some of those race, caste and religious things. I know [that] those things happen everywhere, not just in India.

> Why I like here [Australia] is this quality of life, access to good infrastructure, good education, safe food and less polluted environment; I believe them as it is at least. (ETS 2)

Neha’s assessment and perception of some of these structural concerns could later have conditioned her view on Australian society.

5.3.1.2 Participant 2: Garry, an industrial engineer from Iran (ETS 4)

Garry immigrated to Australia from Iran under a subclass 190 permanent residency visa as a skilled migrant industrial engineer after working nine years in engineering-related professions in Iran. He graduated with a bachelor degree in industrial engineering from an Iranian university. As a part of his permanent residency visa application process, Garry assessed his educational qualifications and work experience through Engineers Australia, the professional body for engineers in Australia, and endorsed his skills and qualifications as meeting Australian expectations. Prior to coming to Australia, Garry achieved ‘proficient’ English level band scores in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test. After spending 10 months in Australia going through a career counselling program, an unpaid work placement for seven months and some unskilled precarious work, Garry ultimately landed an entry-level quality assurance role in a Victorian food manufacturing factory. His jobseeking
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

experience, in terms of the structural and agency-oriented concerns of occupational mobility, is summarised in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Garry’s jobseeking process

Garry was not specifically vocal or explicit about the factors that motivated him to leave Iran and come to Australia. However, he seems to be attracted to the perceived economic opportunities and secular society in Australia. He showed strong interest in becoming accustomed to the Australian lifestyle and anglicised his name as a measure of acculturation. However, he held a negative perception on some of the labour market practices in Australia such as customising resumes. Nevertheless, with prolonged stay in Australia, he later modified such views. Some of those changes will be discussed in the post-arrival jobseeking experience section (Section 5.5) to exemplify how Garry went through the process of morphogenesis (Archer, 1982, 1995).

5.3.1.3 Participant 3: Farah, an agricultural scientist from Sri Lanka (ESI 6)

As a female, Muslim, skilled migrant from Sri Lanka, Farah represents the experience of the more disadvantaged gender, race and religion intersection of skilled migrant experiences (Best et al., 2011; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989; McDowell, 2008; Phoenix, 2006; Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2017; Syed & Kramar, 2010; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). At a time when Muslim immigration sparks tensions in many classic immigrant-receiving countries including Australia, Farah’s migration journey in Australian society and
its labour market could exemplify some valuable insights on jobseeking experiences of minority-ethnic women of Muslim origin in the Australian labour market.

Farah immigrated to Australia as an agricultural scientist from Sri Lanka under a subclass 190 permanent residency visa in November 2014. She was qualified with a bachelor degree in agricultural science, master degree in molecular and applied microbiology, and a PhD in biotechnology with considerable research experience and some academic publications. Back in Sri Lanka, she worked as a research assistant, laboratory technician, university lecturer and in a program development role at the Secretariat of Science, Technology and Innovations. After spending 10 months in Australia going through a career counselling program and unpaid work placement for seven months, Farah managed to secure a contract role as a laboratory technician in one of the prime medical research institutes in Melbourne, Victoria. Farah’s jobseeking process is summarised in Figure 11.

The factors that motivated Farah to immigrate to Australia were predominantly attached to career progression, and future economic and social benefits for her and her family. Among those factors, the following (Table 19) can be identified as vital.
Table 19: Push and pull factors influencing Farah’s migration decision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Push</th>
<th>Pull</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociopolitical</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction on race and religious influence on social and political institutions, particularly the intense negative sentiments against Muslim communities in the aftermath of the longstanding civil war in Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Political stability and ‘perceived secular nature’ of politics in Australia Higher quality of life and access to better infrastructure and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Limited opportunities to realise full career potential as a research scientist</td>
<td>Perceived higher opportunities to utilise and develop skills as an agricultural scientist in one of the world’s biggest agricultural economies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.4 Participant 4: Tashmiha, a human resources manager from Bangladesh (AOA 1)

Similar to Farah, Tashmiha’s experience provides evidence on the jobseeking experiences of minority-ethnic women in the Australian labour market. However, apart from religion and ethnicity, Tashmiha’s educational and occupational background was quite different to Farah. Tashmiha immigrated to Australia from Bangladesh under a subclass 187 regional-sponsored skilled visa in 2015 as a human resources manager. She possesses a bachelor degree in business management and eight years of work experience in the apparel industry, ranging from a human resources (HR) assistant to a human resources manager. Tashmiha spent seven months seeking jobs in Australia at the time she participated as a respondent in the initial qualitative interview round of this research. Tashmiha’s jobseeking process and its associated structural and agential occupational mobility concerns are illustrated in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Tashmiha’s jobseeking process
From the very beginning, Tashmiha held the view that she would not be able to find work commensurate with her education and skills in Australia. Therefore, she looked for an entry-level office administration job. When asked for her reasons to hold such a negative assessment, Tashmiha said:

*I am at a lot of odds. Look, I was an HR manager from Bangladesh apparel industry. You know the reputation we have there for managing human resources. Who wants to take a person from such an industry and give a responsible HR management role? I want to hide my HR background and present me as an admin worker.* (AOA 1)

Tashmiha’s motivation for migration includes her dissatisfaction of work conditions and salary of the apparel industry in Bangladesh, and frustration at the general living conditions in Bangladesh such as food safety, environmental pollution and congested roads. Tashmiha had lower expectations for a thriving job or career growth in Australia compared with other respondents of the research:

*All that I need is a small [non-critical] job, preferably a part-time one. I want to help my husband to take care of the cost of living, raise my kids and be a good mum.* (AOA 1)

After spending one and a half years seeking jobs, ultimately Tashmiha decided to become a childcare worker. At the time of the second follow-up interview, she was satisfied with the outcome:

*Look, my husband got a decent job [even though he was the migrating unit spouse]. Now I work here [the childcare centre] for 20 hours per week. I like this job, coz I love kids. I have my daughter with me in this centre and I can pick my son from the school in the evening. Why do I do a big job and pay a lot of tax and a big childcare bill? I am happy, at least for now.* (AOA 1)

5.3.1.5 Participant 5: Felix, a civil engineer from the Philippines (ETS 6)

Felix, a civil engineer from the Philippines, represents some aspects of the international mobility of expatriates with migration experience in multiple host countries. Before coming to Australia in 2011, Felix spent about 10 years in Saudi Arabia and Qatar as a civil engineer
in major construction projects. At the time of the interview, Felix held a total of 23 years of professional experience as a civil engineer in both the Philippines and the Middle East, as he started his engineering career soon after he graduated from university in August 1988. Among many factors that motivate migrants (Arango, 2017; Massey et al., 1999; Massey et al., 1993) to take migration journeys, family reunion and children’s education become the top priorities for Felix and his family as he spent about 10 years in the Middle East, distanced from his family. Felix was particularly concerned about the quality of higher education in the Middle East and considered Australia as a better alternative to provide higher education for his young children.

After dedicating approximately six months to find work commensurate with his educational qualifications and experience, Felix decided to start as a bakery worker in a local bakery. At the time of the research interview (November 2015), he has been in the same role for three years. Further, Felix started a small cleaning business with his wife, as a supplementary income. In the past three years, Felix has spent much of his time and effort in working as a bakery worker and a cleaner, rather than finding skilled work. He considered the education of his four children, who are at university, as one of his greatest priorities. Therefore, he compromised his pursuit of career development until his children finish their university education. Figure 13 illustrates Felix’s jobseeking process.

![Figure 13: Felix’s jobseeking process](image-url)
5.3.1.6 Participant 6: Tino, an accountant from Zimbabwe (AFS 4)

Tino immigrated to Australia in 2014 from Zimbabwe after working 11 years in Zimbabwe in finance and accountancy roles. He possesses a bachelor degree in accountancy and finance plus a master degree in business administration from two Zimbabwe universities. Tino immigrated under a subclass 190 skilled nominated permanent residency visa after getting his qualifications and work experiences assessed as a part of his visa application process. He was initially confronted with downward occupational mobility in Australia as he could not find work commensurate with his skills and qualifications. While working as a part-time process worker in a small manufacturing company in Melbourne, Tino decided to enrol in a career counselling program, where he also participated as a research respondent in this research. Parallel to the career counselling program, Tino completed a Certificate IV in Warehousing and Logistics and worked as a volunteer warehouse assistant in a large not-for-profit organisation based in Melbourne. After nearly two years of jobseeking, Tino ultimately managed to secure skilled employment in one of the big four banks in Australia as a financial analyst. Tino’s jobseeking experience provides a different perspective in this research, since he worked on two different pathways simultaneously, as a jobseeker in the finance industry as well as in the logistics industry. As he expressed below, he considered seeking a job in the logistics industry as a safety mechanism. The strengths and limitations of this jobseeking approach will be further discussed in the next chapter, through skill transferability perspectives.

I work on two projects now [seeking jobs in two industries]. My first priority is always in the finance and accountancy. But, I finished my Cert IV and looking for some work in logistics as a safety net just in case if I could not find any work in finance ... My only problem is, I do not have any warehouse experience. But, you know, I think ... an accountant can do a good job in inventory management. (AFS 4)

Tino’s migration journey was fuelled by a plethora of structural push factors (Al Ariss, 2010; Massey et al., 1993) created by political and economic turmoil in Zimbabwe. Tino strongly believed he and his family would have no future in Zimbabwe if the country continues to suffer from record high inflation, widespread corruption, and racial tension among native people and the descendants of white settlers. Therefore, Tino was arguably attracted to secular Australian society and becoming a citizen of a developed nation.
... my only problem here[Australia] is finding a good job [skilled work]. Otherwise, I really love this country. You can see the rule of law here ...

As a black man, it is sometimes bit uncomfortable when people stare at you strangely. But, I think, not all of them are racists, some look for curiosity. When they realised it made me uncomfortable, they quickly look down. I always take it easy. (AFS 4)

Tino had a strong interest in acculturation and being a part of Australian society. He was optimistic about his prospects of becoming a contributing Australian citizen. His view of Australian society has largely been influenced by the ethnic tensions he experienced in Zimbabwe. Therefore, he considered racial inequality in Australia as problematic but somewhat manageable compared to his previous experiences. The posterity and pre-existence of social structures in the agent’s reflexive deliberations (Archer, 1982, 2000, 2003; Fleetwood, 2008) will be further discussed in the next chapter using Tino’s experience. Figure 14 shows Tino’s jobseeking process with associated agential and structural occupational mobility concerns.

![Figure 14: Tino’s jobseeking process](image)

5.3.1.7 Participant 7: Gayan, a polymer scientist from Sri Lanka (ESI 7)

Similar to Felix, Gayan represents expatriates with migration experience in multiple host countries. However, contrasting Felix’s experience in the Middle East, Gayan spent three and
a half years in Europe and one and a half years in Canada respectively before immigrating to
Australia. He graduated with a bachelor degree in chemistry and master degree in polymer
science and technology from two Sri Lankan universities, while working in the research
industry in Sri Lanka. As a part of his master degree research component, Gayan first
immigrated to France in 2004 for a six-month industry-funded project. After the successful
completion of his masters, Gayan started his PhD in France in 2006. During and after his
PhD, Gayan had the opportunity to work in France’s apex research body, CNRS (similar to
CSIRO in Australia), and had training opportunities in Spain, Sweden, Belgium and
Germany. Gayan finished the latter part of his PhD in Canada after transferring to a Canadian
university with his supervisor. When the European research industry was hit heavily by the
2008–09 economic recession, Gayan went back to Asia and worked in an English company
that operates in Malaysia and then in a Sri Lankan company in the paint and emulsion
industry. In January 2013, Gayan went back to France for a postdoctoral fellowship. During
his career, Gayan had the opportunity to work on several research projects that led to patented
outcomes. Therefore, he identified himself as an industrial research scientist specialising in
nanoparticles in emulsion polymerisation.

Gayan spent much time without his family in the latter stage of his career in Canada and
Malaysia. Therefore, he was desperate for family reunion. He had not considered going back
to Sri Lanka as an attractive alternative given the limited career advancement in Sri Lanka
due to a lack of advanced research industries. Therefore, he considered family reunion and
stable career opportunities in advanced research industries in a developed economy as prime
motivators for his decision to migrate to Australia in March 2015.

Gayan spent four months in Australia while applying for job vacancies in a spectrum of
occupations in chemical industries. Given he had not been able to secure skilled employment
in his qualified profession, Gayan enrolled in a career counselling program in July 2015,
where he also participated as a respondent in this research. Despite his qualifications, work
experiences and skills as a senior research scientist, Gayan applied for entry/intermediate
level chemist jobs based on the suggestions provided by the career counselling program.

They told me to apply for basic chemist jobs. Because they thought it would be a
very difficult thing to go for a senior level job straightaway. Then I had to remove
my P.hD, postdoc work, and publications from the resume. (ESI 7)
However, Gayan managed to secure a work placement for six months in a pharmaceutical company in Melbourne with the help of the career counselling program. Upon completion of work placement, he was called for an interview for one of his applications.

*But in the interview, I told them I have a Ph.D. and worked in these projects. They were very happy and offered me this position. Actually, this is a little bit higher than that I have applied for.* (ESI 7)

Ultimately, Gayan managed to secure work as a research scientist in a multinational pharmaceutical company in Melbourne, Australia. When asked about the usefulness of the career counselling program in finding skilled work, Gayan said:

*I think this [career counselling program] people do not know a lot about how people recruit scientists. But they are good people. They have the good intentions to help migrants.* (ESI 7)

Gayan’s jobseeking process and associated occupational mobility barriers and facilitators are illustrated in Figure 15.
5.3.1.8 Participant 8: Ahmed, an occupational health and safety (OHS) system compliance officer from Pakistan (AOA 4)

Ahmed, an occupational health and safety (OHS) system compliance officer from Pakistan, provides some contrasting experiences to most of the other participants in the qualitative phase of this research. Ahmed came to Australia in July 2015 after working approximately nine years in various multinational companies in OHS and quality assurance positions. He graduated with a master degree in environmental science and various industry certifications necessary for his occupation, such as ISO 9001 internal auditor, ISO 14001 auditor and OHSAS 18001 training courses granted by various international certification organisations (e.g. SGS, Bureau of Veritas and SAI Global).

Ahmed displayed some proactive and cautious labour market behaviours, since he managed to secure his home country job by obtaining long-term leave to come to Australia to seek job opportunities, instead of resigning. Therefore, he enjoyed the safety net of going back to Pakistan and continue his previous life if he couldn’t find skilled work in Australia. Further, he was particularly cautious of his earnings and expenses in Australia. At the time of the data collection, Ahmed worked in a South Melbourne grocery shop as a shopfloor attendant and a pick-packer for three days per week. He considered this casual non-skilled work as a coping strategy to ease some financial burden caused by settlement expenses, and as a facilitator for a prolonged job search until he finds skilled work one day. Further, he regularly contacted and probed prospective employers and recruiters for job vacancies and embarked on an enthusiastic job search even though he had spent less time (just two months at the time of the data collection) in Australia compared to the other participants of the qualitative phase.

Despite Ahmed’s assertive nature and the exercise of a great deal of agential capacity, he was particularly concerned about racial and religious discrimination in Australia. This deep-seated concern had been largely influenced by one of his experiences at work at the grocery shop. He was subjected to direct racial vilification, as one of his co-workers repeatedly called him a ‘Pakistani terrorist’ at work with the purpose of defamation and racial abuse after escalating an argument. Ahmed seemed to be negatively affected by his Pakistani–Muslim identity at the time of the research, when a flare of anti-Islamic sentiment such as the calls for burqa bans and Muslim-immigration bans explicitly surfaced in Australia, aligning with ongoing sociopolitical events around the world. Five months after the initial interview took place, Ahmed repatriated to Pakistan as a unsuccessful skilled migrant jobseeker by giving up his
battle against profound structural confinements. Ahmed’s jobseeking process and associated occupational mobility barriers are illustrated in Figure 16.

![Figure 16: Ahmed’s jobseeking process](image)

5.3.1.9 Participant 9: Kevin, an education administrator from China (ESI 1)

Kevin, an education administrator from China, immigrated to Australia in 2011 under a subclass 475 regional-sponsored skilled visa. He possesses a bachelor degree in education and master degree in public administration from two Chinese universities. Kevin used to work as a secondary school teacher, an assistant principal and a faculty/school manager of a university in his 18 year career in China. Kevin immigrated to Australia with the hope of finding skilled work in the Australian education industry.

_I am from China. I can speak both Mandarin and Cantonese a little bit. I thought I would be able to find some work easily in an Aussie university or a technical college [TAFE]. You know most of these international students here are from China. I think I can do a fantastic job in the international relations side of a university._ (ESI 1)

Kevin spent about one year seeking skilled work until March 2012, but was unable to secure an opportunity. Upon obtaining his permanent residency in 2014 he relocated to metropolitan Melbourne from regional South Australia. While seeking jobs he worked as a process worker, tourist guide/driver and hospitality worker intermittently, until he participated in this research
in mid-2015. Kevin finished his Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and an ‘education migration agent training course’ while he continued his career counselling course at NMIT. Kevin managed to secure four months paid internship with NMIT in its international student recruitment department. Upon the completion of his internship, Kevin started an education agency to recruit Chinese students to Australian universities. By the time of the follow-up interview round in mid-2016, Kevin was satisfied by his success in this business, since he has managed to secure agency agreements from three Australian universities, a TAFE institute and a registered training organisation.

To be honest with you, I now enjoy my work in this business than working for someone else. (ESI 1)

When asked for the occupational mobility barriers obstructed him from getting a job in Australia, Kevin said:

I think my regional sponsored visa was the biggest barrier I had. You know ... I had to spend two years in regional South Australia. There were not many education businesses there for the international students. They are in the cities. Otherwise, I cannot see any problem of recruiting a Chinese man like me to do international student recruitment. Even if they do not like Chinese people they still need us to get Chinese students. (ESI 1)

Kevin’s jobseeking process and associated agential and structured occupational mobility concerns are illustrated in Figure 17.
5.3.1.10 Participant 10: Cynthia, a Java developer from China (ETS 1)

Cynthia represents some aspects of the occupational mobility of NESB skilled migrant information and communication technology (ICT) workers. Before she came to Australia as a resident under a subclass 475 provisional visa in 2012, Cynthia worked nearly six years in China as a software developer. She possesses a bachelor degree in information and computing science from a leading Chinese university. Within a few months of arrival, Cynthia decided to have her first child in Australia. Therefore, up until 2014, she had not looked for employment. In 2014 she decided to get back to the workforce by seeking skilled work in the Australian labour market. However, Cynthia couldn’t find work commensurate with her skills and qualifications due to a variety of structural and agential concerns of occupational mobility. However, Cynthia was particularly stressed by skills atrophy due to her redundancy for two years, a significant occupational mobility barrier for herself in the rapidly updating ICT industry.

