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Language Education for Refugees and Migrants  
MA Program

MA Dissertation  
Integration of highly-skilled migrants  
into the post-Brexit UK society and labour market

Entona Soutse  
515411

Supervisor: Dr. Achilleas Kostoulas

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This essay is dedicated to all those people who make the courageous choice of migrating following their eagerness and motivation for a better life.

## **Abstract**

On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020, the UK withdrew from the European Union leading to multiple changes in immigration policy and the lived experiences of migrants. The present qualitative study examines the integration of highly skilled migrants into the post-Brexit UK society and labour market. First, it examines existing definitions of highly skilled migrants and refugees in existing scholarship and tries to provide the readers with a new definition based on the participants' characteristics that draw a profile of the UK's skilled-worker's visa requirements. More specifically, the study uses information from seven qualitative interviews with highly skilled migrants to provide insights into the linguistic and professional capital that people who migrate in the UK with a skilled worker visa have. It also focuses on the commitment that these people have towards their integration into the country, and explores how this is shaped by personal aspirations and societal affordances. In extension, the study builds on Norton's (1993) theory of investment and on intentionality theory (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2023) and views the integration as a process of becoming, or gradual co-adaptation. It examines and describes the means of linguistic and cultural investment in a new country within a broader perspective which includes a wide range of skills, known as the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, which are considered valuable in contemporary workplaces. Throughout the outcomes it provides the readers and the policy makers with valuable information about highly skilled worker's integration, underlining the need of the highly skilled migrants' distinctive consideration in the legislative policy from other refugees and migrants.

## **Keywords**

*post-Brexit, highly skilled migrants or refugees, skilled worker visa, integration, investment theory, intentionality theory*

## Περίληψη

Στις 31 Ιανουαρίου 2020, έλαβε χώρα η αποχώρηση του Ηνωμένου Βασιλείου από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση, οδηγώντας σε πολλές αλλαγές στον τομέα της μετανάστευσης. Η παρούσα ποιοτική έρευνα εξετάζει την ένταξη των μεταναστών υψηλής εξειδίκευσης στην κοινωνία και την αγορά εργασίας του Ηνωμένου Βασιλείου μετά το Brexit. Πρώτα απ' όλα εξετάζει τους υπάρχοντες ορισμούς των μεταναστών αυτών μέσα από τα πολλά έτη έρευνας στο πεδίο, και παρουσιάζει ένα νέο ορισμό με βάση τα χαρακτηριστικά των συμμετεχόντων που σχεδιάζουν ένα προφίλ των απαιτήσεων για την εργατική βίζα του Ηνωμένου Βασιλείου. Αντλώντας δεδομένα από επτά συνεντεύξεις με μετανάστες υψηλής εξειδίκευσης, η έρευνα παρέχει πληροφορίες για το γλωσσικό και επαγγελματικό κεφάλαιο που διαθέτουν τα άτομα που μεταναστεύουν στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο με βίζα εξειδικευμένου επαγγελματία και εστιάζει στην δέσμευση που έχουν αυτά τα άτομα για την ένταξή τους στην χώρα. Σε επέκταση, η μελέτη βασίζεται στη θεωρία της επένδυσης της Norton (1995) και στη θεωρία της αποβλεπτικότητας (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2023) και βλέπει την ενσωμάτωση ως μία διαδικασία γίνεσθαι ή σταδιακής συν-προσαρμογής. Εξετάζει και περιγράφει τα μέσα γλωσσικής και πολιτιστικής επένδυσης σε μία νέα χώρα μέσα σε μία ευρύτερη προοπτική που περιλαμβάνει ένα ευρύ φάσμα δεξιοτήτων, οι οποίες είναι γνωστές ως δεξιότητες του 21<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα και θεωρούνται πολύτιμες στους σύγχρονους χώρους εργασίας. Μέσα από τα αποτελέσματα παρέχει στους αναγνώστες και στους υπεύθυνους χάραξης πολιτικής, πολύτιμες πληροφορίες σχετικά με την ένταξη των εργαζομένων υψηλής εξειδίκευσης, υπογραμμίζοντας την ανάγκη της ξεχωριστής αντιμετώπισης και προσοχής των μεταναστών αυτών στην νομοθετική πολιτική από άλλους πρόσφυγες και μετανάστες.