I think all those things [other occupational mobility barriers discussed in the focus groups discussions] apply to my case as well. But, my biggest problem is I am a little bit outdated now. If you want to work in IT you got to be up to date. I stayed home for two years. It’s good for my daughter, but not for my career. (ETS 1)

After spending about nine months seeking skilled work, Cynthia decided to enrol in a career counselling program in 2015, where she also participated as a respondent in this research. The career counselling program helped her to secure work as a freelance software developer in a Melbourne-based company for four months. Upon the completion of her project, the company offered her a permanent position as a Java developer. Cynthia’s jobseeking journey along with its structural and agential occupational mobility concerns is illustrated in Figure 18.
Figure 18: Cynthia’s jobseeking process

The occupational mobility outcomes presented in the above mobility digrams were derived from ANZSCO skill levels using the following criteria:

1. Highly skilled jobs: ANZSCO skill level 1 or 2 jobs
2. Semi-skilled jobs: ANZSCO skill level 3 or 4 jobs
3. Low-skilled jobs: ANZSCO skill level 5 jobs

Table 20 summarises the employment status of the individual in-depth interview phase participants, at the initial interview stage, and the follow-up interview stage.

Table 20: Individual in-depth interview phase participants’ employment status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Employment status / Initial interview</th>
<th>Employment status / Follow-up interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFS 4</td>
<td>Tino</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Employed / High-skilled occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 1</td>
<td>Tashmiha</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Employed / Semi-skilled occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 4</td>
<td>Ahmed</td>
<td>Employed / Low-skilled occupation</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 1</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Employed / Low-skilled occupation</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 6</td>
<td>Farah</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Employed / High-skilled occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 7</td>
<td>Gayan</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Employed / High-skilled occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 1</td>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Employed / High-skilled occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 2</td>
<td>Neha</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Employed / High-skilled occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 4</td>
<td>Garry</td>
<td>Employed / Low-skilled occupation</td>
<td>Employed / Semi-skilled occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 6</td>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>Employed / Low-skilled occupation</td>
<td>Employed / Low-skilled occupation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

The following section will elaborate on what skilled migrants have done to get a sense of Australian labour market and available job opportunities for them while they are in their home countries.

5.3.2 Preparation strategies and participants perceptions on Australian labour market in the pre-arrival stage

Pre-arrival preparation plays a vital role in skilled migration as skilled migrants often embark on planned migration journeys compared to other forms of migration such as refugees, asylum seekers and short-term contingent workers (Al Ariss, 2010; Cerdin & Selmer, 2013; Peltokorpi & Jintae Froese, 2009). Pre-arrival preparation entails many activities such as researching host country labour markets, applying for jobs while overseas, and exploring host country settlement services available to migrants such as education, housing and welfare benefits. The following section discusses participants’ pre-arrival preparation strategies with a specific focus on their knowledge of and research on the Australian labour market as a preparation strategy. This helps to understand participants’ awareness of the Australian labour market and associated occupational mobility barriers and facilitators in the pre-arrival stage of the migration journey.

Pre-arrival preparation may range from ‘no-preparation’ to ‘very well-prepared’ experiences. Neha’s experience falls into the less-prepared category as she possessed a limited understanding of the Australian labour market and possible mobility barriers and facilitators until she came to Australia and confronted such barriers. Apparently, she heavily relied on the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) and the perception that it reflects chronic skill shortages in the Australian labour market; a view that has been contested in some literature (Birrell, 2018; Birrell, Healy, & Kinnaird, 2007; Howe, 2013). Neha was optimistic about her future in Australia and expected a reasonably smooth transition from her previous job to a new role in the arguably ‘skill desperate’ Australian labour market. Therefore, she had less preparation back in India as she expressed below.

I wasn’t expected to hear that my all past experience was irrelevant. If I had known that it would be this difficult to get a job here, I would have done a good amount of homework back in India. (ETS 2)

Immigrants’ poor understanding of host country labour markets could lead to a lack of pre-arrival preparation. Farah provides a good example of such poor awareness of host country
labour markets as she didn’t have any knowledge of employer-sponsored skilled migration programs that can be considered an alternative skilled migration pathway that comes with direct employment opportunities.

*I didn’t know much about that option when I applied for my PR [permanent residency]. I thought Australia is an agricultural country and there would be a lot of opportunities with my PhD. It could have been very different if I tried the other one [other option; employer-sponsored pathway].*

*You know I think the jobs like mine should be on the employer sponsorship list. Coz I do not think any country needs thousands of agricultural scientists, it is a very technical job. If they need someone with those technical skills then they can easily sponsor them.* (ESI 6)

After going through the jobseeking journey in Australia for 10 months, at the time of the interview, Farah considered the employer-sponsored migration pathway as a more suitable pathway for occupations similar to hers, with specific technical hard-skill needs. She believed that her life could have been much easier if she has exhausted the employer-sponsored migration option before obtaining a visa through the General Skilled Migration (GSM) pathway.

Whilst some skilled migrants may have done similar to Neha and Farah, others have shown a considerable level of preparation while they are in their home countries. Garry provides a good example, with carefully planned pre-arrival preparation strategies. Garry was fully aware of the possible hard times ahead in a foreign country’s labour market.

*My mind is logical. I just wanted to be honest with myself by preparing and facing the reality. I knew that I am going to face huge changes in my life, in my work. So, tried to make myself ready for these changes before I come to Australia.* (ETS 4)

In order to equip him for these challenges, he started jobseeking while he was in Iran by creating jobseeker profiles in popular Australian job portals such as SEEK and CareerOne. Further, he had constantly explored Australian job searching techniques, practices and employers’ expectations, and acquired some online training courses designed for immigrant jobseekers. Whilst Garry understood the possible occupational mobility barriers in Australia,
he was so optimistic about his future in Australia based on the perceived demand for industrial engineers in Australia signalled through the Skilled Occupations List.

Similar to Garry’s pre-arrival preparation, Gayan prepared himself to face upcoming challenges in Australia while he was overseas. He entertained three advantages compared to the other participants since (1) he held ‘much preferred’ higher educational qualifications gained from Anglophone countries (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Misko, 2012); (2) he was exposed to western workplace culture and recruitment practices during his stay in Europe and Canada; and (3) his sister had already settled in Melbourne and provided him much needed support in his early settlement. Thanks to these reasons, Gayan had a better understanding of Australian labour market prior to immigrating to Australia. Therefore, he started seeking jobs while he was overseas and went through telephone interviewing with two recruitment agents in Sydney and Melbourne, despite those attempts not being successful due to many of the reasons discussed below.

5.3.3 Skill assessment process: Participants’ understanding of the complicated sourcing process

The skill recognition process plays a vital role in the Australian skilled migration program. All skilled stream primary applicants applying for points-tested skilled migration visas have to undergo a compulsory full skill assessment process conducted by various professional bodies and assessment authorities in Australia (DIBP, 2016). The positive skill assessment outcomes affirm applicants’ skills “as suitable to perform their nominated occupations” (DIBP, 2016, p. 1). Therefore, applicants can find their occupations on the SOL or CSOL, and pass the skill assessments conducted by authorised assessment bodies that recognise that they hold skills that are in demand in Australia and their skills are suitable and adequate to perform the key duties of their occupations.

5.3.3.1 The complex skill assessment process and associated misconceptions

Emergent from the qualitative data was the participants’ general lack of understanding about the complex selection process. One of the good examples evidenced in the qualitative-phase inquiry for the participants’ lack of understanding of DIBP’s use of skill-shortage indicators is the ‘occupational ceilings’ mechanism embedded in the selection process. Occupational

---

9 Some assessing authorities issue provisional skills assessments for certain temporary visa subclasses (e.g. subclass 485). These assessments are different from full skills assessments as they do not assess employment experience.
ceiling refers to the limit on the number of visa application invitations that can be issued through SkillSelect, the management system of the Australian skilled migration program (DIBP, 2017e).

_If I talk about my professional [occupational] ceiling, when I put up my application for immigration there were 1400 people required and until then there were 60 to 65 applications received. (AOA 4)_

_WHERE DID YOU GET THIS INFORMATION? (INTERVIEWER)_

_It's from the immigration department website. (AOA 4)_

_Yeah, even my one was indicating something like that, 2000 people were needed but very few application been received. (ESI 6, ESI 7 in agreement)_

_What it says is, if they have such a high demand and a low supply, let's go to that country you will have a great future there. That why I decided to come here. (AOA 4)_

These two conversations do not necessarily refer to situations where the DIBP required 1400 skilled migrants from the former category and 2000 skilled migrants from the latter category. Instead, they indicate DIBP has only invited a few skilled migrants to apply through these two categories based on the limited demand for these jobs at the given time, even though the occupational ceilings were relatively high for the two categories. Therefore, participants’ understanding of the demand for their jobs was ill-informed. Refer to Appendix E for examples of the gap between occupational ceilings and actual visa invitations for the program year 2017–18. This extract was taken on 17/07/2018 from DIBP’s website. Therefore, it records visa invitations sent until 20/06/2018, 10 days prior to the conclusion of the 2017–18 programming year. This clearly demonstrates how DIBP uses the occupational ceiling mechanism to align skilled migrant intakes with the demand for skilled labour.

Despite the complexity and difficulty in the skill assessment process, obtaining a positive skill assessment is compulsory to apply as a points-tested skilled migrant to Australia. Therefore, seven out of 10 participants in the individual in-depth interview phase of this research considered the achievement of the positive skill assessment as a significant milestone in the pre-arrival phase of their journey. However, when they get confronted by
labour market barriers later in their jobseeking process, most of them questioned the value of the skill assessment, the skill occupation lists, and the relatedness between these processes and real job market needs in Australia. The subsequent section questions the purpose and the nature of the skill assessment process.

5.3.3.2 The purpose of skill assessment

The skilled migrants who held occupations which usually value professional memberships and licences, whilst they are not compulsory to obtain skilled visas, were generally unhappy about the skill assessment process. They considered the skills assessment process as one of the best stages to let skilled migrants know about the professional membership and licencing requirements preferred in the Australian labour market. However, the current process has minimal information in this regard except for the occupations that need compulsory professional membership and licences to migrate to Australia, such as some medical professionals (DIBP, 2016). Getting a positive skill assessment without any indication for membership and licencing barriers in a regulated labour market that seeks such memberships and licences (compulsory or otherwise) made many of them concerned about the skills assessment process. They admitted their jobseeking journeys could have been much easier had they known about professional membership and licencing requirements, before wasting time to apply for jobs without getting necessary memberships and licences. Therefore, these narratives build up an emergent case of the lack of coherence between labour market expectations and skilled migrant sourcing strategies in Australia.

The purpose of the skill assessment process is to work as a vetting tool to identify skilled individuals with horizontal occupational mobility to fill skill gaps in the Australian labour market (DIBP, 2016). However, the participant experience of this research has put the validity and the subsequent usefulness of the skill assessment outcomes into question, as the participants held the view that their positive skill assessment outcomes were not appreciated in the labour market as an endorsement for their skills. The following quote of ETS 5 sums up participants’ views in this regard.

*The skill assessment process is very elusive. It doesn’t really show the truth [the labour market needs/expectations]. It gives you an indication ‘well you are good enough to do your job in Australia’. But once you get your PR [permanent residency] and came here, nobody takes that assessment seriously. Even the*
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

*Department [DIBP] doesn't care whether you do that job [nominated occupation] or not. You just do something to live. (ETS 5)*

This response begs the questions: (1) to what extent are skill assessment outcomes valid in the Australian labour market as an endorsement for migrants’ skills?; and (2) does the skilled migration program fill the skill shortages in the Australian labour market? These two questions craft a need for research specifically focused on such concerns, which goes beyond the focus of this thesis. However, the discussion chapter elaborates the major concerns emerging out of the participants’ responses the nature of the skills assessment, the limitations of the skill assessment and associated policy implications.

5.3.3.3 The nature of skill assessment

Among some shortfalls of the skill assessment process to reflect labour market needs and expectations in Australia, Garry pointed out the nature of the skill assessment, which predominantly assesses specific and generic hard skills of the applicants.

*When they assess me to get here they just considered technical skills. They just asked my educational qualifications and work experiences. When it comes to employment, all of a sudden they just consider the cultural things. Nobody bothers to ask my experiences and qualifications. (ETS 4)*

The entrenched occupational mobility barriers for jobseekers in the Australian labour market, due to employers’ and recruiters’ desire for soft skills and cultural assimilability, have been elaborated on extensively elsewhere (Misko, 2012; Rajendran, Farquharson, & Hewege, 2017). Six out of 10 participants in the individual in-depth interview phase of this research identified the lack of consistency between the skilled migrant selection process and labour market expectations as a barrier to their labour market success. The following section discusses the post-arrival jobseeking experiences and post-employment working experiences of the qualitative phase participants. Such discussions help to understand the occupational mobility barriers and facilitators that exist in the Australian labour market and how skilled migrants craft their agential responses to such barriers and facilitators.
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

5.4 Post-arrival jobseeking experience and occupational mobility barriers

This section explores participants’ experiences once they arrived in Australia and started their jobseeking process. Aspects such as availability of jobs, differences between skilled migrants’ previous jobs and comparable Australian jobs, the value of overseas qualifications and work experience, lack of local qualifications and work experience, English language proficiency, the role of career counselling services, and skilled migrants’ individual jobseeking strategies are discussed in this section. The findings are presented under ten occupational mobility themes informed by literature (see Table 21).

Table 21: Occupational mobility barriers/facilitators identified through the post-arrival jobseeking experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme No</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Theme attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The similarities and differences between skilled migrants’ home country occupations and comparable Australian occupations</td>
<td>- How contextual, technical hard skill, and soft skill difference between home country and comparable Australian occupations become occupational mobility barriers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2        | The need for Australian context-specific knowledge                    | - How the lack of Australian context specific knowledge become an occupational mobility barrier  
- Identify the occupations with such context-specific skill needs |
| 3        | The lack of local work experience as an occupational mobility barrier  | - How lack of Australian work experience act as an occupation mobility barrier  
- The labour market intermediaries perception on the [lack] of Australian work experience |
| 4        | Recognition of foreign qualifications and work experience              | - The recognition barriers for qualifications obtained from NESB countries  
- The recognition barriers for the work experiences obtained from NESB countries |
| 5        | Availability of jobs: Participants’ experiences in low job growth industries | - The lack of job opportunities in diminishing industries  
- How skilled migrants fare in low-growth areas of the Australian labour market |
| 6        | Participants’ experiences with recruitment services and labour market intermediaries | - The role of labour market intermediaries in skilled migrant employment  
- Recruiters understanding and perceptions of |
### Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>English language proficiency and cultural distance as an occupational mobility barrier</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How English language skills affect the confidence of skilled migrant jobseekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How cultural probes of English language create communication barriers for NESB skilled migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Skill atrophy and out-dated skills as an occupational mobility barrier</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How prolonged under/unemployment and non-utilisation of skills become occupation mobility barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Knowledge of local job searching techniques, local referees, social networks and supportive career counselling programs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The role of local referees in resumes, social networks and the influence of career counselling programs in skilled migrant employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Job searching strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Difference strategies used by the research participants to overcome certain occupation mobility barriers e.g. anglicising names, downgrading resumes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1 The similarities and differences between skilled migrants’ previous jobs and comparable Australian jobs

The extant literature on skilled migration has put scant regard to job role differences between home countries and host countries in skilled migrants’ occupational mobility, particularly for occupations holding the same or similar occupational titles. This arises from the pre-emption that the same or similar occupational titles necessarily refer to same/similar educational qualifications and job roles. Whilst this can be accurate for some occupations, differences in qualification systems and job roles play a vital role in the occupational mobility of certain jobs (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014). Therefore, this research considers these differences as an emergent theme in skilled migrants’ occupational mobility and puts higher emphasis on investigating it through a skill transferability perspective.

Since all of the participants had undertaken skill assessments as a part of their visa application process and represented various occupations in different industries, this research provides a prime opportunity to explore the job role differences between the home country and host country as an occupational mobility barrier. The subsequent section is dedicated to identifying the similarities and differences between participants’ previous jobs in their home countries and comparable Australian jobs, identified through participants’ jobseeking...
processes, as well as their experience in skilled occupations once they started work in Australia.

Neha realised there are significant differences between her previous job as a town planner in India and her current job as a town planner in one of Victoria’s suburban city councils. She expressed the difference in the job roles and imposed occupational mobility barriers as:

*Because the work that I have done back in India in a way quite different to the requirements for a town planner in Australia, when I was applying it was difficult to fit into that category of town planners’ requirements that people seek here.*  
*(ETS 2)*

One of the appropriate ways to understand the differences in Neha’s (and comparable other’s) previous jobs and equivalent Australian jobs is to assess the skill requirements of different jobs through an appropriate skill classification framework (Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016). Neha’s experience will be discussed in detail in the discussion chapter, through one such framework devised by Balcar et al. (2011).

The following conversation from the accounting and financial sector workers indicates similar occupational mobility barriers in their industry. However, these experiences do not necessarily entail job role differences between the home country and the host country. Instead, they refer to different career stages where people get accepted into accounting/financial auditing jobs in their home countries compared to Australia.

*Back home auditing is where you start your career, but here you need experience in other areas to get into an auditing role.*  
*(AFS 3)*

*One of the agents told me this thing.* *(AFS 2 in agreement with the previous statement)*

*Luckily, I resigned from [DE identified: large multinational financial audit firm] and joined [DE identified; bank] after my internship.*  
*(AFS 1)*

As indicated above, auditing is considered as a career entry point for some accountancy and financial sector workers in certain countries, where fresh graduates are recruited to audit firms as accounting/financial auditors. Contrastingly, in the Australian context auditing is considered as a job for well-immersed individuals with substantial work experience.
Therefore, the skilled migrants holding resumes with years of auditing experience as their first job might encounter some challenges winning employers’ trust when seeking jobs in Australia.

### 5.4.2 The need for Australian context-specific knowledge as a mobility barrier

Since knowledge plays a vital role alongside the skills in skilled employment, the need for context-specific knowledge can be considered as a significant occupational mobility barrier (Almeida & Fernando, 2017). This research finds some evidence for this barrier through some of the participants’ experiences. However, the importance of such context-specific knowledge varies across different individuals representing different occupations. Among various occupations covered in this research, the town planner experience represented by Neha considered the need of contextualised knowledge as a significant barrier in her occupational mobility. Her concerns arise from the nature of the town planners’ work in Australia:

> It has a very restricted mobility because each city is different. Even within Australia, if I decided to move to Sydney, then I would have to think twice because the planning, working systems even assessing systems are very different in Sydney from what we do here in Victoria. (ETS 2)

In order to acquire localised knowledge, Neha worked as an unpaid intern in a planning consultancy company and had a work placement at a city council. She had to pay the cost of ‘lack of context-specific knowledge’ through unpaid labour in exchange for exposure to local industry knowledge and practices. As she expresses below, this process has helped her to develop a new set of skills instead of advancing her previously gained skills.

> Well, it has helped me to develop a set of new skills instead of improving my previous skills as this job is very different from what I used to do. (ETS 2)

Felix’s experience suggests similar needs for localised knowledge for civil engineers in Australia. This explicates through the nature of the civil construction industry in Australia, as it has its own industry-specific requirements and practices.

> It’s very different here in Australia. They [Australian industry] use a lot of subcontracting; even in small projects. So you need more project management
knowledge than civil engineering knowledge to negotiate with these subcontractors and manage them. You need to know how people work here [local construction practice]. (ETS 6)

Australia has a long history of using foreign workers in construction projects. However, the majority of those workers were hired to provide much needed physical labour while Anglo-masculine dominance has prevailed in primary labour market (top tier) construction jobs (Hedwards, Andrevski, & Bricknell, 2017; Watson, 2012). Therefore, the contextual knowledge mentioned above is predominantly held by local workers in construction management roles as this type of knowledge often complements soft skills and the industry’s specific cultural practices. Whilst this might not impose many difficulties for highly technical civil engineering jobs such as structural engineering and civil drafting, it can be critical for civil engineering roles with considerable managerial responsibilities and fieldwork.

5.4.3 The lack of local work experience as an occupational mobility barrier

The need to have local work experience may create some significant occupational mobility barriers for certain occupations, as local work experience plays a prominent role in the acquisition of contextual knowledge. This resonates with participants’ experience of this research since some employers and recruiters that participants dealt with considered local experience as a compulsory requirement for certain jobs. There had been unified agreement between all 26 research participants in the qualitative phase of the research about ‘the lack of local experiences as one of the most significant occupational mobility barriers’ they confronted at the time. However, this view might have been influenced by the career counselling program they were enrolled in as the program explicitly suggests the lack of local work experience as a limitation for skilled migrants. This was evident in the following section adapted from the letter of introduction10 that this program uses to place jobseeking NESB skilled migrants in unpaid industry placements.

I would like to introduce the above participant from our program [Name of the career counselling program], an orientation program for job-ready skilled migrants who are hitting closed doors in the job market, not because they can’t perform but because they lack the necessary local experience. (Appendix F)

---

10 Refer to Appendix F for the full copy of the letter.
The above quote explicitly categorises lack of Australian work experience as a weakness for new skilled migrant jobseekers, and seeks support from potential employers to overcome this weakness. Whilst this reflects the career counselling program’s passion and supposedly good intention to help jobseekers, it also evidences the subtle perception biases that exist in the Australian labour market. However, such pre-emptions rub against the primary objectives of the skilled migration program as it intends to fill chronic skill shortages in the Australian labour market and train Australian workers in the long run by using skills and expertise brought along by foreign skilled workers (DIBP, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

5.4.4 Recognition of foreign qualifications and work experience

This research provides an opportunity to investigate the problems associated with foreign qualifications and work experience recognition in the Australian labour market. All of the participants in the qualitative phase of the research (n = 26) encountered various difficulties in persuading employers about their qualifications and work experience gained from NESB countries. Whilst there was no evidence to substantiate (except Ahmed’s experience as explained in Section 5.1.1.7) that they experienced explicit and direct discrimination based on their ethnic, religious or gender identities, some did experience employers’ or recruiters’ reluctance to accept their NESB qualifications and work experience as valuable in Australia.

Garry and Felix had substantial engineering experience, but came across a significant level of devaluation of their foreign qualifications by employers and recruiters. Despite both having bachelor degrees in engineering, some recruitment companies suggested they take Certificate IV courses through their training arms to make their resumes more ‘Australian looking’. This cast a firm belief in Garry that education has no value in the Australian labour market:

_I am sick of doing education here. It doesn’t work here. Lots of people work here from work experience._ (ETS 4)

Similar to Garry and Felix, Tashmiha experienced some negative perceptions about her work experience in the apparel industry, as a recruiter said:

_To be honest with you, I don’t think I’ll be able to convince my client, a person from Bangladesh apparel industry have the skills that we are looking for. Frankly telling it’s a reputation problem ... All that I can suggest you is to apply for general admin jobs._ (AOA 1 replicating recruitment agent’s response)
However, Tashmiha has not considered these comments as personal negative projections towards herself. Instead, she believed the recruitment agent had attempted to help her.

*I think that girl was trying to help me genuinely. If you migrate from a country with a bad reputation you will have to carry those black marks, unfortunately. That’s why I don’t bother much to find HR jobs here. (AOA 1)*

Contrastingly, Neha, representing town planners, has not experienced any explicit devaluing of her qualifications gained in India from any of her prospective employers in Victorian city councils. Instead, she received a response from one suburban city council that she was overqualified for a planning position as she holds a master degree in architecture. Neha was tolerant about the response and explained it through the difference between planning roles in India and Australia, since the former refers to strategic planning and the latter refers to operational planning duties. Therefore, presumably, the skills and educational qualifications necessary for the former could be greater than the latter.

The experience of qualifications recognition had been more fruitful for the research scientists in the sample. Both Gayan (a polymer scientist) and Farah (an agriculture scientist) had experienced difficulties convincing employers and recruiters to consider their qualifications in their early attempts to apply for ‘chemist jobs’ in non-research industries. However, when they applied for jobs in the research industry, they received a good reception for their PhD qualifications and academic publications, particularly in job interviews. After successfully securing skilled work and reflecting on their jobseeking journeys, both admitted their attempts to find work in non-research industries (primarily in manufacturing, testing and quality assurance) were less effective, as those industries usually seek undergraduate qualifications for testing jobs. This resonates with the responses they received from some employers and recruiters in the early days, as they were told they were overqualified for those roles. Contrastingly, their experience suggests the research industry in Australia has been more meritocratic in selection by assessing their research merits over the grant location of the qualifications. However, the experiences of Gayan and Farah should also be understood in related to other structural and agential occupational mobility barriers and facilitators, despite the research industry’s treatment of foreign qualifications in a relatively meritocratic way.
5.4.5 Availability of jobs: Participants’ experiences in low job growth industries

Some sections of the Australian economy have faced decline or slow growth during the last couple of years (Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016; Treasury, 2015). This has had significant impacts on job creation in some industries. According to a Department of Employment study of Australian jobs, over the five years to November 2015 four industries recorded a sharp fall in employment (DOE, 2016). The manufacturing industry has been struck by the highest decline (117,700 jobs); followed by the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry (38,800 jobs); wholesale trade (13,500 jobs); and electricity, gas, water and waste services (8900 jobs) respectively. The following section provides some qualitative remarks about the impact of those job reductions on skilled migrants’ jobseeking experiences.

Garry provides an exemplary case for the dysfunctional consequences of the poor link between diminishing industries and skilled migrant intakes. A significant portion of Garry’s work experience as an industrial engineer was in the automobile industry; the very industry in which Australia has faced rapid closure of major manufacturing facilities. These closures led to massive redundancies and a surplus of skilled and experienced auto workers seeking work in remaining auto-service industries and/or alternative industries (Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016). Therefore, existing but limited job opportunities in the Australian manufacturing industry have proven to be highly competitive. This has created a dreadful labour market situation for Garry and similar other skilled migrant jobseekers who come to Australia for the occupations in slow growth or diminishing industries.

Many skilled migrants pay a significant opportunity cost for their migration decision and exercise their agential choices to a great extent in selecting their destinations (Al Ariss, 2010; Andresen et al., 2014; Berry & Bell, 2012; Cerdin & Selmer, 2013). Therefore, the lack of job opportunities creates an undesirable labour market situation for skilled migrants as well as host countries by delaying the economic contribution of skilled migrants to host country economies. Garry expressed his concerns on this matter as:

> Look, I wanted to come to Australia. But I don’t want to be jobless here. It is a waste, both for me and this country. There is a problem; unbalance situation in jobs [labour market]. If they don’t have manufacturing jobs they shouldn’t have allowed us to come here. If they have done that, I could have considered other places. (ETS 4)
Similar to Garry’s experience, many skilled migrants make their agential choices by assessing their circumstances against the host country pull factors (Massey et al., 1999). Therefore, the accurate representation of labour market status in skilled migrant selection processes and skill shortage/demand lists are critical for correct decisions to be made that benefit both skilled migrants as well as host countries through rapid economic and social integration.

After realising the lack of job opportunities in the manufacturing industry, Garry decided to take a career change from the automobile industry to the food manufacturing industry as a response to the labour market barrier. Such transitions usually come with significant transition penalties (Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016) as workers often have to adjust to the needs of the new jobs, such as industry-specific knowledge, specific hard skills, and industry-specific standards and regulations. The heavily regulated food industry in Australia has many such requirements, imposed by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and a variety of other voluntarily standards such as HACCP, BRC, FSSC 22000, ISO 22000 and organic certification needs. Garry express his knowledge gap in this area as:

Typically for this kind of jobs you got to have a microbiology degree or food industry [exposure]. I lack these things. Say for an example I do not know about microorganisms related to food industry [products]. (ETS 4)

As a coping strategy for this occupational mobility barrier entrenched in the knowledge and skill gaps, Garry managed to find an unpaid work placement for seven months in a Victorian food manufacturing business with the help of the career counselling program. Despite the fact that he has to pay a huge transition penalty by providing unpaid labour for seven months, this work placement provided him with some necessary exposure to food industry quality assurance systems by allowing him to play a major role in a project of implementing hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) standards. After his unpaid work placement, Garry managed to find an entry-level job as a quality assurance inspector in a Melbourne-based food manufacturing organisation. Therefore, Garry’s experience provides evidence for the skilled migrants’ strategy of using work placements as an employment enabler.

The career transition discussed above through Garry’s experience evidenced a change in both occupation and industry at the same time. Some skilled migrants change their industry of employment as a strategy to find skilled employment. These skilled migrants may experience
fewer transition penalties compared to the situation substantiated through Garry’s experience. Farah has taken such a change in her career by changing her industry from agriculture research to medical research. She experienced fewer transition penalties, as she managed to secure a research technician position, the job she has done during the most of her professional career.

5.4.6 Participants’ experiences with recruitment services and labour market intermediaries

The current Australian labour market houses a large industry of labour market intermediaries working between employers and jobseekers (Bretherton, 2011; Hamid, Hoang, & Kirkpatrick, 2018; Harvey, Groutsis, & van den Broek, 2018). These operators act in multiple spaces in the labour market, such as contracted recruitment services and labour hire agencies. Further, some provide training and career counselling services affiliated with their registered training organisation arms. As explained in the methodology chapter, the qualitative phase participants of the research were recruited from a partly public-funded career counselling program operated in Melbourne. Therefore, the participants’ experience of labour market intermediaries entails their engagement with the career counselling program and other third-party operators such as recruitment services and labour hire services. The following quote adapted from Felix resonates with some other’s experiences in this regard.

Because some of them are just school leavers … They recruit for many industries. People like us have very complex work histories, across many countries and sometimes across many industries. How could they possibly know all these foreign companies how good these companies are and how valuable the work experience in those places? You cannot expect these people to understand all these things and find the best workers. I think what they do is, they avoid people with unfamiliar qualifications and work experience. For the rest, they call people with local experience. (ETS 6)

Felix’s response was a result of his somewhat bitter personal experience with third-party recruiters, as they were reluctant to appreciate his long work history in the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, spanning 23 years in major construction projects such as building airports. However, his concerns align with the experiences of other participants, particularly in occupations such as agricultural scientist, polymer scientist, town planner, microbiologist,
engineer, and some accountants in the qualitative sample. To overcome such recognition barriers, some participants considered approaching their future bosses directly, without going through recruitment agents. They considered that this approach would provide them with a better chance to explain their unfamiliar educational qualifications and work experience to someone with good understanding of the skills and knowledge needed for the jobs at hand. At the time of the follow-up interview stage, some participants (n = 16) were successful in doing so by securing paid employment or internship opportunities. Apart from the above concerns, many were unhappy about the third-party recruiters’ practice of hiding employers’ details in job advertisements. This causes difficulties for the jobseekers in understanding the nature and characteristics of the prospective employer and articulating relevant and deeply engaging responses in their resumes, key selection criteria (KSC) and interviews.

While some considered third-party recruiters as a barrier to securing skilled employment in Australia, others gained some benefits by working with third-party recruiters. Garry explained his experience of working with them:

_Some people are not comfortable with recruiters. I found that it’s not like applying and waiting for interviews. You have to catch the position before they are advertised. I made friendships with some recruiters, when they trusted me and they knew that I am qualified, they let you know the vacancy before they publish it._

_(ETS 4)_

Garry had been able to successfully secure nine interviews with employers and three interviews with recruiters and more than 30 feedback telephone conversations through recruitment agents. That is in a stark contrast to most of the other participants’ experiences. The reasons for Garry’s apparent success in working with third-party recruiters could be the nature of work he pursued. Vacancies for his interest, shopfloor supervision in the manufacturing industry, are usually managed through labour hiring agencies and third-party recruiters in Australia. Therefore, the recruiters were well immersed in labour market needs for these jobs and had built trusted relationships with employers to select and appoint suitable workers to fulfil such vacancies.
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

5.4.7 English language proficiency and cultural distance as an occupational mobility barrier

English language proficiency has long been identified as a significant occupational mobility barrier for immigrants from NESB countries (Frost, 2017; Gimenez & Morgan, 2017; Hamid, Hoang, & Kirkpatrick, 2018; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014; Syed & Murray, 2009). However, the implications of the barrier vary among different types of international migrants and is considered as lowest for skilled migrants compared to other forms of entrants such as refugees and asylum seekers. Australia has attracted highly English language proficient skilled migrants from NESB countries in recent decades, after commencing pre-immigration English tests for selected occupations in 1993 and further extending this to all occupations in 1999 (Hawthorne, 2008, 2014b). In today’s environment, NESB skilled migrants have to undergo a compulsory English test approved by DIBP to prove their English language skills fall into one of the following proficiency levels: functional English, vocational English, competent English, proficient English and superior English (DIBP, 2017f). Skilled migrants who intend to apply for points-tested skilled visas must obtain a minimum level of competent English in order to be eligible for application. Further, they need to obtain proficient or superior English levels if they intend to obtain points for English skills in the visa point test (DIBP, 2017f). Therefore, all the participants in the qualitative phase of the research obtained competent or above English language skills prior to immigrating to Australia.

Reflecting the above discussed English language skill attainments, all the respondents in this research were able to communicate in both written and oral English without significant difficulties. However, they expressed some of the difficulties and associated challenges to understanding Australian speakers and communicate with confidence, particularly in the first year of arrival. Therefore, the following discussion explores how English becomes an occupational mobility barrier for skilled migrants proven to have reasonable English language skills.

Most of the participants in the qualitative phase (n = 19) had difficulties understanding Australian speakers due to the ‘Australian accent’ of English, except for the three participants who spent time in England, South Africa and the UAE, among native English speakers, and another four participants who spent more than two years in Australia at the time of the data collection.

---

11 This development is in stark contrast to the controversial ‘dictation test’ under the Migration Restriction Act 1901 as it intended to be used for non-racial discriminatory purposes compared to the dictation test.
collection. However, this difficulty became less astringent with considerable time spent in Australia, since most of these participants experienced improvements by the time of the follow-up interviews. The following quote from Cynthia sums up some of the concerns common to the other participants.

Well, communicating [in English] is not an issue for me. But I think it affects the confidence of the person. Because you feel that you are the odd one out amongst the group. Even if you want to speak out, you feel that your accent wouldn’t be right, maybe you wouldn’t match properly. It affects the confidence. (ETS 1)

As she has pointed out, lack of confidence in the public sphere caused by foreign accents was held to be the most common challenge among the participants. This supposedly uncomfortable feeling made some of them less vocal in public; a disadvantage in a labour market seeking extroverted open communicators. As expressed below, some participants had to repeat their conversations and sometimes slow down in order to make themselves understandable to locals. This comes at a significant cost in engaging with employers at interviews, as impressions usually matter in such instances.

Even sometimes when I go to employers the people in the reception they find it really difficult to understand my accent. So I have to repeat and I have to be a bit slower. These things affect your confidence. (ESI 1)

Apart from having a ‘foreign accent’, some participants considered the cultural aspects associated with language as a challenge in expressing themselves (Norton, 1997; Pennycook, 2014). Whilst this thesis dedicates a section to the role of Australian workplace culture as an occupational mobility facilitator/barrier for skilled migrants, the interest here is to exemplify how everyday conversation creates linguistics challenges for newcomers. One of the classic examples pointed out by Garry in day-to-day conversations in Australia was:

You know people here often ask you ‘How are you doing?’ I think they use it as a greeting word like ‘hello’. Sometimes they do not expect you to answer when they ask it. I tried to tell them how I actually spent my time. People looked at me like ‘what’s going on with this guy?’ There are many things like this. You can perfectly understand them. But, you don’t know how to respond to them as locals do. (ETS 4)
The aforementioned situation may seem trivial as a communication barrier. However, applied to the jobseeking process, which inevitably comes with self-expressions and relationship-building needs, this could cause lack of confidence and frustration due to difficulties in building engaging conversations. However, there was a collective sense of agreement among all participants that they achieved some improvements along these lines with prolonged stays in Australia. Whilst the linguistic barriers in cross-cultural settings are worth enough for a separate thesis, the intention of the above discussion was to stress the challenges imposed by language skills on one’s occupational success.

5.4.8 Skill atrophy and outdated skills as an occupational mobility barrier

The non-utilisation of skills over a period of time can cause skill deterioration (Cameron et al., 2013; Dantas et al., 2017). Then, the outdated skills make redundant workers less attractive in the labour market. Therefore, without intervention, the mutual dependency of skills and active employment may put redundant workers into a vicious cycle of unemployment. Among many respondents in this research, people with higher-order technical hard-skill needs in their jobs considered skill atrophy as a significant occupational mobility barrier. A microbiologist (ESI 2), a polymer scientist (ESI 7), an agricultural scientist (ESI 6) and a software developer (ETS 1) were the most prominent individuals who substantiated evidence for skill atrophy. The difficulties keeping up to date with recent developments and knowledge in their fields were considered a major disadvantage of being redundant for a prolonged period.

Yeah, truly I am out of touch in simple words. It’ll take some time for me to recover from it and get back to the momentum. Sometimes [you] forget the correct technical terms, most appropriate techniques suitable for a situation. Even when I am applying for jobs and writing those KSCs, sometimes I feel a lack of something. But, applying for jobs sometimes keeps me on track, coz I have to write again and again what I have done in my career. (ESI 6)

As Farah explained above, hands-on experience/skills play a vital role in her job as a research technician. Laboratories recruit these technicians to get the benefit of such skills in order to conduct precise experimental tasks with better accuracy. In the educational research industry (similar to Farah’s current job in a laboratory affiliated with a university), training and assisting students with correct techniques make up a large part of a research technician’s job.
In today’s rapidly evolving scientific research industry, the methodological and technical knowledge necessary to perform such tasks updates frequently. Therefore, prolonged redundancy can cause significant harm to workers having jobs with high-order technical hard-skill needs. In complementing Farah’s remarks, the other two participants in the concerned sample who work in the scientific industry considered outdated skills caused by skill atrophy as a significant occupational barrier for their occupational success.