### Λέξεις κλειδιά

*Μετανάστες ή πρόσφυγες υψηλής εξειδίκευσης μετά το Brexit, βίζα εξειδικευμένου εργάτη στην Μεγάλη Βρετανία, ένταξη, θεωρία επένδυσης, θεωρία αποβλεπτικότητας*

## Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Table of Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1. Overview of the Dissertation.....	8
1.2. Significance of the Dissertation.....	8
1.3. Structure of the Dissertation.....	10
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review</b> .....	<b>12</b>
2.1. Highly Skilled Refugees and Migrants .....	12
2.1.1. Who are Highly Skilled Refugees and Migrants.....	13
2.1.2. Highly Skilled Refugees and Migrants Globally .....	15
2.1.3. Highly Skilled Refugees and Migrants in the UK Context.....	15
2.2. Migration and 21 <sup>st</sup> -century Skills.....	17
2.2.1. Definition of the Word ‘Skills’.....	17
2.2.2. The Emergence of the 21st-Century Skills.....	18
2.2.3. The Categorization, Assessment and Acquisition of the 21st-century Skills.....	19
2.3. Investment Theory and Integration .....	20
2.3.1. Skilled Migrant Workers’ Integration .....	20
2.3.2. The Role of Language in Migrants’ Integration .....	21
2.4. A Synthesis of What is Known about the Integration of Highly Skilled Migrants ...	23
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology</b> .....	<b>25</b>
3.1. Overview.....	25
3.2. Research Questions .....	25
3.3. Data Generation .....	26
3.4. Data Analysis .....	29
3.5. Ethical Concerns .....	29
<b>Chapter 4 The Interviews</b> .....	<b>32</b>
4.1. Participant 1 .....	32
4.2. Participant 2 .....	33
4.3. Participant 3 .....	34
4.4. Participant 4 .....	35
4.5. Participant 5 .....	36
4.6. Participant 6 .....	37
4.7. Participant 7 .....	38
<b>Chapter 5 Discussion</b> .....	<b>41</b>
5.1. Revisiting the Research Questions .....	41
5.2. The Investment of Highly Skilled Migrants.....	46
5.3 Implications for Education and Professional Development .....	47
5.4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Work.....	48
<b>References</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>55</b>

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1	Integration as intentional becoming .....	46
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## **List of Tables**

Table 1	Set of inclusion criteria.....	26
Table 2	Interview participants' data .....	28

## **Table of Abbreviations**

<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>HOU</b>	Hellenic Open University
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>P1</b>	Participant 1
<b>P2</b>	Participant 2
<b>P3</b>	Participant 3
<b>P4</b>	Participant 4
<b>P5</b>	Participant 5
<b>P6</b>	Participant 6
<b>P7</b>	Participant 7
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation presents a qualitative inquiry that focuses on the integration of highly skilled migrants into the post-Brexit UK society and labour market. An attempt has been made to understand how this integration is taking place, using insights from a series of interviews which were completed with people from around the world who have arrived in the city of London with a skilled worker visa.

In this study, integration was viewed as a process of becoming, or gradual co-adaptation an individual in context. In this sense, it develops the concept of *investment* (Norton, 1995), which was defined as an individual's sustained efforts to develop their linguistic and cultural capital in order to become parts of the society into which they wish to integrate. However, a broader perspective was adopted, in which linguistic and cultural investment was extended to include a wide range of skills, which are considered valuable in contemporary workplaces (21<sup>st</sup> century skills).

To enable theoretical cohesion between the various elements that were brought together, this study draws on *intentionality theory* (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021, 2024; Stelma et al., 2015), which reconceptualises human activity as a developmental trajectory towards a specific goal: in this case, the goal is integration, the relation between the person and their aspiration is the *intentionality* of the situation, and the progress towards the goal is described as *intentional becoming*. In intentionality theory, it is suggested that processes of intentional becoming are sustained by a synthesis of social (interpersonal) and psychological (intrapersonal) factors (e.g., Palavouzi, 2023). Notably, the activity that is triggered by such factors creates additional opportunities (or 'affordances') for development (Kostoulas & Stelma, 2017; Young et al., 2002), leading to a self-sustaining cycle of growth.

### 1.2. Significance of the Dissertation

This study aimed to make an empirical contribution to discussions about integration, Brexit, and highly skilled migration, as well as a conceptual contribution to the theoretical understanding of how people with a migrant background integrate (or fail to integrate) in the new countries where they find themselves.