Similar to the scientific research industry, workers in the ICT sector have to deal with rapidly changing skill needs in their occupations. Owing to the nature of their industry, these workers have to keep their skills and knowledge up to date with changing technology. This is considered as an occupational challenge for many ICT employees, skilled migrants or otherwise. Applied to the situation of skilled migrants, where some spent years of unemployment or underemployment in non-skilled jobs, deterioration of skills and knowledge is inevitable unless they use strategies to engage with developments in their industry. Cynthia deliberated on this issue:

*But, my biggest problem is I am a little bit outdated now. If you want to work in IT you got to be up to date. I stayed home for two years. It’s good for my daughter, but not for my career. (ETS 1)*

### 5.4.9 Knowledge of local job searching techniques, local referees, social networks and supportive career counselling programs

Understandably, every country might have its own labour market requirements and widely accepted practices. These requirements and practices reflect aspects such as statutory and other regulatory demands, prominent national and local cultural preferences and industry-specific requirements. Understanding these requirements is vital for immigrants who transcend national borders seeking work. Presumably, these requirements are relatively familiar for people who immigrate to destinations where the national and business/institutional culture and the level of economic development are similar to their home countries. This provides the foundation for the assimilability thesis (Maliepaard, Lubbers, & Gijsberts, 2010) for the better employment outcomes for MESB skilled migrants who immigrated to Australia from other Anglophone countries. Those who have a limited understanding of these aspects may widen their understanding with prolonged stay in the Australian labour market. However, such prolonged exposure comes at a considerable cost of
unemployment/underemployment. Alternatively, one can fast-track this learning process by getting support from social networks and career counselling programs. The following section explores participants’ experiences of social networks and career counselling programs as a response to the needs of local job market knowledge and having local referees in resumes and CVs.

Most of the participants (n = 23) in the qualitative phase sought some form of help from their immediate family members, close relatives and friends living in Australia during their settlement or jobseeking process. Further, a few went ahead and sought assistance from colleagues in sporting teams, community gatherings, religious groups and social networks specific to professional relations such as LinkedIn. Therefore, the experiences of this research’s participants is aligned with literature (Junankar & Mahuteau, 2008) pertaining to the importance of social networks in skilled migrants’ employment. The following quote from Tino sums up the nature of the support some participants received from their colleagues to understand and respond to local job searching needs and techniques.

*One of the things that I did was, I asked from one of my friends who was in the exact position I was applying for. He made some valuable comments on my resume. I was totally blind before. He said 'this is all rubbish'. What I have mentioned in my resume was very academic. If employers see that they might think [I am] applying for a PhD. They would throw it away. So he made some valuable comments about what I should mention in my resume and what I shouldn’t. Based on his comments I changed my resume totally. It helped me a lot to have some interviews. (AFS 4)*

Apart from getting help to improve resumes or CVs, many respondents used their local networks to source referees for job applications. However, the referees obtained from social networks were not necessarily able to provide work references. In order to overcome that limitation, some respondents provided two work references from their previous overseas employers and one local reference sourced through social networks. The skilled immigrants who used that path believed that employers and recruiters prefer to talk to a local person rather than contacting overseas referees. However, this belief sits in contrast to some participants’ experiences in later stages, as some employers and recruiters contacted their previous overseas employers for references. This had been the case for people handling more
sensitive information in their jobs; a medical laboratory technician (ESI 2) and a financial accountant (AFS 4) provided evidence for such incidents.

As elaborated in Section 5.4.6, the qualitative phase participants sought support from career counselling services and ended up enrolling in a program from which this research obtained its sample. Peer suggestions played a significant role in choosing such courses since 17 out of 26 participants decided to choose the career counselling program based on such suggestions. The participants emphasised two important aspects of the career counselling program: exposure to local labour market needs, and the synergy of working with people in the same or similar situations.

You would get two things from these programs. The first thing is some opportunity to find local experience; the second thing is the synergy you get from your colleagues. Because when you see a lot of people who are desperate, who are like you; they have qualifications and experience but cannot find jobs, you realise you are not the only one. After some time, you see that they are also getting successful. That synergy and the positive environment make it very motivating. (ESI 8)

Participants admitted that the encouragement and constant push to go out and talk directly to employers and the emotional support received from the career counselling program were the most important facilitators for their success. The ways that these individuals exercise their constrained agency through reflexive deliberations and internal conversations will be explored in the discussion chapter through the critical realists’ utility of morphogenesis (Archer, 1982, 1995).

5.4.10 Job searching strategies

The previous section provided some evidence for the skilled migrants’ use of peer support and career counselling programs to overcome occupational mobility barriers imposed by the lack of professional networks, local referees in resumes and local work experience. This section explores two other strategies devised by the participants in their jobseeking processes. The change of socially identifiable information in resumes, such as names and educational qualifications, and the modification of social behaviour to reflect the values of Anglo cultural dominance/preference in Australia were identified as strategies. From the initial cohort of 26 participants, eight reportedly anglicised their first names. The propensity to anglicise names might have been influenced by (a) the career counselling program’s suggestion to anglicise
names for the benefit of attracting employers’ attention; (b) participants’ frustration at getting limited responses to their resumes with ‘foreign-sounding’ names; and (c) some labour market evidence in mainstream media (Fassaie, 2017) that shows higher preference for resumes with anglicised names. The following section provides evidence for all three reasons.

The career counselling program from which this research sourced its qualitative sample suggested that participants anglicise their first names in job application documents to get more recruiter attention. Whilst this decision was voluntary, the program provides some convincing evidence in terms of the success stories of previous participants to motivate jobseekers to take the decision. The participants showed three types of responses to this suggestion: (1) happily change their names with a sense of symbolic attachment to mainstream Australian society; (2) change their names with some level of frustration for the lost identity; (3) completely oppose changing any detail attached to their identities. Therefore, the decision to anglicise one’s name can be considered a clash between individual agency and structural barriers. The participants who anglicised their names ($n = 8$) fall into the first two categories of responses, with some level of compromised agency.

Garry provided evidence to the first category of response as he willfully changed his name to reflect an Anglo identity. Garry strongly believed anglicising one’s name was a swift pathway of integration into Australian society:

\begin{quote}
I changed my name. It is very very important. Yeah, I cherish my culture, my name and everything. But it [changing name] creates a good first impression to employers. They would find my background from my resume. They would definitely see where I came from. But, when they see my English name they would consider it as a somewhat adaptation to the Australian culture. Maybe some people do not feel comfortable with it [changing their names]. But, you know, I do not mind, to me its ok. (ETS 4)
\end{quote}

His sentiments on symbolic attachment to Australian society resonate with others who go down the same path with a more complacent attitude towards changing their identity and modifying social behaviour. They considered anglicised names as a better proxy for their ‘hard to pronounce’ foreign names, therefore enhancing social bonding and socioeconomic opportunities. This cohort takes the functionalist stance that they have to do anything it takes to make them employable in a foreign land. In return for their compromised agency, some of
them expected a rudimentary gesture of acceptance from the society and labour market alike. This led to a level of frustration for some when they felt their efforts were not repaid enough in the labour market. AOA 6, who anglicised her name to Rebecca, expressed her frustration:

*Look, I did everything they wanted me to do. Even I changed my name. But, still, they do not want me.* (AOA 6)

The second category of respondents consists of agents who anglicised their names with some level of concern about the lost identity. Some of them hoped to revert to their original names once skilled employment was successfully secured. The third group of respondents was vehemently opposed to changing their names for any perceived benefit. They considered the name change as a shatter of identity and a total disconnect from their roots and values. These individuals (AOA 1, AOA 4, AFS 2, ETS 3, ESI 6), who exercised their agency to a greater extent, were dominated by people whose names were strongly attached to their faiths or family origins.

Based on the experience and perceptions of the participants of the qualitative phase, three main reasons were identified that led to anglicised participant names: (1) the difficulty of the pronunciation of their original names; (2) the advantages and relative ease of assimilation; and (3) to avoid possible discrimination based on non-Anglo identity. Table 22 illustrates the participants’ reasons to anglicise their names.

**Table 22: Participants’ reasons to anglicise their names**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pronunciation difficulty</th>
<th>Assimilation benefits</th>
<th>Avoid direct discrimination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AOA 6</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 7</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFS 4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 8</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These factors represent participants’ experiences as well as perceptions; for example, in some cases participants had experienced that pronouncing their names was difficult for some
people. However, in other cases participants just thought it would be difficult for some people. Therefore, the multiplicity of the discourse of identity and names exists for both instrumental and emotional reasons, depending on the agents’ perceptions.

Other than anglicising names, some participants in the qualitative phase downgraded their resumes as a strategy to secure entry-level jobs. There was a shared view among the qualitative phase participants that educational qualifications play a trivial role in one’s job market success in Australia compared to other factors such as professional references, local work experiences and cultural assimilability. Some believed they were overqualified for some of the vacancies that they applied for. Therefore, some of them removed their higher level educational qualifications from resumes. The career counselling program supported this strategy as appropriate to get a foothold in the Australian labour market. Farah and Gayan removed their PhD qualifications when they applied for entry-level chemist jobs as explained in Section 5.4.4. Tashmiha downgraded her resume by replacing her bachelor degree with a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care when she applied for childcare work. The following quote from Tashmiha shows her disappointment in the decision to limit her agential capacities under the influence of structural constraints.

*You know it’s sad … the Aussies here, I think they boast a lot in their resumes to get jobs. We have to hide our qualifications to get jobs.* (AOA 1)

### 5.5 Post-employment career progression and work experience

So far, NESB skilled migrants’ pre-arrival and post-arrival jobseeking experiences and entrenched occupational mobility barriers and facilitators have been elaborated. The following section explores the post-employment career progression and work experience of the participants who have been able to secure employment in Australia. The skilled migrants might need some time in new jobs to realise the growth potential, glass ceilings and employers’ intentions to train and develop employees. Therefore, aspects such as participants’ use of previously gained skills in their new jobs, growth opportunities and the experience pertaining to Australian workplace culture will be explored in this section.
5.5.1 Use of previously developed skills in new jobs

If the purpose of the Australian migration program\(^\text{12}\) is to fill the chronic skill shortages in the Australian labour market and train an Australian workforce by effectively utilising skills brought along by skilled migrants (DIBP, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c), there should be space for skilled migrants to use their previously gained skills in their new Australian jobs. In order to understand the space for such usage, this research has used the post-employment experience of 10 selected individuals in the qualitative phase. The participants’ experiences in this regard have varied across a spectrum of responses based on their circumstances. Garry, who moved to an entry-level quality assurance role with some level of downward occupational mobility, said he was using a part of his previous skills in the new job; particularly the generic hard skills and some soft-skill components (Balcar et al., 2011). Since Garry has changed his occupation from industrial engineering to quality assurance, and industry from automobile to fast moving consumer goods, the technical hard-skills components involved in his previous job might be different from his current Australian job. Therefore, his case provides evidence for the lack of skill transferability in cross-occupational settings with downward occupational mobility.

Neha provides a similar experience in cross-occupational skill transferability. She has been able to secure work as a town planner in Australia; the same position she used to work in back in India. However, as explained in sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2, the job roles of town planners in India are vastly different from that of Australia even though the job titles remain the same. Therefore, instead of using and improving her previous skills, the Australian job has helped her to develop a new set of skills. Given the nature of Neha’s Australian job, the new skill set is more lenient towards soft skills.

Well, it has helped me to develop a set of new skills instead of improving my previous skills, as this job is very different from what I used to do. (ETS 2)

The cross-occupational skill transferability story was quite different to the above narratives for two research scientists in this sample. Gayan and Farah, who work as a polymer scientist and a medical research technician, use most of their previously gained research skills and knowledge in their new Australian jobs. Further, both claimed that they have work responsibilities to train and develop co-workers (for Gayan) and students (for Farah) in their

---

12 Australian migration program refers to the long-term permanent migration program (DIBP, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

Australian jobs. Their jobs involve in-depth technical hard skills to a great extent due to the nature of work in the scientific research industry. Therefore, their experience provides some evidence for successful transferability of technical hard skills across national borders.

5.5.2 Australian workplace culture, prospects of assimilation and direct or systemic discrimination in the workplace

Instead of pursuing an inquiry on how people exhibit their cultural practices, this research seeks to understand how participants’ views on cultural preferences, affiliation and sense of identity have evolved through the temporal axis of the investigation. The intention here is to unearth real, causally efficacious emergent properties of structural concerns such as cultural preferences, associated prejudice and discrimination. Further, the temporal disjuncture of agents’ reflexive deliberations on said structural concerns will be put into perspective through the critical realist utility of morphogenesis in the discussion chapter. Table 23 summarises how the participants’ self-identified perception of Australian society and the acceptance of new arrivals has evolved through their prolonged stay in Australia. The tabulation is limited to the experiences of the individual in-depth interview phase (n = 10) as this was the only cohort that underwent follow-up interview rounds.

Table 23: The evolution of participants’ perceptions of Australian society with prolonged stay in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Initial perception</th>
<th>Later perception after a prolonged stay in Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFS 4 / Tino</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 1 / Tashmiha</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOA 4 / Ahmed</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 1 / Kevin</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 6 / Farah</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESI 7 / Gayan</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 1 / Erica</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 2 / Neha</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 4 / Garry</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETS 6 / Felix</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked whether they had been subjected to any form of direct racial, gender or social class based vilification or abuse, nine participants (except Ahmed / AOA 4) explicitly stated
that they had not been subjected to any such experience at the time of the data collection. Ahmed was subjected to direct racial vilification at his workplace. As illustrated in Table 23, most of the individual in-depth interview phase participants held either a positive or neutral perception of Australian mainstream cultural values, acceptance and the sense of belongingness in Australian society. The positive or neutral perceptions and sense of affiliation among the participants were complemented by their lifestyle choices. As Tino summed up in the following quote, most of the individual in-depth interview phase participants (except Farah and Tashmiha) practised a lifestyle similar to Australian mainstream Anglo life in some aspects, such as work attire, greetings, food choices and some social behaviours.

In most of the things we do in day to day life, I do not see much difference between me and them except my skin colour and I speak English with an African accent ... Of course, my English is not as good as theirs. You know some of my white friends at work go to the African restaurant in Collingwood more than me.

(AF5 4)

These self-identified lifestyle similarities might have brought them a sense of affiliation to an already multicultural and multiethnic Australian society. Farah and Tashmiha, on the other hand, practised a lifestyle guided by some religious preferences of Islam. Their self-identified differences to the Anglo-mainstream lifestyle were the dress code, as they wear a headscarf; and greetings, as they do not shake hands with males; and food, as they eat halal food. However, as an educated, exposed and informed individual, Farah respects the customs, preferences and rights of the other cultures and religions:

As much as I wear a headscarf other people have their rights to wear what they want. My dress is not below or above [inferior or superior to] anything. This is what I have been doing throughout my life. I cannot think of any other way now.

(ESI 6)

When asked about her experience of using a headscarf in Australia, Farah compared her ‘limited Australian experience’ with her ‘lifelong Sri Lankan experience’ and expressed her satisfaction about the statutory protection against discrimination, enforcement of legal provisions and equal treatment in front of the law in Australia. She didn’t seem to put much effort to understanding issues related to racial inequality and rather preferred to avoid them as
individual problems for some individuals. However, Farah displayed some interest in the gender–race intersection. Farah’s next comment shows the more disadvantaged intersection of race and gender for Muslim women compared to their male counterparts (Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2017; Syed, 2007).

Identity as a Muslim is more challenging than the identity as a woman. Because wearing a hijab identifies you as a Muslim. Muslim men do not have this problem as they cannot be identified as us. My experience in Australia is far better than some of the other countries if you consider the current situation in the world. (ESI 6)

Drawing on her employer’s treatment of Muslim employees, Farah was particularly happy about the mezzo-organisational level understanding and interest of cultural diversity in her workplace.

I do not find any difference in my workplace because they discussed with us to give us a prayer room, even though we didn’t ask. I think they have a good understanding of the Muslim culture, they wish us for our festivals. Even in last Ramadan, they put a notice in the newsletter as ‘Muslims are fasting in these days’. This makes us comfortable and confident. (ESI 6)

In Farah’s case, the more favourable macro and mezzo level conditions have offset some micro-individual level negative experiences. Whilst this negative experience is more intimate to Farah, it provides some useful insights into the importance of freeing up social institutions from racism, sexism and other social malaise in both macro and mezzo levels as a response to structural inequality.

Whilst the majority of the individual in-depth interview phase participants had self-identified affiliation needs to Australian mainstream society through lifestyles choices, they did not like to relinquish the deep-rooted and sincerely held values of their origins. This led to a clash of values in decision-making, as participants made their way through the jobseeking process. The following quotes from Garry exemplify such clashes in the space of building customised resumes and having social networks.

Let me start with preparing a resume. I think it’s not totally honest because they expect you to lie them. We call it customisation here. To me, it’s a new word for
lying; customisation ... I heard from many recruiters; you have to customise your resume. But what I have done is what I have done. Ethically I think I should tell them what I have done without manipulating it. If they need a detailed account of what I have done specifically, they should have interviewed me ... But here they want me to change what I have done, all my fields of work as they want to hear it. (ETS 4)

Similarly, Neha identified a prominent cultural difference between her origin and destination.

Being outgoing, talking to people, marketing yourself, those things I wasn’t used to do earlier. But when I came here and meet with people through LinkedIn, meet people in person, that makes me changed ... But, that is something that I never expected to affect my job prospects here. Simply because that wasn’t considered as an important characteristic one should have when I was working in India. Here it does make a difference. It is very important. That is what I have heard in my meetings with people while doing my work [volunteering], I have experienced that. Being a very cheerful person in front of people makes a lot of difference. That is a huge culture change for me, not what I dress or what I eat. (ETS 2)

In this conversation, Neha interestingly identified the cultural forms embedded in social structures rather than simply conflating and equivocating culture to food and dress. As a skilled migrant from a former British colony, Neha identified many aspects of Australian life in terms of food, dress and language that she can relate to. However, her experience in the above conversation shows the hardships embedded in migration journeys due to the value incongruence between home countries and host countries. Therefore, the critical exploration of such experience would facilitate the development of a cohesive Australian workforce.

5.5.3 Repatriation

So far, the pre-arrival experience, post-arrival jobseeking experience, post-employment job retention and career progression experience of the selected skilled migrant cohort has been discussed. However, it is important to understand the experiences and agential strategies of individuals who have not been able to achieve much success in the Australian labour market. The case study phase of this research represents the experiences of two such individuals, namely Felix and Ahmed. As discussed earlier, Felix is currently working as a bakery worker and a casual cleaner to help the education of his four children in university.
If I cannot find an engineering job I will study more in project management or something like that or I shall go somewhere else. I have plan B and C. But, you have to understand that I have four children and their education is my biggest priority. I don’t want them to get stuck because of me. After getting my citizenship next year I shall go for my education. That is my plan B. I’ll do my studies and go back to the Middle East. (ETS 6)

Ahmed had already been repatriated to Pakistan, five months after the initial interview took place. Both cases of repatriation are undoubtedly the agential responses to the manifestation of profound structural barriers. However, these two skilled migrants were still endowed with agency in terms of the capacity to make repatriation decisions. Therefore, their existence sits in stark contrast to people embarking on other forms of migration journeys such as refugees and asylum seekers. Both individuals believed that structural determinants would work to their favour in the Middle East and Pakistan, since both were privileged in those labour markets prior to their migrating to Australia. Therefore, their cases substantiate the temporality and spatiality of the nature of social structures.

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the participants’ experiences pertaining to the pre-arrival, post-arrival and post-employment stages of their migration journeys to Australia. Through the exploration of participants’ experiences the chapter (1) gathered more evidence to the already identified occupational mobility barriers and facilitators; (2) identified some emergent occupational mobility barriers and facilitators; and (3) attempted to understand how skilled migrants exercise their constrained agency under the influence of profound structural influences. The next chapter will discuss the research findings through the intersectionality perspective (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991; Phoenix, 2006) and the critical realists’ utility of morphogenesis (Archer, 1982; Bakewell, 2010; Bhaskar, 2010, 2013) in order to understand the causally efficacious emergent properties of social structures and individual agency in the space of skilled migration in Australia.
Chapter 6
Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The quantitative findings chapter provided evidence for three vital determinants that condition the Australian skilled migrants’ employment and occupational mobility outcomes; namely, language background, visa status and gender. Subsequently, the qualitative findings chapter provided further evidence to the various attributes of language background, visa status and gender-related occupational mobility barriers existing in the Australian labour market while elaborating on how skilled migrant jobseekers articulate their agential responses to such barriers.