To address the first set of aims, this study offers a novel, updated definition of highly skilled migration. As will be shown in Chapter 2, the question of which migrants are considered 'highly skilled' is far from straightforward. Various definitions have been proposed, with a focus on education, income-generating power, professional status and more. In this study, an attempt will be made to supplement these discussions, by tracing the contours of this population and highlighting characteristics that they share. This discussion will focus on how highly skilled migrants define themselves in terms of their linguistic and professional capital and also in terms of their migration history and their future aspirations. Such a description, it is expected, can usefully inform policy-making discussions about highly skilled migration.

Furthermore, the findings of this study offer a research-based description of the integration of these people. The integration (or *intentional becoming*) of this particular population differs from the one experienced by other migrant and refugee populations, which have been studied more extensively in the existing literature (e.g., Iredale & Appleyard, 2001; Kearns & Whitley, 2015; Palavouzi, 2023). By describing the particularities of this particular developmental trajectory, the forces that sustain it, and the obstacles that hinder it, it is hoped that this study can provide guidance for planning supportive actions (e.g., by NGOs and local government entities that are active in the integration of newly arrived migrants).

Lastly, the findings provide an insight into the post-Brexit era and the benefits and difficulties that people face depending on the part of the world that they are coming from, helping citizens who are thinking of migrating get a more accurate picture of the situation depending on those people's personal thoughts and experiences. At a time when the impact of Brexit is actively discussed and reconsidered, often in polarised discourse, it is expected that an empirical perspective can help to enhance understanding of the nuances of immigration policy, as experienced by the people who are affected by it.

In addition to the above, this study was also motivated on a personal level. Having been a migrant in the UK myself for the last year, in the post-Brexit era, and having personally experienced the whole visa procedures, I was aware of the financial requirements and the time-consuming processes involved. My personal experience made me conscious that UK policy decisions have created circumstances in which considerable willpower and determination are required to migrate into the country. I felt that a lot of people who might have preferred the UK the previous years, including reasons as the language convenience,

might now prefer to explore other relocation options, where the requirements would not be that great and where the context would make them feel more welcome. This is particularly true for people whose skills profile may have created multiple immigration opportunities. Taking my thoughts and experiences into consideration and examining the relevant gaps in the literature review, I decided to examine the integration and reach an outcome that can deliver the outcomes mentioned above.

To achieve all of the abovementioned aims, a small-scale qualitative inquiry was designed and implemented between October and December 2023. This study is outlined in the following section (Section 1.3.) and presented in more detail in the chapters that follow.

### **1.3. Structure of the Dissertation**

**Chapter 1** of this dissertation describes the study, its motivations, and the contributions it makes. It continues by familiarizing the reader with the chapters that will follow and their contents.

**Chapter 2** is an overview of the literature that informs the research. It contains three basic aspects that merit examination. The first section critically examines various definitions of highly skilled migrants that have been proposed in existing literature. Multiple conceptualizations referring to highly skilled migrants by economists, sociologists, and policymakers are presented, examining the highly skilled migrants first globally and then in the context of the UK. In the second part of this chapter, readers will find an analysis of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and their emergence, which helps to broaden our understanding of what 'highly skilled' means in the contemporary labour market. This discussion includes a more specific categorization, which suggests how these skills can be acquired and assessed. The chapter concludes with a presentation, explanation, and deeper analysis of the concepts of investment and integration. Once these theories are analysed, an examination of the skilled migrants' integration according to the literature is presented focusing mostly on the role of language on it. After a synthesis of all the above information, we move on to the next chapter.

**Chapter 3** details the methodology of the research. In this chapter, an overview is provided describing the approach and purpose of the study, as well as the specific research questions that the study aspired to answer. In addition, one can find the design of the study, and a description of the interviews used to generate data. A description of the sample is provided with information about the participants and the way the interviews were conducted. In the

final section of Chapter 3, there is a description of the data analysis methods, which shows how thematic analysis was used to generate findings. The last part of the methodology section includes information about the ethical concerns encountered during the research process, and about the ways with which these were dealt.

**Chapter 4** summarises the content of each participant's interview. This is done in order to provide a holistic picture of the participants' statements, experiences, and thoughts. This chapter familiarizes the reader with the study participants and gives a deeper understanding of the outcomes and categorizations that follow in the last chapter.