This chapter discusses the findings of both quantitative and qualitative chapters in the light of theoretical literature. Owing to the exploratory nature of the research, no effort has been made to test any theory or theoretical prepositions. However, the effort has been taken to explain research findings through the critical realist concept of morphogenesis (Archer, 1995, 2003; Bakewell, 2010; Bhaskar, 2010, 2013; Fleetwood, 2008; Fletcher, 2017) and the theory of intersectionality (Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). These theoretical perspectives have been used throughout the discussion to explain how participants exercise their individual agency in formulating their agential projects in response to structural barriers and/or facilitators.

Further, the qualitative chapter attempted to understand the temporal distinguishability of structure and agency through participants’ jobseeking experiences in Australia by exploring how their previous experience has conditioned their present view on occupational mobility barriers or facilitators. Departing from mainstream migration theories that merely explain why people migrate or otherwise (Bakewell, 2010; Castles, 2007, 2010, 2016a; Fletcher, 2017), the intention in this exercise was to unearth real, causally efficacious emergent properties of both social structures and individual agency.
6.2 Agents’ motivation and desire to contribute to Australia

Citizenship, identity and desire to contribute to the host country economy and civic society among different migrant cohorts have been discussed elsewhere (Baldassar, Pyke, & Ben-Moshe, 2017; Ben-Moshe, Pyke, & Kiritchenko, 2016; Robertson, 2011) in the Australian research context. Such discussion provides substance to persuade an inquiry by itself and poses challenges to social theorising with increasingly complex human mobility in the (post)modern world. Whilst the intention of this research is not to embark on that journey, it is worthwhile to mention how the participants of this research have shown their desire to become active citizens or otherwise in Australia. The following section is dedicated to exploring the agents’ motivations to contribute to the host country.

Owing to the higher human capital attainments and identity as skilled workers with ‘expected higher capacity’ to contribute to the host country economy, many participants started their job searching journeys with higher self-esteem and confidence on their capabilities as skilled workers (see Section 5.3 of the qualitative findings chapter). Since most of them (except the participants who stayed in England, France, Singapore, South Africa and the Middle East before migrating to Australia) migrated from countries without substantial social welfare benefit schemes or where such benefits are limited to the poorest layer of society, welfare dependency was a new experience for them. Therefore, they considered earning and contributing to the Australian economy as not only a responsibility, but also an important aspect of realising self-worth (Fleetwood, 2008; Robertson, 2011). The following quote from Tashmiha (AOA 1) sums up the sentiments around the desire to contribute and the struggle to find self-worth.

I thought that I am qualified. I was very successful in my previous jobs. I was really a productive person. It’s a devastating situation when I feel I am useless here. I want to be productive and energetic. I want to earn and contribute to this country. (AOA 1)

This strong sense of agential capacity and motivation to contribute to the host county has slowly and gradually deteriorated in some participants (AOA 1, AOA 4, ETS 6) when confronted with labour market barriers that restrain their occupational mobility. The following section identifies and discusses the complex interplay of these agential deliberations under the effect of structural barriers and facilitators.
6.3 Intersectionality and experience of dual/multiple disadvantage

Individuals in any society whether they are migrants or otherwise necessarily sit on the intersection of structural determinants such as race, gender and social class (Alberti, Holgate, & Tapia, 2013; Best et al., 2011; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). However, literature suggests that certain structural intersections such as ‘white masculine upper class’ are more socially and economically advantaged against their ‘black feminine lower class’ counterparts (Alberti, Holgate, & Tapia, 2013; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; McGinnity et al., 2006; Phoenix, 2006). Therefore, in terms of the structural determinants in making social order, different individuals sit in various positions of the highest advantageous to highest disadvantageous spectrum, depending on the structural mediators applicable to themselves. Whilst this thesis has neither intentioned nor identified social structures as the sole determinants of social [dis]advantage, the effect of social structures in combination with agential intentions, motivations and capabilities in making social order is worth understanding. Therefore, this section is dedicated to discussing the research findings through the theoretical lenses of intersectionality (Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

The quantitative findings of this research are well aligned with the intersectionality thesis (Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Phoenix, 2006) of social [dis]advantage since language background, gender and visa categories of skilled migrants have been shown to become factors associated with employment and occupational mobility outcomes. Consequently, NESB, female, non–employer-sponsored visa holding participants have been identified with comparatively lower employment and occupational mobility outcomes against their MESB, male, employer-sponsored visa holding counterparts. Different individuals holding different intersectional identities between the above two extreme categories have experienced a range of occupational mobility outcomes depending on their intersectional identities; for example, NESB male skilled migrants’ occupational mobility outcomes have been shown to be superior to their NESB female counterparts. However, it is important to understand that this thesis has not tested intersectionality theory through inferential statistics to substantiate dual/multiple [dis]advantage due to the compound effect of the above three structural factors moderating employment and occupational mobility outcomes. Therefore, there exists an opportunity for further research for empirical testing of intersectionality theory.

All qualitative phase participants (n = 26) of the research belonged to comparatively disadvantageous structural intersections since they were NESB, non–employer-sponsored skilled migrants. As explained in the methodology chapter, the rationale for the selection of NESB skilled migrants for participation in the qualitative phase was the relative labour market disadvantage faced by this group of skilled migrants as substantiated in the research literature (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014; Misko, 2012; Peterson, Pandya, & Leblang, 2014; Reid, 2012; Resia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2016; Syed & Murray, 2009; Thornton & Luker, 2010). Therefore, it can be reasonably argued that the downward occupational mobility faced by all of the qualitative phase participants (n = 26) was an outcome of their disadvantageous structural intersectionality. Consequently, they all enrolled in the partly public-funded career counselling program from which this research recruited them. However, the prime focus of the research was not to investigate the effect of intersectionality in conditioning skilled migrants’ employment and occupational mobility outcomes. Such an inquiry raises an opportunity for a different research project with a different theoretical foundation.

Farah’s (ESI 6) experience of her existence as a Muslim woman, as explained in Section 5.5.2 of the qualitative finding chapter, provided evidence for the dual disadvantage for Muslim women in the Australian labour market compared to their male and non-Muslim counterparts. As Farah explained in Section 5.5.2, Muslim women clearly have to experience negative sentiments associated with Muslim identity by being socially identifiable as Muslims through their dress code. Even though Farah said “being a Muslim is more challenging than being a woman”, the two aspects are not analytically separable since her identity as a Muslim explicates through her identity as a woman. Hence these two identities are mutually dependent and collectively responsible for the dual disadvantage faced by Muslim women (Syed, 2007, 2008; Syed & Kramar, 2010; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). The following section is dedicated to discussing the interplay between social structures and individual agency through the critical realists’ utility of morphogenesis (Archer, 1982, 2003; Bhaskar, 2013).

Tashmiha (AOA 1) is another example for the dual disadvantage faces by NESB female skilled migrants. Gender played a critical role in deciding the occupational mobility outcomes
for Tashmiha in both sending (Bangladesh) and receiving (Australia) countries. For example, her identity as a woman once facilitated her entry to the Bangladeshi apparel industry, where female labour market participation is substantially higher than the male participation. However, as explained in section 5.3.1.4 her background in Bangladeshi apparel industry latter became a barrier for her occupational mobility in Australia. Moreover, Tashmiha had to shoulder the primary care responsibilities of her household. This demonstrates how gender played a critical role in Tashmiha’s case as a labour market facilitator as well as a barrier. Further, her race and gender intersection has created a dual disadvantage for her occupational mobility in Australia.

6.4 Skilled migrants’ experiences through the morphogenetic perspective

Through the discussions presented in the literature review and methodology chapters, realism has been shown to be characterised by its implicit recognition of analytical separability and temporal distinguishability (Archer, 1995, 2003). Developed on realist ontology, morphogenesis therefore can be considered as a theoretical supplement to realism through its explicit recognition of analytical dualism, which in turn provides methodological utility to practical social analysis (Bakewell, 2010). The morphogenetic argument of structure and actions/agency operating over different time phases is based on two fundamental propositions. These propositions can be represented by Figure 19.

1. The structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) which transformed it.
2. Structural elaboration necessarily post-dates such actions.

![Figure 19: The morphogenetic sequence; adapted from (Archer, 1995)](image)
Archer (1995) explains the continuity of the morphogenetic cycle/s and how social structure and individual agency emerge, intertwine and redefine one another:

Although all three lines are in fact continuous, the analytical element consists only in breaking up the flows into intervals determined by the problem in hand: given any problem and accompanying periodization, the projection of the three lines backwards and forwards would connect up with the anterior and posterior morphogenetic cycles. (Archer, 1995, p. 76)

The distribution of a structural property at a given time affects the population capable of transforming it, ipso facto the time it takes to modify/eradicate the manifestation of the concerned structural property. Different individuals react to structural properties in different ways based on their knowledge, attitudes, vested interests and objective capacities at T^2. Consequently, society gets divided between individuals who work to change the status quo versus individuals who work to maintain it (Archer, 1995, 2003). Therefore, the structural influence remains beyond T^2 despite agents’ collective social endeavours to transform it. During this period of persistence, the structure becomes a barrier for those who endeavour to change/transform it (Archer, 2007).

In terms of agents’ interactions with social structure, an activity initiated at T^2 continues in a context not of its own making. This rejects methodological individualism, where any structural property influential after T^2 is attributable to contemporary actors because of their knowledge, attitudes, vested interests and objective capacities for changing it (Archer, 1995). In other words, agents respond to structural barriers/facilitators, which they played no role in making (not necessarily on every occasion). However, between T^2 and T^3 agents exert two independent influences, one directional and the other temporal, to speed-up, delay or prevent the elimination of prior structural influences. If agents’ endeavours were successful, the structural change produced at T^4 goes beyond the mere replacement of one structural property with another new property. Instead, they are structural elaborations of a range of social possibilities that come into play between T^2 and T^4. The structural elaboration restarts a new morphogenetic cycle with a new set of structural influences with the capacity to act as structural barriers and/or facilitators. Thus, T^4 becomes the new T^1.

Applied to the situation of skilled migration in the Australian labour market, the morphogenetic cycle provides a robust theoretical explanation of how skilled migrant
jobseekers negotiate structural barriers and facilitators through their jobseeking projects. Skilled migrants coming to Australia have to deal with the influence of prior structural barriers and facilitators, which they might not have played a role in making. However, through their constantly modifying individual projects, they endeavour to respond to already existing structural barriers and facilitators. The process of structural elaborations generated as the outcomes of such agential actions then modifies and redefines the social structures through the axis of temporality and spatiality. The skilled migrants’ individual and social endeavours to respond to such structural labour market determinants make them innovative in job searching, social engagement and job retention strategies. Sections 5.4 and 5.5 of the qualitative findings chapter provided evidence for some of the innovative measures that the participants of this research have taken.

The need for professional membership and associated professional protectionism (Hawthorne, 2016b) can be elaborated as an example of the presence of the morphogenetic cycle in labour markets. By the time any skilled migrant comes to Australia, particularly for certain highly regulated occupations such as nursing, medical practice and law, they have to go through the process of professional membership acquisition. This labour market need represents a variety of occupational mobility concerns ranging from the acquisition of local contextual knowledge to the purpose of limiting labour market entry for new entrants. Whilst the former can be considered as an agency oriented barrier, the latter is a highly structure-oriented barrier that helps to maintain elitism in the regulated professions. Therefore, any skilled migrant entering the labour market at a point of concern has to confront existing structural barriers, which they have not played a role in making. However, it is reasonable to assume the agent possess some level of knowledge, attitude, vested interests and agential capacity to understand and negotiate with the concerned structural determinants (Archer, 2003, 2007).

Confronted with such barriers, agents get to choose between two contrasting options: (1) working towards the acquisition of professional membership; and (2) refusing the need of professional membership and continuing to seek jobs with existing ‘human capital attributes’. Both choices have considerable costs and intended benefits to agents. The former improves one’s human capital attributes towards much-preferred labour market expectations of acquired professional memberships. In certain regulated occupations, this could be attributed to overcoming some regulatory/statutory barriers; for example, working in Australia as a
general practitioner needs some mandatory professional registration (AHPRA, 2018). However, such membership acquisitions come with costs, such as the cost of training and the cost of accreditation, with no guarantee that jobseekers will secure a professional role once completed. Whilst the second choice avoids the before-mentioned costs, it alternatively increases the cost of unemployment/underemployment given some occupations need compulsory professional memberships in order to be considered for employment.

The agential responses to structural barriers are not necessarily simple and binary as shown in the previous example. As long as agential responses to structural determinants do not happen in a social vacuum, they influence one another and possess the capacity to influence social structures. For an example, if a considerable amount of skilled migrant jobseekers decided not to acquire professional memberships for a prolonged period, this decision could impact the supply side of the labour market and more than likely push up the salaries of eligible workers of the concerned occupations as long as there exist genuine skill shortages. The decision could also force authorities to reconsider the requirement for mandatory professional membership. In this example, agents collectively respond to the pre-existing structural labour market determinant; namely, professional membership/protectionism. In doing so they form structural elaborations that go beyond the response period (T² to T³). Thus, it satisfies both conditions necessary for the cycle of morphogenesis to operate; the structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) which transformed it, and structural elaboration necessarily post-dates such actions (Archer, 1982, 1995, 2003). Therefore, this example showcases the temporal distinguishability of social structure and the agency that transformed it. The new structural determinants emerging out of the situation are not a mere replacement of previous structural determinants. They are elaborations of a host of new social possibilities (Archer, 1982, 1995).

Another example of the manifestation of the cycle of morphogenesis is the skilled migrants’ pre-arrival perception of the host country labour market/society. As explained in the qualitative chapter, skilled migrants have experienced a range of structural push–pull factors (Castles, 2016b; Massey et al., 1993) that conditioned their preconceived view of the Australian labour market and society. For example, the skilled migrants (e.g. Neha, Farah and Garry) who were attracted to sociopolitical pull factors such as the ‘perceived secular nature’ of Australian society have clearly been influenced by the pre-existing structure – the very lack of the same secular governance in their home countries. Based on the available knowledge and resources to them at the time, they did their research to find out the nature of
Australian society and its labour market. Therefore, they certainly have responded to pre-existing structural concerns in both source country and host country. However, when happening in a regular and continuous manner, the influx of immigration could influence the very structural pull factors that motivated people to come to Australia in the first place. For example, factors such as acceptance for immigrants in the host-country society and religious and cultural tolerance could be affected by the mass influx of immigration.

Further, it is important to understand the intended and unintended structural elaborations. The migrants might have intended to come to Australia and take advantage of a secular society and assist in the reproduction of that secular society. However, an unintended consequence of their presence may be the ‘reactionist’ social forces wanting to ‘claim/reclaim’ a different view of society. This clearly illustrates how pre-existing structural determinants influence the actions of contemporary actors and how such agential actions lead to future structural elaborations (Archer, 1995, 2003).

6.5 The difference between the agential perception of social structures and real, causally efficacious emergent properties of social structures

Distinguishing the subtle difference between one’s perception of social structures and real, causally efficacious emergent properties of social structures described in critical realists’ social theory (Bhaskar, 2010, 2013) is important to better understand the structural manifestations in labour markets. Therefore, this section is dedicated to discussing how agential perceptions of social structures are different from ‘real social structures’ through the qualitative phase participants’ experience; and how agential perceptions have evolved through the temporal axis of the inquiry without necessarily attaining structural improvements. This will be helpful to stress the need for structural interventions in labour markets that go beyond the mere improvement of agential perceptions.

Tashmiha’s (AOA 1) experience can be illustrated as an example of how labour market perception of one’s occupational history could become an occupational mobility barrier or facilitator depending on the agent’s perceptions. On the assumption that Australian employers consider the fearsome reputation of the Bangladesh apparel industry as a place for oppression, in recruiting skilled migrants with an ethnic Bangladeshi background, one could argue the occupational background as a structural determinant. It was an outcome of many previous morphogenetic cycles which Tashmiha might not have played a role in making.
However, at $T^2$ (see Figure 19) Tashmiha has to face the intended or unintended consequences of having a negative public image for the industry she worked in previously. Therefore, at $T^2$ she has to respond the pre-dated structural determinants. However, it is difficult to draw the conclusion of her occupational history as a structural barrier solely on Tashmiha’s experience, since she has not pursued skilled employment and has not received such a response from any employer.

However, Tashmiha acted on the perception that employers would treat her occupational background negatively. Therefore, she exercises her active agency by concealing her HR background and presenting herself as an admin worker; and putting in comparatively less effort to find skilled work commensurate with her skills/qualifications. As much as one employer might perceive Tashmiha’s occupational background with negative connotations, another might perceive it as an indication of her resilience in an industry with widely known bad track records for treating workers. Whilst the former upheld the occupational background as a structural barrier the latter considered it as an occupational mobility facilitator.

Tashmiha’s case is more lenient towards an example of how agential perceptions on structural determinants are different from the emergent properties of social structures. For Tashmiha’s occupational background to be considered as a structural occupational mobility barrier, she needed to be denied employment by a labour market operator based on her occupational background, which was not fully evident in the qualitative data.

Another example to showcase how agents’ perceptions are different from the structural properties of a society is Farah’s (ESI 6) perception in terms of the Australian treatment of her ethno-religious background. At the time of the research, Farah had experienced an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere at work, where her employer provided the necessary resources for her to practice her religion. In building her perception on the matter of acceptance, Farah compared this positive experience in her relatively short stay in Australia with the bitter experience of ethno-religious conflict in the long standing Sri Lankan civil war. Therefore, Farah’s positive perception of Australian society was constrained to her limited exposure to social structures in Australia. However, at the time Farah felt welcome in Australia, the public sentiment on Muslim immigration in Australia was negative (SBS, 2016). Therefore, Farah’s perception does not necessarily reflect the manifestations of racial determinants in Australian society. Further, employers might respond to sentiments towards a particular group of people (Muslim immigrants in this case) differently than the general public, since their intentions
such as acquisition of skills and employee reliability are different from the public expectations of migrants. Whilst initiatives such as those Farah’s employers implemented should be encouraged and essential for the development of a cohesive Australian workforce, individual perceptions should not be equated to the achievement of structural improvements.

The skilled migrants’ perceptions of the Australian labour market play a pivotal role in the immigration decision-making process (Al Ariss, 2010; Berry & Bell, 2012; Cerdin & Selmer, 2013; Peltokorpi & Jintae Froese, 2009). Owing to the nature of the skill-oriented, non-discriminatory skilled migration selection process, the Australian labour market maintains a positive perception in terms of job availability, cultural assimilability and skill integration in migrant-sourcing countries (DIBP, 2017a; Duffy & Frere-Smith, 2014). The pre-arrival experience of qualitative phase participants such as Neha (ETS 2), Garry (ETS 4), Farah (ESI 6), Tino (AFS 4) and Tashmiha (AOA 1) provided evidence for such positive perceptions and how such perceptions acted as migration pull factors (Castles, 2010, 2016b). However, once skilled migrants are confronted with various occupational mobility barriers in Australia, they modify their perceptions as well as their agential behaviour through numerous cycles of reflexive deliberation (Archer, 2003, 2007). The subsequent section discusses how participants’ perceptions of certain aspects of the Australian labour market evolved through the course of the research.