**Chapter 5**, the final chapter of this dissertation, focuses on the discussion of the outcomes of the study. This discussion begins by providing empirically informed responses to the research questions, as the former emerged from the participants' interviews. Using thematic analysis, the participants' answers are categorized into three sections aiming to answer the research questions, including the clarification of who the highly-skilled migrants are, what their capital and their integration into the UK was, and lastly their investment in their stay in the UK. Taking into consideration the outcomes of the research the investment of the highly skilled migrants is redefined. The chapter concludes with implications for education and professional development, a concise discussion of the limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter provides an overview of the literature concerning the themes of this empirical investigation of the highly skilled migration in the context of post-Brexit UK. It presents what is already known about the skilled migrants and their integration and leads to the detected gaps in knowledge that this study addresses. This review begins, in Section 2.1, by discussing perceptions about highly skilled migrants and refugees. This section contains definitions that had been used in the literature, covering the phenomenon of skilled migration both in its global scope and in its specific manifestation in the United Kingdom (UK). Following that, Section 2.2 widens the definition of what 'skilled' can mean, by presenting the concept of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and exploring issues like their emergence, their categorization, assessment, and their acquisition. This discussion provides an understanding of their interconnectedness with the skilled workers and the contemporary labour market. Finally, Section 2.3 discusses investment theory (Norton, 1995), viewed through the lens of intentionality theory (Kostoulas & Stelma, 2016; Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021), and connects it to the skilled workers' integration and the role of the language in it.

#### **2.1. Highly Skilled Refugees and Migrants**

This chapter focuses on defining highly skilled refugees and migrants (Section 2.1.1.), discussing their situation, first generally (Section 2.1.2) and then with more specific reference to the UK (Section 2.1.3).

There is a heightened need to study skilled migrants, as they are becoming an increasingly important element in global migration (Nathan, 2014). Data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggest that, over the last decade, the mobility of highly educated migrant population rose in nearly all countries (with the exception of Mexico). In 2020, the global percentage of recent migrants who have tertiary-level education is 50% of the total migration population, and in the European Union (EU) the percentage is 39%. These numbers represent a substantial increase compared to 2010 figures, at which time the respective percentages were 35% and 25% respectively.

However, a focus on education alone may generate a misleading picture of a phenomenon as complex as the migration of highly skilled populations. To this end, in the next section, an attempt will be made to define who highly skilled migrants are.

### **2.1.1. Who are Highly Skilled Refugees and Migrants**

When discussing a highly skilled workforce, a fundamental distinction to make is between people who have a migrant status, refugees, and mobile populations. In contrast with the term “refugees”, there is not an international consensus providing us with a precise definition about the term migrants which are considered as a very heterogeneous group.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migrants as people who are moving or have moved across international border or within a state away from their habitual place of residence to improve their economic and social conditions, regardless of whether their move was forced or desirable and regardless of their legal status and the length of their stay (*About Migration | International Organization for Migration*, n.d.; Douglas et al., 2019). According to these characteristics there are different categorizations on migrants like economic migrant, irregular migrant, long-term migrant, migrant workers, returning migrants and short-term migrants (Douglas et al., 2019).

When it comes to refugees, they were defined by the United Nations in 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, as people who have a fear of being persecuted in their country for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion and as a result are unable or unwilling to return to that country (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1978).

Lastly, population mobility is a phenomenon of globalization that is rising abruptly and is considered as the movement of people between countries and regions for the search of better opportunities, or from rural to urban places, or because of them being displaced, and is therefore closely linked to the movements of migrants and refugees throughout history (*Mobile populations*, n.d.).

A second question to disambiguate is what exactly the term ‘highly skilled’ indexes in every setting. This is necessary, as economists, sociologists and policy makers have developed different conceptualisations, which are only partially overlapping (Weier & Klekowski Von Koppenfels, 2020). This deceptively simple term could refer to people who are highly skilled by education (e.g., university graduates) (Borjas, 2005; Docquier & Marfouk, 2006; Peri & Sparber, 2011), people who are highly skilled by profession (e.g., operators of specialized machinery) (Bouvier & Simcox, 1995; Espenshade et al., 2001; Libaers, 2014), people who can generate a certain level of income (Borjas, 2005) or a combination of the above factors.

Approaches that use the education criterion to define highly skilled migration generally view highly skilled migrants as people who have university or at least post-secondary education experience (Docquier & Marfouk, 2006). While this definition aligns to intuitions and public perceptions of skill, it can be problematic as it excludes many people who have sophisticated skill sets which they developed outside the education system. For example, by defining skilled workers by their level of education, highly skilled people with non-tertiary degree or with vocational education, such as athletes, artists, or welders can be excluded (Weinar & Klekowski Von Koppenfels, 2020). As a result, many countries such as the Netherlands do not consider education level in considering someone as “knowledge migrant” (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018).

A different approach involves replacing the education criterion with that of occupation. This definition focuses on what could be described as ‘marketable skills’, irrespective of where these were gained (Weinar & Klekowski Von Koppenfels, 2020). Marketable skills are, of course, socially constructed and temporally variable, in the sense that they depend on the current priorities of the economy in the host country (Williams, 2007). In other words, an individual’s status as a highly skilled migrant depends on their potential to fulfill specific demands of the labor market and not on their characteristics *per se* (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018; Weinar & Klekowski Von Koppenfels, 2020).

Solimano (2008) suggests that a skilled workforce, in this sense, comprises people in three categories relating to their contribution potential. First, there are people valued because of their potential to directly contribute to the economy by engaging in the production of goods and services (e.g., engineers, technicians, entrepreneurs etc.). Secondly, there are people valued because of their potential to indirectly contribute to the economy, such as academics and researchers. Finally, there are people like nurses and teachers, who can contribute to the social aspects of life.

Although frameworks for the classification of jobs have been developed for use by statistical agencies (e.g., ISCED (*Statistics Explained*, n.d.)), the difficulty of assigning value to jobs has led to the development of a third criterion, income. In this perspective, the income that highly skilled migrants can generate is used as a proxy for measuring the potential value of their skills (Borjas, 2005). This is, of course, a criterion with its own challenges, as it assumes unencumbered access to the job market and tends to ignore inequalities in the income generating potential of women and foreigners.

Based on the above, when referring to highly skilled migrants in this study we will be referring to people who are highly skilled in a combination of factors and more specifically to people who are skilled by education (including linguistic proficiency in an above-average or high level) and by profession, meaning that they have an experience or a degree linked to their profession and they are able to fulfill specific demands of the labor market. These will be some factors to measure their high skilled profile without being completely absolute as some of the characteristics might change from one individual to another.

### ***2.1.2. Highly Skilled Refugees and Migrants Globally***

The national policies by which each country defines highly skilled migrants and decides who can enter the country and under which circumstances, vary greatly across the globe. Very often, these definitions tend to apply broadly to visa category, rather than each individual's unique skill set (Weinar & Klekowski Von Koppenfels, 2020). In countries such as Canada, the U.S., and Australia refugee policy is viewed, at least in part, as fulfilling humanitarian goals, which leads to more lax definitions of the 'highly skilled'. On the other hand, in the EU the focus is on asylum seeking. In addition to involving time-consuming processes, this perspective does not differentiate according to an individual's skills. By which factor the term "highly skilled worker" is defined affects other issues too.

It should be noted that, despite the recent interest in migration and refugee issues, which is caused by the increased population flows (Canagarajah, 2017), the phenomenon of highly skilled migration is hardly novel. For example, Miguélez and Fink (2017) report on exceptionally high migration rate of inventors between 1985 and 2010 towards countries such as Switzerland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Austria, and the UK.

On the whole, such people are perceived as 'desired' inflows of migration (Bielewska 2018; Triadafilopoulos, 2013), as it is assumed that they are considered easier to integrate, and it is thought that they pose fewer burdens to the welfare state. In addition, it is often believed that highly skilled migrants fill specific niches in the job-market, and are therefore not perceived as threats to the local workforce (Weier & Klekowski Von Koppenfels, 2020).

### ***2.1.3. Highly Skilled Refugees and Migrants in the UK Context***

Now it is time to move on to a more specific analysis of the term 'highly skilled', as used in the UK discourse. The UK has always been a country receiving large numbers of people from abroad. The British Empire contributed to organizing global mobility in the nineteenth and twentieth century with the basic role of the Britain's Empire being the constant shifting

between different parts of the world with the purpose of creating new identities (Fedorowich & Thompson, 2015). After World War II, with the British Nationality Act of 1948, Britain's role as a leader of the Commonwealth tried to be asserted by providing the right to the nationals from other countries and particularly former British colonies like India and Jamaica to settle in the UK (Somerville et al., 2020). Their access however was eventually eroded with core of the legislation including strong control procedures, but at that point Europeans started enjoying a free movement within the UK. Notably, immigration numbers to the UK in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have increased and are more diverse than at any point of its history with the foreign citizens group being tripled in size since 1980s (Somerville et al., 2020). Between 1995 and 2015 the number of European migrants living in the UK rose from 0.9 to 3.3 million and research has shown that about 44% of EU immigrants had some form of higher education, a number that substantially exceeds the percentages of UK-born university graduates (23%) (BREXIT, 2016).