Section 5.5.2 of the qualitative findings chapter provides evidence on how participants’ views on cultural preferences, affiliation and sense of identity evolved with a prolonged stay in Australia. Further, the experience of Garry (ETS 4) can be illustrated as an example of how agents’ perceptions in terms of certain labour market practices and occupational mobility aspects have evolved with time. As illustrated in Section 5.5.2, Garry seems to have struggled to understand the need for customisation of his resume in applying for jobs. He held the view that any alteration to one’s resume to match the need of employers was a form of dishonest manipulation. Whilst the integrity of content and the presentation of details in labour market instances such as resumes and job interviews is arguable, the practice of altering resumes to match job vacancies has been commonly used in the Australian labour market (Stevens, 1990).

Due to Garry’s perception on the matter, he was confronted by the need to customise his resume to meet labour market expectations. Therefore, his perception acted as an occupational mobility barrier for him at the beginning. However, after experiencing
downward occupational mobility for a prolonged period, Garry later changed his mind and customised his resume by axing some of his qualifications and assigning modest interpretations to his work experience based on one of his colleagues’ opinions. Consequently, this cast a perception in Garry that educational qualifications play a trivial role in the Australian labour market (see Section 5.4.4). Garry’s experience provides an example of how agents modify their perceptions through the process of reflexive deliberation in their settlement journeys (Archer, 2000, 2003).

Whilst agents’ perceptions of occupational mobility barriers and facilitators do not necessarily equate to real structural barriers and facilitators, these perceptions are not immune to the influence of social structures (Archer, 1982; Giddens & Pierson, 2013). Therefore, it is worthwhile to understand how participants have developed such perceptions. Going back to Tashmiha’s experience, her perception was partly developed through her self-judgment of her previous occupational background in the Bangladesh apparel industry. However, the career counselling program played a role here by agreeing with her strategy of concealing her HR background and presenting herself as an admin worker. Similarly, Farah’s employer played an important role in her positive experience of workplace assimiability in Australia. These experiences substantiate the role labour market operators play in conditioning skilled migrants’ employment experiences. Therefore, the incremental changes of perception towards the positive by employers and employees are important steps towards broader structural changes in labour markets. However, care should be taken not to narrowly misinterpret perception changes as structural improvement. Section 6.10 discusses the role of labour market intermediaries in skilled migrant employment discourse.

6.6 Skill assessment process: The complicated skilled migration sourcing process

The qualitative chapter identified three issues related to the skill assessment process: (1) the complex selection process and associated misconceptions; (2) the [lack of] labour market validity for skill assessment outcomes as an endorsement for skilled migrants’ foreign-gained skills; and (3) the misalignment between assessed skills and labour market expectations for certain occupations. The first issue arises from the complexity of the skilled migrant sourcing process in Australia and skilled migrants’ general lack of understanding of the process. The Australian migration program is administrated through a complex visa regime with hundreds
of different visa subclasses (DIBP, 2015a, 2016, 2017c, 2017e). This makes the visa application process complicated. The DIBP and its allied service providers such as skill assessment authorities and migration agents usually dictate this process (DIBP, 2016). Such a complicated process arguably makes visa applicants distant from the department’s core processes and make more dependent on the service providers. Consequently, applicants become less informed about some of the vital elements in the process, such as the labour market validity for visa skill assessment outcomes, the demand for skilled labour specific geographies such as regional Australia, and professional memberships and other labour market favourable attributes.

As shown in Section 5.3.3.1 of the qualitative chapter, participants have misunderstood the occupational ceiling mechanism used in the selection process, where the DIBP does not necessarily fill the full occupational ceiling for every occupation in the SOL. Instead, DIBP uses ABS and other ongoing labour market supply and demand statistics to decide the number of invitations sent out to each occupational category within a program year (DIBP, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e). Therefore, the occupational ceilings for some occupations get filled, without a single invitation being issued for other occupations. Further, in order to make the SOL and CSOL align with the demand of labour and skill requirements in the dynamic Australian labour market, DIBP annually revises these skill lists based on the Department of Employment and the Department of Education and Training’s advice on skill shortages in the Australian labour market. These revisions result in some occupations being removed from the list if identified as oversupplied, and flag some occupations for future removal (DIBP, 2017c). Therefore, the DIBP’s use of the SOL and the CSOL is far more complicated than a simple and direct indicator of skill shortages. Section 5.3.3.1 of the qualitative findings chapter provided evidence for skilled migrants’ general lack of understanding of this complicated process and how it causes false expectations about the demand for their occupations in Australia.

The second and third issues can be linked with a plethora of challenges in assessing migrants’ skills gained in different contexts to Australia. Since the skill assessment process only tests the fundamental skills and education qualifications necessary to perform one’s nominated occupation, there could be myriad of other context-specific skills necessary to perform a job effectively and efficiently in Australia. The need for such skills could be different from one

---

13 This role was previously played by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (AWPA).
occupation to another, as some occupations heavily rely on skills with ‘less contextual differences’ whereas others heavily depend on ‘highly context-specific’ skills as discussed in Section 5.4.2 of the qualitative findings chapter. Further, the quantitative findings chapter reinforced that employers do not necessarily recruit on the merits of skills. Other structural factors such as language background, cultural background, religion, gender and visa status become influential in employers’ choices of whom to recruit (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Asghar, Cameron, & Farivar, 2017; Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Junankar, Paul, & Yasmeen, 2010; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014; Misko, 2012; Ng Chok et al., 2018; Rynderman & Flynn, 2016; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009; Thornton & Luker, 2010). Therefore, skills have the imprint of the social construct that make, develop and sustain them. It is vital to understand the social construct of skills in order to understand their transferability across national borders. However, as shown in Section 5.3.3.2 and 5.3.3.3, the skills assessment process is not necessarily well aligned with the social construct of skills due to its higher emphasis on technical hard skills. Therefore, there exists a gap between assessed skills and labour market expectations in skilled migrant employment discourse (Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014). The next two sections discuss the challenges associated with the social construct of skills through skill transferability perspectives.

6.7 Skill transferability through structure–agency perspective

Soft skills are commonly referred to as easily transferable skills (Balcar et al., 2011) irrespective of the contextual implications they carry and instigate with them (e.g. interpersonal skills). Applied to the situation of skilled migrants, this overgeneralisation creates a false sense of transitional ease for migrants’ skills across national borders. However, it is worthwhile to understand if a contextually defined and subjectively interpreted set of personal attributes such as soft skills are so easily transferable across fiercely protected national borders, especially in the context of wider sociocultural differences. If soft skills are contextually defined and subjectively interpreted, the interplay between social structures and individual agency of the actors who endeavour to transfer their skills across borders has a pivotal role in skill transferability discourse. The structuralist and individualist division is counterproductive in understanding transitional challenges since the former effectively reduces the responsibility to social structures and the latter reduces it to individual agency (Archer, 1982, 1995, 2007; Bakewell, 2010). Therefore, the realist construct of structure–
agency interplay provides a more fruitful avenue to investigate the challenges of soft skills transferability in cross-cultural settings.

The occupational mobility literature provides a set of skills and attributes identified as necessary for employment success in contemporary labour markets. Among many such identifications the Mayer Committee (1992)’s seven key competencies, DEST (2002) employability skills for the future and Balcar et al. (2011) are worth considering due to the different approaches they suggest in identifying employability skills. Table 24 summarises the key identifications for each. Further, the above three classifications align with the skill classification attempts made by Bratianu and Vatamanescu (2016). They represent wider aspects of skills and personal attributes necessary for employment success. However, three fundamental challenges arise in any attempt to discuss employability skills:

1. What is meant by each skill/personal attribute type? Whose definition prevails?
2. Under what circumstances might someone be judged as competent?
3. Who is responsible for the attainment of such desired skills and attributes? This entails the level of skills jobseekers/employees need to bring to the job against the level of training needed to be provided by the employers.

Table 24: Comparison of employability skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mayer Committee’s (1992) seven key competencies</th>
<th>Employability skills for the future (DEST, 2002)</th>
<th>Balcar et al. (2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Collecting, analysing and organising information</td>
<td>• Communication that contributes to productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers</td>
<td>• Personal effectiveness skills cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communicating ideas and information</td>
<td>• Teamwork that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes</td>
<td>• Relationship and service skills cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning and organising activities</td>
<td>• Problem-solving skills that contribute to productive outcomes</td>
<td>• Impact and influence skills cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Working with others and in teams</td>
<td>• Self-management skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth</td>
<td>• Achievement skills cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using mathematical ideas and techniques</td>
<td>• Planning and organising that contribute to long- and short-term strategic planning</td>
<td>• Cognitive skills cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Solving problems</td>
<td>• Technology skills that contribute to effective execution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of tasks
• Learning skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes
• Initiative and enterprise skills that contribute to innovative outcomes

Among the above-stated wide variety of skills, communication can be considered as a good example to illustrate the transitional complexities of soft skills across cultural distinctions. Most participants (n = 17) in the qualitative phase inquiry self-identified as individuals with adequate communications skills in their home country context, in both language and culture. Further, some of them (ETS 2, ETS 4, AOA 4) had some examples to showcase how communication skills were important in their home country occupations and how they succeeded in tasks involving communication skills. However, as explained in Section 5.4.7, participants identified themselves facing certain communication challenges due to reasons such as cultural references attached to language, having foreign accents and public perceptions on their use of English. The interplay of such factors created a situation where some participants lost confidence in conversation with native English speakers in Australia (see Section 5.4.7).

The realists’ construct of morphogenesis is useful for understanding how structural determinants play a vital role in the above example. Skilled migrants have to deal with a plethora of pre-existing structural factors in terms of English language capabilities, which they have not necessarily played a role in making. For example, English language skills are considered as a symbol of social affluence in some former British colonies (Pennycook, 2014). Therefore, skilled migrants from such countries have to bear the structural pressure of using English as a social status indicator. Further, owing to their identity as skilled migrants they face a similar structural pressure in Australia, where society and labour market operators expect them to use fluent English (Frost, 2017; Hawthorne, 2015, 2016a; Syed & Murray, 2009). The skilled migrants respond to such pre-existing structural determinants through a variety of agential projects. Some try to mimic Australian accents, or learn local clichés and cultural aspects related to English, while others limit themselves in conversation in the public sphere.
In response to the abovementioned structural pressure, they often inadvertently contribute to reinforcing the very social barriers that hold them back. According to Archer (1982, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2007), agents may or may not be aware of their role in such structural elaboration processes. This distinguishes morphogenesis from structuration, where structuration is constrained to active agency in structural elaboration processes (Archer, 1982; Bakewell, 2010). The above example showcases the difficulty of transferring communication skills across national borders. If communication skills come with no such attachments to social structures, their transferability would be much easier.

6.8 Skilled migrant employment through a skill transferability perspective

The above section has discussed the social construct of skills through the structure–agency perspective and identified transitional challenges for skills across national borders due to structural barriers. This section explores skill transferability challenges arising from the differences between skilled migrants’ home country jobs and host country jobs. Through the qualitative analysis, it has been identified that job role differences between skilled migrants’ home countries and Australia is an occupational mobility barrier due to the skill mismatch this creates (Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014). The use of skills frameworks to assess skilled migrants’ home country occupations against their Australian occupations can be considered as an appropriate way to understand such differences (Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016). The following section uses Neha’s experience to discuss and substantiate the occupational mobility barriers created by skill mismatches. One such framework has been devised by Balcar et al. (2011) in their study of transferability of skills across economic sectors in the European region. They classified skills into three broad categories:

- **Soft skills**: non-job-specific skills that relate to an individual’s ability to operate effectively in the workplace. These skills are usually considered as perfectly transferable. However, the transferability of soft skills across national and cultural boundaries is worth pursuing.

- **Generic hard skills**: technical and job-specific abilities, which can be applied effectively in most jobs in a majority of workplaces, occupations, sectors and in personal life. They are thus perceived as considerably transferable.

- **Specific hard skills**: technical and job-specific abilities applicable in a small number of workplaces, occupations and sectors. They describe special attributes necessary to
perform an occupation in practice. These skills are characterised by lower transferability as they come with particular occupation- or industry-specific requirements.

Figure 20 illustrates three skill levels and broad skill clusters associated with these categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job specific hard skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislative &amp; regulatory skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic skills in science &amp; technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic hard skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICT skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soft skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal effectiveness skills cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship &amp; service skills cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact &amp; influence skills cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement skills cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive skills cluster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 20: Major skill categories; adapted from Balcar et al. (2011)**

This skill transferability framework provides a good vantage point from which to identify the issues associated with Neha’s (ETS 2) (and comparable other’s) skill mismatch between the sending country (India) occupation and comparable Australian occupation, despite both jobs holding the same occupational title of ‘town planner’. Neha engaged in a more strategic planning role in her previous job in India that comprised duties such as assisting local councils in developing policies and programs; research planning-related policy developments; writing policy submissions, various reports and working papers; and collaborating with local and international institutes and universities in planning policy and research. Her current job in Australia entails duties such as assessing development applications from clients in relation to planning scheme requirements; communicating daily with clients and providing feedback and progress on their applications; answering customer inquiries on planning requirements and councils’ guidelines; representing the council at tribunals and defending the council’s decisions; dealing with objectors; and associating with other professionals such as engineers, architects and building surveyors. These aspects make
her current role an operational planning role. The specific and generic skills required for these two job roles are illustrated in Figure 21.

Figure 21: A comparison of skills necessary for two town planning jobs in India and Australia

The skills profiles illustrated above suggest skill transferability challenges in Neha’s case. Her previous job as a strategic planner was highly dependent on the above-identified specific hard skills more than the generic hard skills and soft skills. Neha’s current job as a planner in Australia heavily relies on her generic hard skills and soft skills but a certain level of specific hard skills identified above. Neha’s educational qualifications in the area of planning and architecture and highly similar generic hard skills and soft skills in town planning jobs in two countries made her migration journey possible through a skilled migration pathway. However, in the case of finding skilled employment in Australia, Neha encountered skill-mismatch problems (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014) as she has expressed below.

Because it is very different from what it was in India ... In India, it was more of strategic planning. I was more involved in research and consultancy projects, affiliating with the councils doing policies and programs. Here it is more
fragmented ... each department just does their bit, like statutory planning department would do the implementation of the regulations, and strategic planning department does framing policies. I wasn’t sure where exactly I would fit in. That is another problem that I am facing. (ETS 2)

Farah’s (female / research technician) experience of transferring from agricultural research to medical research for the same occupation as a research technician is starkly different from the situation substantiated above through Neha’s experience. Even though it cost 10 months of significant effort and some unpaid labour as a transition penalty for Farah to find work in her skilled occupation, she experienced a much smoother transition from agricultural research to medical research. The possible facilitator for the apparently smooth transition was the skill profile and job role similarity between research technician jobs in two research domains, since both jobs are highly dependent on similar technical hard skills. According to Farah, despite the difference between test materials, samples and research objectives, most of the research techniques necessary for both jobs remain largely similar. Therefore, Farah’s strategy of seeking work in other, similar industries can be suggested as a useful strategy for skilled migrants (as well as native workers) facing occupational mobility barriers in diminishing or slow growth industries.

Snell, Gatt, and Gekara (2016) suggest some useful strategies for switching careers between industries and occupations in the Australian labour market. They identified the lack of understanding of skills and transferability across industries/occupations among jobseekers, employers and employment facilitators as a barrier for cross-industry occupational mobility. Further, they recognised that people who had changed jobs within their career (a situation similar to skilled migrants) have a much better understanding of transferable skills than people who spent their entire career in one job. These findings resonate with some of the participants’ experiences in this research as some participants (ESI 2, ETS 2, AOA 3) have not realised their cross-occupational transferable skills; some find it difficult to convince employers/recruiters that they possess such transferable skills (AFS2, AOA 7, ETS 6); and others (ESI 6, ETS 4) successfully secured employment through cross-occupation/cross-industry skill transferability. Whilst the Snell, Gatt, and Gekara (2016) study has not investigated skilled migrant experiences, their suggested approach of using occupational clusters as cross-occupational skill transferability platforms remains valid for skilled migrants.
6.9 The problems associated with foreign work experience and educational qualification recognition: The subtlety of structural manifestations

The lack of Australian work experience has already been identified as a significant occupational mobility barrier, particularly for NESB skilled migrants in the Australian labour market (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Rynderman & Flynn, 2016; Wagner & Childs, 2006). The challenges imposed by the lack of local work experience can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, this might be attributed to certain jobs that are highly dependent on the Australian context-specific skills and knowledge, as discussed in a previous section. Therefore, the lack of local work experience becomes an occupational mobility barrier for such occupations. Secondly, for occupations that have minimal needs of context-specific knowledge, it can be attributed to structural concerns of occupational mobility such as employers’ preferences for skilled migrants from Anglophone countries (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Misko, 2012), therefore using local experience as a denial strategy for NESB workers.

If the lack of local experience solely refers to contextual knowledge requirements, then it should ideally be applied to all skilled migrants without Australian work experience irrespective of their cultural or language backgrounds. However, the literature on occupational mobility suggests NESB skilled migrants are more often confronted with the problem of lack of Australian experience compared with their MESB counterparts (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Misko, 2012; Rynderman & Flynn, 2016). Thus, the claim seems to be misused in the labour market by some prejudiced employers/recruiters against NESB skilled migrants as a marker of their racial, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Junankar, Paul, & Yasmeen, 2010; Misko, 2012; Peterson, Pandya, & Leblang, 2014; Reid, 2012; Rynderman & Flynn, 2016; Syed & Kramar, 2010; Thornton & Luker, 2010). This research found evidence for both cases; the reasonable occupational needs for context-specific knowledge (ETS 2) and the blunt use of the term as a denial strategy (ESI 6, ESI 7, ETS 1, ETS 6).

The recognition of qualifications and work experience gained outside Australia has been a persistent theme of investigation in international mobility research in Australia and elsewhere alike (Guo, 2009; Hawthorne, 2015, 2016b; Misko, 2012; Wagner & Childs, 2006). The
problem of the (non)recognition of qualifications and work experience gained outside Australia is twofold (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Misko, 2012; OECD, 2012; Thornton & Luker, 2010). Whilst some researchers (Booth, Leigh, & Varganova, 2012; Thornton & Luker, 2010; Wagner & Childs, 2006) have identified and substantiated evidence for direct discrimination against migrants from NESB countries in the recognition of educational attainments and prior work experiences, others (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Misko, 2012; Rynderman & Flynn, 2016) explained the issue as a problem of systemic discrimination based on employers’ preferences towards candidates from other Anglophone countries with similar educational qualification systems and work/cultural practices.