However, on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020, the UK withdrew from the EU (Brexit, 2023). This policy decision, which is popularly referred to as the Brexit, has triggered multiple developments in the field of migration. When Brexit happened, 18% of the workforce in the UK were migrants, with the bigger percentage working in the hospitality sector (28%) and the rest being employed in the transport and storage (26%), in information, communication and IT (25%) and at last in the health and social sector (21%) (Fernández-Reino & Rienzo, 2021). Until that time, however, the labour market of the UK was freely open for all EU citizens and there were over 50 different routes for non-EU nationals to migrate to UK to work, study or join family (Vargas-Silva, 2014).

Is the number of highly educated migrants still increasing after Brexit? After Brexit, UK stopped accepting migrants freely and set up a visa requirement for entering the country. A variety of visa options are available, including visas for work, for study for reuniting with your family, for Ukrainian citizenship and others (*Visas and Immigration - GOV.UK*, n.d.). Looking specifically at the work visa, which is most directly relevant to the focus of this study, this is based on the needs of the UK job market. Multiple options are available, including a "Global talent visa", "Creative work visa", "Innovator founder" and more, among which most popular are the "Health and Care worker visa" and the "Skilled worker visa" (*Work in the UK - GOV.UK*, n.d.).

What UK policymakers have focused on after Brexit is a points-based immigration system which focuses on attracting the highest skills and the greatest talents like scientists,



engineers, academics, students, and other specialist work routes including routes for global leaders and innovators (*The UK's points-based Immigration system: policy statement*, 2020). The points-based system has tradable and non-tradable points. In the non-tradable points, both EU and non-EU citizens need to speak English and to have a job offer that is at the required skill level and comes from an approved sponsor. If the applicant earns more than the minimum salary, they are eligible for the application; if not, they can use the tradable points to still be able to migrate into the UK. In order to fill the gap in their points they need to have a job that belongs to a specific shortage occupation lists that the country has created for jobs in urgent demand. Alternatively, they need to have a PhD relevant to their job (Immigration, 2023; *The UK's Points-based Immigration System: Policy Statement*, 2020). According to the country's demands, it is evident that when it comes to the UK's high skilled migrants or refugees' education and salary scales are the most dominant factors for someone to be considered as a skilled immigrant. The main focus of this study is on the "Skilled worker visa" as it is the one that have showed the largest growth with a double number of 130,000 visas granted in 2022 in contrast of 59,000 that were granted in 2021.

Now that the term highly skilled migrant or refugee has been clearly clarified the next chapter (Section 2.2.) will focus on the word "skills" itself and will lead to the presentation and the analysis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills which seem a contemporary phenomenon that need to be examined in extend with the study's analysis.

## **2.2. Migration and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Skills**

This section presents the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and their relevance with migration. It begins by providing a wider definition of the word "skills" (Section 2.2.1.), leading to an explanation of the emergence of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills throughout the years (Section 2.2.2). Finally, Section 2.2.3., is a more detailed presentation of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, by categorizing them, and presenting how they are assessed and how their acquisition is completed in a person's life.

### **2.2.1. Definition of the Word 'Skills'.**

Having given an initial definition of the term "highly skilled migrants and refugees" in Section S.1, we now turn our attention to an in-depth examination of the word "skills". The definition of the word "skill" through different dictionaries can be: the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance ("Definition of Skill," 2023); an act with determined results and good execution often within a given amount of time, energy or both (Skill, 2023); a particular ability that one develops through training and

experience which is useful in a job (Cambridge dictionary, 2023). By synthesising all definitions in one, the work 'skill' is a construct that consists of knowledge, training and a satisfactory result for a task or a job. Throughout the years, skills have been divided into labour skills (i.e., the skills of workers like electricians, bakers, blacksmiths), life skills (i.e., the skills required in carrying out complex activities involving ideas, things and people), social skills (i.e., skills connected to interaction and communication) and soft skills (i.e., a combination of the above plus emotional intelligence) (Boucher, 2020; Skill, 2023).