As qualifications and foreign experiences act as markers for applicants’ ethnic identities (Rynderman & Flynn, 2016), the employers’ higher inclination towards Anglophone candidates stemmed from the ‘perceived higher quality of education’, familiar qualification systems (Hawthorne, 1997, 2005) and desire for cultural assimilability in workplaces from Anglophone candidates (Gimenez & Morgan, 2017; Rajendran, Farquharson, & Hewege, 2017). Therefore, the issue of systemic discrimination becomes ‘hard to tackle’ in the highly subjective and value-based process of job recruitment. Consequently, the need for contextual knowledge and role differences between Australian jobs and comparable overseas jobs can be used as justifiers by some prejudiced employers and recruiters for not recruiting skilled migrants from NESB countries.

6.10 The role of labour market intermediaries as occupational mobility barriers and facilitators

As explained in Section 5.4.9, the qualitative phase participants benefited from taking part in the career counselling program by improving their understanding of local labour market needs and expectations, getting access to the career counselling program’s social networks consisting of employers and former participants, getting local referees on their resumes, and experiencing the synergy of working with people in the same or similar situations. The career counselling program has its own perception of the Australian labour market and occupational mobility barriers and facilitators. This view was evidenced in its introduction letter for skilled migrant jobseekers to potential employers (see Section 5.4.3 and Appendix F). Apparently, this perception of the career counselling program was developed through the knowledge
gathered by working with skilled migrant jobseekers for 22 years since its inception in 1996. Therefore, the program articulated strategies based on its interpretation of identified occupational mobility barriers and facilitators. The career counselling program suggested participants (1) anglicise their names if they are comfortable with it; (2) customise resumes to meet employers’ expectations and downgrade qualifications in some instances; and (3) apply for entry-level skilled jobs as a strategy for getting a foothold in the Australian labour market. This research neither intended nor is equipped to assess the effectiveness of these strategies. However, it is worthwhile to understand their influence on skilled migrants’ jobseeking experiences in the Australian labour market.

As explained in Section 5.4.10 of the qualitative findings chapter, participants anglicised their names to avoid pronunciation difficulties, increase assimilation benefits and avoid direct discrimination. However, there was not enough evidence that the participants who anglicised their names (n = 8) necessarily experienced these difficulties before they made the decision to change their names. Therefore, it is sensible to assume that their decision to change names was influenced by the career counselling program’s suggestion, on top of perceptions built by their daily engagement with Australian society. Further, the career counselling program’s strategy of downgrading educational qualifications and applying for entry-level skilled occupations has worked for some jobseekers since the program maintains records of successful past candidates. However, the same strategy has not paid off very well for participants with postgraduate qualifications who sought entry to knowledge intensified industries; for example, the experience of two participants with PhD qualifications. Whilst the jobseeker can learn from previous success stories, strategies need to be tailored to suit the circumstances of each jobseeker. This research stresses the need for empowering skilled migrant jobseekers to exercise individual agency and make well-informed labour market decisions for better and swift integration into the Australian workforce.

Apart from its strategies for labour market success, the career counselling program profoundly conditioned the participants’ view of the third-party recruitment sector in Australia. Most of the participants (n = 21) in the qualitative phase of the research considered third-party recruiters as a barrier to their success in the labour market. This view has been informed by their personal experiences in dealing with third-party recruiters (see Section 5.4.6) as well as guidance provided by the career counselling program. The career counselling program actively encouraged avoiding third-party recruiters. Instead, it
encouraged participants to talk to their potential future bosses, assuming that it will help employers to understand and better relate to skilled migrants’ transferable skills and complex work histories spanning multiple industries and national borders in some instances.

Consequently, some of the major concerns among the participants (n = 21) who were sceptical about third-party recruiters were (a) third-party recruiters’ inability to understand complex work experience histories of skilled migrants, which often carry foreign employer details; (b) their lack of interest in foreign qualifications due to the perceived risk of recruiting people with unfamiliar qualifications and work experiences; and (c) recruiters’ poor understanding of complex transferable skills involved in some technical, skill-intensive jobs (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Hawthorne, 2016b; Misko, 2012; Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016).

6.11 Theoretical framework to understand the interplay between structural and agential concerns of skilled migrants’ occupational mobility

The discussion in this chapter shows how pre-existing social structures condition the present structural manifestations of the Australian labour market. Further, how agents’ intended or unintended actions transform and regenerate social structures in the process of structural elaborations (Archer, 1982, 1995, 2007; Bakewell, 2010) have been discussed. These fundamental arguments in the realist utility of morphogenesis helped to criticise individualism, where contemporary actors are made responsible for the structural determinants applied to labour market outcomes, which they have not necessarily played a role in making. Therefore, while handling the temporal complexity of social structures, morphogenesis provides a better theoretical utility for practical social analysis in [skilled] migrant labour markets (Bakewell, 2010; Morawska, 2011; Vandenberghe, 2005). The following theoretical framework developed on the key premises of morphogenesis is useful in better understanding skilled migrants’ occupational mobility through temporal and spatial expansions. The framework is illustrated in Figure 22.

The identified occupational mobility barriers/facilitators in the quantitative and qualitative chapters were the outcomes of current and pre-existing social structures (Archer, 1995). In responding to such occupational mobility barriers/facilitators, agents exercise their constrained agency in varying degrees depending on their capabilities and motivations (Archer, 2007). Agents use countless reflexive deliberations and internal conversations in the
process of agential responding (Archer, 2007). As showcased through the experience of 10 selected individuals, agents developed particular labour market entrance strategies such as anglicising names, altering resumes, obtaining professional memberships, pursuing career changes by changing industries, and accepting semi-skilled or entry-level jobs as responses to structural barriers.

Understanding the abovementioned agential responses is helpful at the micro-individual level, where current jobseekers could learn useful strategies from their successful predecessors. Further, it could also be useful in the mezzo-organisational level, where employers could develop policies and processes to address structural inequality in the workplace and develop training and upskilling initiatives to train diverse cohorts of employees from various ethnocultural and occupational backgrounds. However, an adequate understanding of the temporal and spatial concerns of occupational mobility barriers and facilitators is pivotal in such exercises due to the emergent nature of social structures and corresponding agential responses. Simply replicating agential and organisational responses that were proven to be successful in different time and space combinations would not necessarily provide favourable outcomes due to social emergence. Therefore, the temporal distinguishability emphasised in the theoretical framework is critical to understand the employment discourse of skilled migrants in Australia.

In terms of the macro-national level, this involves processes and strategies such as improving pre-arrival preparation (Ng Chok et al., 2018) by better informing skilled migrants about the dynamics of the Australian labour market; reducing the complexity of skilled migration selection processes and associated miscommunication (Gregory, 2014; Hamid, Hoang, & Kirkpatrick, 2018; Hawthorne, 2014b); reducing transitional penalties for cross-border, cross-industry and cross-occupational skill transferability (Asghar, Cameron, & Farivar, 2017; Dantas et al., 2017; Ng Chok et al., 2018; Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016); and improving labour market recognition for skills, educational qualifications and work experience gained from NES backgrounds (Almeida & Fernando, 2017; Hawthorne, 2015, 2016b). Policy suggestions for the empowerment of agents/jobseekers are elaborated in the policy implications section of the conclusion chapter.
Figure 22: The theoretical framework to better understand skilled migrants’ occupational mobility
6.12 Chapter summary

The discussion chapter put the research findings into a perspective through the theoretical lenses of intersectionality (Best et al., 2011; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991; Phoenix, 2006) and critical realists’ utility of morphogenesis (Archer, 1982, 2003, 2007; Bakewell, 2010). In doing so it has elaborated on agents’ motivations and desires to find employment commensurate with their skills and qualifications, multiple disadvantages faced by certain groups of skilled migrants due to intersecting identities, and the difference between agential perceptions and real, causally efficacious emergent properties of social structures. Further, it discussed the complicated skilled assessment process in Australia, skill transferability and associated occupational mobility barriers and facilitators. Then, it went further to discuss the challenges associated with foreign work experience and educational qualifications recognition for NESB skilled migrants, followed by a discussion on the role labour market intermediaries play in NESB skilled migrants’ occupational mobility. The chapter finished with a theoretical framework to understand the occupational mobility barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in Australia.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This sequential mixed-method research was designed to better understand the employment and occupational mobility outcomes of NESB skilled migrants in Australia. Informed by the ontological assumptions and epistemological orientation of critical realism, the research has taken a different approach to previous research in understanding the jobseeking experience of NESB skilled migrants in Australia. The methodological choice of using descriptive statistical analysis on a set of secondary quantitative data followed by a qualitative phase consisting of focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews were defended in the methodology chapter. Consequently, the research has been able to answer two research questions: What are the barriers and facilitators for NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for in Australia? And How does their ‘migrant status’ affect NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for in Australia? The following section emphasises the theoretical contribution of the research, the policy implications of its findings, the limitations of the research and, finally, sets directions for future research.

7.2 Theoretical contribution

The quantitative phase of the research identified and substantiated three structural determinants (language background, visa status and gender) that condition the employment and occupational mobility outcomes of NESB skilled migrants in Australia. Further, the qualitative phase explored how NESB skilled migrants articulate their agential response to such structural labour market barriers and facilitators. It also gathered evidence for a number of known occupational mobility barriers and facilitators. The research also identified several emergent occupational mobility barriers for NESB skilled migrants in Australia such as transitional barriers for soft skills, cross-industry and cross-occupational mobility barriers, and misconceptions around the demand for skilled labour in Australia. Consequently, the research has contributed to advance the understanding of the skilled migrant employment discourse in Australia.
Due to the ontological assumptions and epistemological orientation of critical realism, the research undertook a novel approach in exploring the jobseeking experience of NESB skilled migrants in Australia. Led by critical realism, the research uses the intersectionality perspective (Choo & Ferrerio, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991; Phoenix, 2006; Ressia, Strachan, & Bailey, 2017) and morphogenetic cycle (Archer, 1995, 2003, 2007) to understand how the interplay between social structures and individual agency condition the employment and occupational mobility outcomes for NESB skilled migrants in Australia. The research embraces analytical dualism, where social structures can exist independently of the individual agency that produces them. Therefore, the research has effectively differentiated the agents’ perceptions of structural labour market barriers and facilitators from the real, causally efficacious emergent properties of social structures. This has distanced the research from other occupational mobility literature that adopted positivist, post-positivist, interpretivist and social constructivist orientations.

The research also asserted the analytical separability and temporal distinguishability of social structures (Archer, 1995, 2003). Consequently, the “posteriority and pre-existence” (Archer, 1995, p. 66) of social structures, where pre-existing social structures condition current structural labour market determinants, as well as current structural manifestations informing future structural elaborations, are embraced. The thesis rejects the individualists’ argument of employment and career success as a sole agential responsibility of labour market incumbents, since contemporary actors respond to structural barriers/facilitators which they played no role in making (Archer, 1995). Further, the research rejects the notion of rational labour markets where employers recruit solely on the merits of applicants. The research understands labour markets as composite outcomes of agent habits (Hodgson, 2007), reflexive deliberations (Archer, 2003) and agential concerns upon structural labour market determinants rather than mere functional relationships between supply and demand for labour (Bakewell, 2010; Fleetwood, 2008).

The research has purported that soft skills are swiftly transferable across national borders irrespective of contextual differences, and found that there are considerable transitional penalties for soft skill transferability due to structural determination. The structural determination of skills and value of educational and professional attainments is not a migrant-specific occupational mobility barrier. Both migrant and native jobseekers benefit (or otherwise) from structural determination in labour markets based on their varying
intersectional identities. However, the impact of the disadvantageous intersections that the NESB skilled migrants’ bearing, are critical to their occupational mobility. The realist utility of morphogenesis has provided this research with a better theoretical lens to look at this problem through the posterity and pre-existence of social structures and how such structural determinants pose challenges for skill transferability, where social structures were dealt with holistically rather than instantaneously. Consequently, the research has contributed to the skill transferability discourse.

The research has demonstrated how critical realism can be used as an alternative methodological paradigm (Bakewell, 2010) for migration research. Migration scholarship (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Bakewell, 2010; Castles, 2007, 2016b; Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009) has been proposing the need for alternative theoretical perspectives to classic migration theories, since such theories are merely capable of explaining why people migrate or otherwise. Whilst some (Bakewell, 2010; Fletcher, 2017; Morawska, 2011) proposed critical realism as an alternative methodological paradigm for migration research, a workable research methodology has not been fully developed (Bakewell, 2010). Through its critical realism led research methodology, this research has demonstrated how a critical realism led migration research can be deployed operationally. Instead of starting from a deductive, literature-driven conceptual framework, the research has used a data-driven emergent research design informed by critical realist epistemology. Therefore, it can be concluded that the research has contributed to the occupational mobility literature as well as the critical realism led research methodology literature.

7.3 Policy implications

There is a sense in the policy and political landscape in Australia, resonating with DIBP research and publications, that the skilled migration program outcomes have been achieved (DIAC, 2011; DIBP, 2014b, 2015b, 2015c). The DIBP’s stance on occupational mobility of skilled migrants was explicated in one of its annual migration program outcome reports as:

A skilled visa does not always equate to a skilled job. Skilled migrants might need to work in a low-skilled job to get a foothold in the labour market. (DIBP, 2015c, p. 12)
This position goes against the notion that the Australian labour market suffers from chronic skills shortages. This argument is more meaningful in a ‘labour desperate’ labour market than a ‘skill desperate’ labour market. However, such an attitude towards the integration of foreign skills displayed by the responsible apex body pulls the skilled migrant employment discourse backwards as there is no real motivation for people to do things differently or to promote the integration of skilled sources from diverse backgrounds. Whilst skilled migrants outperform other streams of migration in terms of employment outcomes and contribution to the Australian economy (DIBP, 2014b, 2015c; MCA, 2015), care should be taken not to oversimplify the entire skilled migrant employment discourse to the experience of positive employment outcomes. Such oversimplifications would lead to overlooking the negative employment outcomes of certain jobseeker groups such as NESB skilled migrants (Birrell, 2018). Consequently, these groups are deprived of policy and program support to improve their employment outcomes and contribution to the Australian economy.

The Australian labour market suffers from skill shortages in certain occupational categories (DIBP, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e). However, employers consider wider sociocultural aspects along with skills in recruitment (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Gimenez & Morgan, 2017; Mahmud, Alam, & Härtel, 2014; Misko, 2012; Ng Chok et al., 2018; Westcott & Vazquez Maggio, 2016). As the quantitative analysis identified, there were three important structural determinants (language background, visa category and gender) as moderators of skilled migrants’ employment and occupational mobility outcomes. The qualitative analysis substantiated the impact of such structural determinants through participants’ experiences while identifying evidence for a range of occupational mobility barriers in the Australian labour market. Therefore, the functionalist view of rational labour markets is problematic. And therefore, it is important to acknowledge that labour market incumbents have to juggle with structural determinants which they have not played a role in making (Archer, 1995, 2007; Bakewell, 2010). This can be considered an important step towards recognition of the need for timely policy intervention to facilitate rapid absorption of NESB skilled migrants into the Australian labour market.

Australia has a dynamic labour market. Therefore, the skills needs are inevitably volatile. Current initiatives such as the skill ceiling mechanism, Medium and Long-term Strategic Skills List (MLTSSL) and Short-term Skilled Occupation List (STSOL) are meaningful in terms of aligning skilled migration intakes with the demand for skilled labour in Australia.
However, as identified in the qualitative findings chapter, there are considerable misconceptions and ambiguity around these measures and what it means to individual applicants, particularly in the migration agent dictated application process (Sardana, Zhu, & Veen, 2016). Therefore, it is advisable to make the skilled migration selection process more transparent and less migration agent dependent. Given that skilled migrants possess the capacity to handle process complexities, higher applicant involvement in the process is advisable. This will help to reduce misconceptions and ambiguity. Further, it will help to improve applicants’ knowledge of the Australian labour market in their occupations of interest. Both skilled migrants and the Australian economy would benefit from better informed migration decision processes, where migrants could consider seeking work in more skill-desperate regional Australian labour markets instead of crowded metropolitan areas (Taylor, 2018; Taylor, Bell, & Gerritsen, 2014). Introducing more regional-sponsored skilled visas for skill-desperate regional areas would also be considered as a desirable solution.

As substantiated through both quantitative and qualitative findings, there is less justification for ‘visa-skill assessment’ as an endorsement for migrants’ skills in real labour market situations. Employers are reluctant to consider skills and qualifications gained from NES backgrounds or certain developing countries and reveal a preference for qualifications and work experience gained in Anglophone countries (Cameron et al., 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011; Misko, 2012; Ng Chok et al., 2018). The qualitative analysis exemplified such reluctance through the participants’ jobseeking experiences in Australia. Therefore, increasing employer awareness of the vetting process involved in skilled migrant selection would enhance employers’ confidence in skills and qualifications gained from NESB countries.

Central to skilled migrants’ occupational mobility issues is the General Skilled Migration (GSM) stream. The GSM stream accounted for 54.9% of the skilled stream (DIBP, 2017a) in the 2016–17 program year. Further, through the GSM stream, skilled migrants are not getting a guaranteed entrance to the Australian labour market similar to the employer-sponsored visa stream. Consequently, there is no mechanism attached to the GSM process that is instrumental to track skilled migrants’ success in obtaining work in their skilled occupations. Working in their nominated occupations or similar occupations is not monitored as a visa condition for GSM stream applicants (DIBP, 2017a). The employment outcomes therefore have largely been considered as an agential responsibility. This is in stark contrast to both short-term and permanent employer-sponsored migration programs as employers hold some
responsibility for recruiting sponsored skilled migrants in the occupations they claimed to have difficulties finding skilled workers in Australia for (DIBP, 2017b). However, there are some accusations of employers’ breach of these conditions particularly in the short-term employer-sponsored skilled migration program (Birrell, Healy, & Kinnaird, 2007; Howe, 2013). Comparatively, there is limited evidence available to monitor the GSM program’s effectiveness in fulfilling the arguably desperate skill shortages in the Australian labour market. Therefore, these GSM skilled migrants might end up in non-skilled work without getting much policy attention or benefiting from the help necessary to confront labour market barriers.

The research findings support cross-occupational and cross-industry mobility as a helpful strategy for skilled migrants seeking jobs in low growth industries. Whilst the research has identified some transferability challenges for soft skills due to various structural factors, it has also identified some possibilities for cross-industry and cross-occupational transferability of generic and specific hard skills. However, in order for such transferability to take place, jobseekers and recruiters need to be able to understand the transferable skills in jobs. The research supports occupational clustering as an appropriate way to understand the similar skill needs between different occupations (Snell, Gatt, & Gekara, 2016). Therefore, policies and programs leading to improved awareness of transferable skills among employers, recruiters and jobseekers are highly recommended in the current times, where the Australian labour market is experiencing higher market volatility.

7.4 Research limitations

Section 4.9 elaborated on the statistical limitations imposed by the use of the CSAM secondary dataset and how this research has overcome some of those limitations by adopting a descriptive statistical analysis. However, CSAM only reports visa pathways with permanent settlement prospects for both skill and family visa streams. Therefore, it does not represent the employer-sponsored temporary skilled employment visa category (e.g. 457 visas), the uncapped and largest category of employer-sponsored skilled employment visas. This underrepresentation brings some limitations to CSAM data in the analysis of how employer sponsorship conditions the labour market outcomes of skilled migrants. Further, there is a constant fluidity between visa categories in the Australian migration program since some migrants transfer themselves to permanent visas from temporary visas during their settlement in Australia. For example, some migrants transfer from subclass 457 temporary skilled visas
to permanent resident visas. In such cases, their employment and other settlement outcomes might be largely influenced by their previous employment experience. However, it is difficult to distinguish such experiences through the CSAM survey responses.

In terms of qualitative data, the small sample size in the qualitative phase possesses some generalisability challenges for the qualitative phase findings. This can also be considered as a limitation of the research. However, as explained in the methodology chapter, generalisability of findings was compromised for the benefit of an in-depth understanding of skilled migrants’ lived-through experiences of finding skilled work in Australia.

Employers play a vital role in the skilled migrant employment discourse. However, this research has not collected qualitative data from employers to understand their perceptions on skilled migrants’ employability attributes. Employers might have some sensible considerations on NESB migrants’ skills, work experiences, educational attainments, and language and communication skills. Therefore, it is vital to incorporate their perspective to develop a comprehensive understanding of skilled migrants’ employment and occupational mobility in Australia.

7.5 Directions for future research

The research has identified considerably inferior occupational mobility outcomes among female NESB skilled migrants compared to their male and MESB counterparts. Further, gender when intersecting with other structural determinants creates dual disadvantage situations for some skilled migrants such as NESB women. Contrastingly, gender works as a structural labour market facilitator for some job seekers in gendered labour markets e.g. male workers in construction, heavy industries and female workers in care industry (Hedwards, Andrevski, & Bricknell, 2017; Watson, 2012). Thus, gender plays a vital role as a structural labour market determinant in the Australian labour market. Therefore, further research to understand the job seeking and occupational mobility outcomes through a fully developed gender perspective is highly warranted.

This research has evidenced some NESB skilled migrant jobseekers’ understanding of the transferable skills in their jobs. However, employers’ and recruiters’ understanding of such transferable skills were outside the focus of the research. Therefore, there is a research opportunity for investigating employers’ and recruiters’ understanding of the skill
transferability between jobs in similar occupational clusters. Such research is an imperative given current volatility in the Australian labour market, which has led to massive redundancies and market restructurings.

The existence of public-funded career counselling programs, such as the one this research recruited its participants from, recognises the occupational mobility challenges for NESB skilled migrants in Australia. Therefore, it justifies the selection of participants from the particular program. However, the impact of such programs to combat occupational mobility challenges, and their approach to identify and handle the problem of downward occupational mobility, is an opportunity for further research.

The Australian government announced a major visa reform to the Temporary Work Skilled visa (subclass 457) on 18 April 2017. Subsequently, the 457 visa category was replaced with the Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa in March 2018. Under the new system eligible employers can source skilled migrants for occupations in the Short-term Skilled Occupation List (STSOL) for a maximum of two years (or up to four years if an international trade obligation applies). Alternatively, eligible employers can also source skilled migrants for occupations in the Medium and Long-term Strategic Skills List (MLTSSL) for up to four years, with eligibility to apply for permanent residence after three years. Therefore, there exists a research opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of these policy reforms and their impact on different categories of skilled migrants. Further, these visa reforms could impact the employment and occupational mobility outcomes of the Australian migration program, given some of the skilled temporary migrants coming through new streams can apply for permanent residence after three years in Australia. This triggers another research need, to understand how short-term skilled migration pathway conditions the employment and occupational mobility outcomes for the Australian migration program.

7.6 Concluding remarks

This research examined the interplay of structural and agential labour market determinants in shaping the jobseeking experience of NESB skilled migrants in Australia. The thesis findings present a number of critical insights pertinent to the occupational mobility outcomes of skilled migrants in Australia. For example, the research embraced the emergent properties of social structures where structural barriers under certain circumstances can become structural facilitators under different circumstances. Gender is one of such examples that can become a
barrier as well as a facilitator in gendered labour markets. Therefore, the research highlights the need of constantly modifying agential responses to such emerging labour market barriers and facilitators. Consequently, the policy and program support leading to improve labour market awareness and jobseeker empowerment were identified as important and highly recommended. Further, the research shed light on the problem of oversimplification of the entire skilled migrant employment discourse to the experience of positive employment outcomes. Many skilled migrants struggle to find employment commensurate with their skills and qualifications. The evidence of negative employment outcomes for some job seeker groups further illustrates the need for improvements.

The research illustrated the complexity of the skilled migrants’ selection process in Australia and consequent ambiguity and misconceptions among jobseekers. Further, how the skilled migration programme should respond to the highly volatile labour market attributes such as redundancies, casualization, regional labour/ skills deficits, was also emphasised. The research suggests various labour market testing mechanisms such as skilled occupation lists and regional sponsorship schemes to fill skill shortage in the regional economies. Further, the research embraced cross-industry and cross-occupational mobility as a useful strategy for better employment outcomes. The research put particular attention to the skill transferability discourse by illustrating the cross-occupational, cross-industry, and cross-national skill transferability challenges.
References


AHPRA. (2018, 4/12/2017). Types of Medical Registration. 2018


References


References


References


References


Fassaie, S. (2017). I regret changing my name to fit in at work, but now it's too hard to go back. The Sydney Morning Herald.


References


References


Morawska, E. (2011). Studying International Migration in the Long (er) and Short (er) Durée: Contesting Some and Reconciling Other Disagreements Between the Structuration and Morphogenetic Approaches.


References


Yin, R. (2014). *Case study research : design and methods* (Fifth edition. ed.): SAGE.


Appendix A: An example of qualitative code arrangement
(4 of the 30 second-order codes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Type</th>
<th>Number of Sources</th>
<th>Number of Coding References</th>
<th>Number of Words Coded</th>
<th>Number of Paragraphs</th>
<th>Duration Coded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Node</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian work place culture and other cultural differences</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1,004</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Discrimination, Systemic Classification:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment and desire to contribution</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration and skill recognition process clarity and ambiguity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Participant Information and Consent Form

Date: ......................

Project title: The job seeking experience of skilled migrants in Australia: Quality and Accessibility to career opportunities

Principle Research Student:
Don Tennakoon
PhD Candidate
School of Management,
RMIT University.

Senior Supervisor: ......................
Dr Darryn Snell
Senior Lecturer
School of Management,
RMIT University.

Associate Supervisor: ......................
Dr Margaret Heffernan, O.A.M
Lecturer
School of Management,
RMIT University.

Dear .............,

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

This research is conducted as a requirement of the Doctor of Philosophy programme of RMIT University. Don Tennakoon is conducting this research, with the supervision of Dr. Darryn Snell and Dr. Margaret Heffernan. This project has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee.
Why have you been approached?

You have been identified as a potential person who may be able to share your experience for this research. You have been approached through researchers’ existing contacts with the institute offering job preparation and career guidance course that you have enrolled, if you have contacted through said institute. If you have not contacted through above institute, you have been approached through researchers’ personal contacts, professional networks, or industry engagements. The participation for this activity remains voluntary and you have the privilege to refuse the participation or withdraw from participation at any stage you wish to do so.

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?

This research will investigate the job seeking experiences of Non English Speaking Background (NESB) skilled migrants in Australia by employing a set of skilled migrants reside in Melbourne, Victoria. Emphasis will be given to the participants’ experiences in their job seeking and employment process.

Two research questions will be addressed, in order to achieve the research objectives.

1. What are the barriers and facilitators to NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for, in Australia?
2. How does their ‘migrant status’ affect NESB skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for, in Australia?

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

If you are agreeing to participate, you will be invited to participate in a focus group discussion and/or individual in-depth interview that explores your experience. The group discussion and/or individual in-depth interview will be held at a place that considers the safety and convenience of both you and the researcher, and with your agreement. The discussions will take up to 1½ hours in duration.

There will be no ‘right or wrong’ responses; your opinion on the issues raised is important to the research. You will not have to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable to answer. Further, you may end your participation at any stage.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this research. However, if you have any concerns about your participation, or you wish to change your responses to any of the questions, or if you find distress in participating you may contact any of the researchers listed above at your convenience. Your inquiry will be treated with confidentiality.
What are the benefits associated with participation?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for your participation, perhaps you might be interested to know the outcomes of this research which will discuss the facilitators and barriers for the Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) skilled migrants in getting access to the employment they are qualified for, in Australia. This may be a potential benefit for you, given your background as a skilled migrant to Australia.

What will happen to the information I provide?

All the information you give will be anonymous and you will be given a Code as the only identification in the report and records. During all phases of the research, the de-identified hard data will be stored securely in a lockable filing cabinet in the researcher’s office, provided by RMIT University. De-identified soft data will be stored securely under password protection in researcher’s working computer at RMIT university premises or RMIT University computer servers where appropriate.

Following the completion of the project the data will be retained in RMIT University for five years. After five years both hard data and soft data will be shredded and destroyed in an appropriate manner pertaining to the RMIT University standards and guidelines.

The outcome of this research will be shared publicly in the form of conference papers, journal articles, report to participants, and a thesis. You will be able access the final outcome of this research in terms of a publicly available thesis at RMIT research repository. As a participants you are entitle to request a copy of this research’s results/findings as an indirect benefit of participating for this research.

What are my rights as a participant?

You have the right to,

- Withdraw from participation at any time
- Request that any recording cease
- Have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed provided it can be reliably identified (Please note that the focus group discussion context puts data in to aggregation).
- Have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions?

You are free to contact any of the investigators as stated above.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

Don Temnakoon

PhD Candidate

RMIT University
Participant’s Informed Consent

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described

3. I agree:
   ▪ to be interviewed
   ▪ to have my voice audio recorded

4. I acknowledge that:
   (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
   (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
   (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
   (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to me upon request. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant: ................................................ Date: ........................................
(Signature)

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V Vic 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au

RMIT University
Appendix C: Interview protocol for the qualitative data collection phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewee/s</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audio recording</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Instructions to interviewer** | • Brief introduction to project  
• Participant Information and Consent Form |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key themes for discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Get to know about participants** | 1. Brief introduction of participant/s (identity concealed with de-identification techniques such as use of codes instead of names)  
• Country of birth  
• Professional background  
• Level of education  
• Years of work experience  
• What motivated them to migrate? |
| **Employment status**     | 2. Participants’ current employment status; Employed, Underemployed, Unemployed or Not in the labour force |
| **Pre-arrival experience**| 3. Participants’ knowledge of the Australia labour market prior to immigration  
4. Migration decision-making as a family unit |
<p>| <strong>The role of language proficiency</strong> | 5. Participants’ experience pertaining to English language proficiency |
| <strong>The role of qualification</strong> | 6. Participants’ experience pertaining to their foreign-gained qualifications |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The role of social networking, local labour market knowledge</th>
<th>7. Participants’ experience pertaining to local labour market knowledge and knowledge in local job searching techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Participants’ experience pertaining to the availability of local referees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Participants’ experience pertaining to the importance of social networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of professional bodies, training providers, certification and accreditation services</td>
<td>10. Participants’ experience pertaining to the role of professional bodies and importance of memberships, licences and accreditations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Participants’ experience pertaining to the need for career guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill transferability and skill atrophy</td>
<td>12. Participants’ experience of previously gained skills transferability challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Participants’ experience on skill deterioration due to non-use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of inclusion / exclusion</td>
<td>14. Participants’ experience pertaining to the evidence of labour market discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging new themes</td>
<td>15. Any other concerns of participants’ interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Next step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thank you statement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Ethics approval letter

Notice of Approval

Date: 21 April 2015
Project number: 19145
Project title: The Job Seeking Experience of Skilled Migrants in Australia; Quality and Accessibility to Career Opportunities
Risk classification: Low Risk
Chief Investigator: Dr Darryn Snell
Other Investigators: Dr Margaret Haffernan
Student Investigator: Mr Don Azanka Sanjoea Livora Tonnakoon

Project Approved: From: 21 April 2015 To: 3 March 2018

Terms of approval:

Responsibilities of the principal investigator

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by BCHEAN. Approval is only valid while the investigator holds a position at RMIT University.

1. Amendments
   Approval must be sought from BCHEAN to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment submit a request for amendment form to the BCHEAN secretary. This form is available on the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) website. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from BCHEAN.

2. Adverse events
   You should notify BCHEAN immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

3. Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)
   The PICF must be distributed to all research participants, where relevant, and the consent form is to be retained and stored by the investigator. The PICF must contain the RMIT University logo and a complaints clause including the above project number.

4. Annual reports
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report.

5. Final report
   A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. BCHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

6. Monitoring
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by BCHEAN at any time.

7. Retention and storage of data
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

Regards,

Dr Christopher Cheong
Chairperson
RMIT BCHEAN
Appendix E: The gap between occupational ceilings and actual visa invitations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation ID</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Occupation Ceiling Value 2017-18</th>
<th>Invitations to 20/06/2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1213</td>
<td>Livestock Farmers</td>
<td>4195</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1311</td>
<td>Construction Managers</td>
<td>5400</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1312</td>
<td>Engineering Managers</td>
<td>1155</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1341</td>
<td>CHW Care Centre Managers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1342</td>
<td>Health and Welfare Services Managers</td>
<td>1374</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2211</td>
<td>Accountants</td>
<td>4785</td>
<td>2658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2212</td>
<td>Auditors, Company Secretaries and Corporate Treasurers</td>
<td>1327</td>
<td>968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2241</td>
<td>Actuaries, Mathematicians and Statisticians</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2246</td>
<td>Land Economists and Valuers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2247</td>
<td>Management consultant</td>
<td>3265</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2321</td>
<td>Architects and Landscape Architects</td>
<td>1474</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2322</td>
<td>Cartographers and Surveyors</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2331</td>
<td>Chemical and Materials Engineers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2332</td>
<td>Civil Engineering Professionals</td>
<td>3266</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2333</td>
<td>Electrical Engineers</td>
<td>1042</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2334</td>
<td>Electronics Engineers*</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2335</td>
<td>Industrial, Mechanical and Production Engineers*</td>
<td>2178</td>
<td>1195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2339</td>
<td>Other Engineering Professionals*</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2341</td>
<td>Agricultural and Forestry Scientists</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2346</td>
<td>Medical Laboratory Scientists</td>
<td>1497</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2347</td>
<td>Veterinarians</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2349</td>
<td>Other Natural and Physical Science Professionals</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2411</td>
<td>Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teachers</td>
<td>2639</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2414</td>
<td>Secondary School Teachers</td>
<td>7910</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2415</td>
<td>Special Education Teachers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2512</td>
<td>Medical Imaging Professionals</td>
<td>1113</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2514</td>
<td>Optometrists and Orthoptists</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2519</td>
<td>Other Health Diagnostic and Promotion Professionals</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2521</td>
<td>Chiropractors and Osteopaths</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2524</td>
<td>Occupational Therapists</td>
<td>1109</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2525</td>
<td>Physiotherapists</td>
<td>1464</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2529</td>
<td>Podiatrists</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2527</td>
<td>Speech Professionals and Audiolgists</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2531</td>
<td>General Practitioners and Resident Medical officers</td>
<td>3495</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2530</td>
<td>Internal Medicine Specialists</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2534</td>
<td>Psychiatrists</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2536</td>
<td>Surgeons</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2539</td>
<td>Other Medical Practitioners</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2541</td>
<td>Midwives</td>
<td>1050</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2544</td>
<td>Registered Nurses</td>
<td>16341</td>
<td>838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2611</td>
<td>ICT Business and Systems Analysts*</td>
<td>1574</td>
<td>1180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2613</td>
<td>Software and Applications Programmers*</td>
<td>6202</td>
<td>3620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

14 This extract was taken on 17/07/2018 from https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/Trav/Work/SkillSelect
### Appendix E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>SkillSelect</th>
<th>202</th>
<th>2031</th>
<th>Computer Network Professionals*</th>
<th>1318</th>
<th>763</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2621</td>
<td>Database and Systems Administrators and ICT Security Specialists</td>
<td>2391</td>
<td>306</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2633</td>
<td>Telecommunications Engineering Professionals</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>386</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2711</td>
<td>Barristers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2713</td>
<td>Solicitors</td>
<td>4161</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2723</td>
<td>Psychologists</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2725</td>
<td>Social Workers</td>
<td>1562</td>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3122</td>
<td>Civil Engineering Draftspersons and Technicians</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3123</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering Draftspersons and Technicians</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3132</td>
<td>Telecommunications Technical Specialists</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3211</td>
<td>Automotive Electricians</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3212</td>
<td>Motor Mechanics</td>
<td>5980</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3222</td>
<td>Sheetmetal Trades Workers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3223</td>
<td>Structural Steel and Welding Trades Workers</td>
<td>4426</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3232</td>
<td>Metal Fitters and Machinists</td>
<td>5330</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3233</td>
<td>Precision Metal Trades Workers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3241</td>
<td>Panelbeaters</td>
<td>1344</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3311</td>
<td>Bricklayers and Stonemasons</td>
<td>1271</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3312</td>
<td>Carpenters and Joiners</td>
<td>6958</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3322</td>
<td>Painting Trades Workers</td>
<td>2780</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3331</td>
<td>Glaziers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3332</td>
<td>Plasterers</td>
<td>2103</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3334</td>
<td>Wall and Floor Tilers</td>
<td>1407</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3341</td>
<td>Plumbers</td>
<td>5507</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3411</td>
<td>Electricians</td>
<td>9354</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3421</td>
<td>Airconditioning and Refrigeration Mechanics</td>
<td>1427</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3422</td>
<td>Electrical Distribution Trades Workers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3423</td>
<td>Electronics Trades Workers</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3513</td>
<td>Chefs</td>
<td>2675</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3941</td>
<td>Cabinetmakers</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3991</td>
<td>Boat Builders and Shipwrights</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Occupations that are subject to rota arrangements. For Accountants (2211) the occupational ceiling also reflects volumes in other skilled visa categories.*

Appendix F: Industry placement introduction letter used by the career counselling program

Preston Campus
24 October 2013

Introducing [Name]

Request for Unpaid Industry Placement

I would like to introduce the above participant from our [Name], an orientation program for job-ready skilled migrants who are hitting closed doors in the job market, not because they can’t perform but because they lack the necessary local experience.

Our program builds their understanding of Australian work practices and culture, communication skills, management concepts, teamwork and job seeking skills.

Then we try to provide them with experience, at no cost to your firm and no trouble to your supervisors, in the form of an unpaid Industry Placement.

As you will see from the CV, this participant has good professional qualifications and experience. We question them on their abilities and try to ensure that they can really perform their "Demonstrated Skills" at the stated level. The relevant Australian authorities have fully recognised their qualifications and their English is good.

They realise that they should expect a modest level of job here at first so they are keen to obtain a basic-level placement to experience all aspects of the working environment. Participants are expected to do any duties requested by an employer and can often help out with backlogged work or projects nearing deadline.

As well as providing a skilled professional with invaluable experience of local industry, employers get the opportunity for an obligation-free look at a prospective job applicant.

For insurance, the participant is fully covered under the Department of Education’s WorkCover arrangements. Any employer payment is purely voluntary and there is no obligation for any sort of job offer or formal training and evaluation.

The placement is usually for four to six weeks but the duration can be flexible to suit your schedule. The Institute considers any placement as a sponsorship and has no problem with this being used in your company's publicity profiling.

If you have any questions, please contact the Work Placement Officer, [Name] by email [Email]

Thank you again on behalf of the Institute and the program.

Program Coordinator

[Name]