### ***2.2.2. The Emergence of the 21st-Century Skills***

Since developments like technological advances and globalization have changed the scene over the past four decades, it is important to take a longitudinal perspective in the definition of terms such as "skills". Before the 1980s, 'skilled labour' referred to jobs that required manual tasks. After this decade, the inflation-adjusted incomes of high school graduates decreased radically by 16%, in contrast to those of higher-educated graduates, whose incomes rose by 10% and continued to rise, albeit modestly, over the following two decades (National Research Council, 2012). While these numbers increased both for men and for women, women averaged lower hourly pay at each education level than males. This data shows the beginning of an era where the education requirements surrounded people's lives and work. As we move on to contemporary times, the exclusive need for advanced education is proven not to be enough as political leaders and businesses have begun to have extra requirements from schools about people's skills for work and life known as critical skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (National Research Council, 2012).

Research has shown that the use of technology and computers has eliminated humans' need for problem-solving in non-routine tasks, or communicating straightforward information, especially with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) that models human cognition and is able to act rationally and function like a human (Autor et al., 2003; Sharma & Bhargav, 2022). Specifically, within industries, occupations and education groups, computerization is associated with reduced labour in tasks that require routine manual and cognitive acts, while the increasing labour is noticed in areas with non-routine cognitive tasks as computers cannot easily replace humans in tasks that require interpretation of complex patterns (Autor et al., 2003; Voogt & Roblin, 2010). In 2013, 47% of jobs in the U.S. were susceptible to automation, while automatically there has been a growth in higher-level jobs such as managerial and professional positions with the requirement of problem-solving skills (Sousa & Wilks, 2018).

This trend is shaping a labour market where a new set of skills is required. These skills, which are often referred to as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, or ‘competencies’ (National Research Council, 2012), include (but are not limited to) problem-solving for non-routine problems, critical thinking and decision-making about different tasks, intercultural collaboration and communication, self-management for the effective completion of tasks, creativity, emotional intelligence and adaptation to rapidly changing environments (National Research Council, 2011, 2012; Sousa & Wilks, 2018).

### ***2.2.3. The Categorization, Assessment and Acquisition of the 21st-century Skills***

All the skills mentioned in the previous chapter (Section 2.2.2.) can be categorized into cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal domains and will be explained below, according to National Research Council (2011, 2012).

To begin with, the cognitive domain includes three groups of skills: cognitive processes and strategies, knowledge, and creativity. These are linked to competencies such as critical thinking, information literacy, reasoning, argumentation, and innovation. What is also important for people who attain these skills is to gain “deeper learning”, which means that they can transfer their knowledge to different situations and contexts. It also involves knowing how, why, and when to apply knowledge to the solution of specific problems. A further distinction can be made depending on whether the skills are ‘general domain’ or ‘domain-specific’. General domain skills can be acquired without reference to a specific domain, and therefore they can be applied everywhere once they have been mastered. By contrast, domain-specific skills are required in specific situations, but this does not mean that they can be generalised or applied outside these situations. They are specific tests that exist that can measure peoples’ cognitive skills and can be used in various contexts (Kuncel & Hezlett, 2007).

The interpersonal domain includes groups of skills such as teamwork, collaboration, leadership, and —more generally— skills that facilitate relating to and interact with other people. These are sometimes also referred to as ‘soft skills’ and can also be described as a form of “social intelligence”. Interpersonal skills are linked to competencies such as communication, collaboration, responsibility, and conflict resolution. Ideally, these skills should be developed through a learner’s journey from preschool to postsecondary study. Some examples of the ways that these skills can be assessed are through reports by personal statements, or letters of recommendation from prior employers, through self-assessment questionnaires (perhaps in conjunction with peer assessment), and through situational

judgment tests with multiple choices to possible reactions in hypothetical teamwork situations (Bedwell et al., 2014).

Lastly, the intrapersonal domain includes the following three groups of skills: intellectual openness, work ethic and conscientiousness, and positive evaluation of the core self. The competencies that are linked here are flexibility, adaptability, initiative, appreciation of diversity, and metacognition. Generally speaking, these skills can be viewed as talents or abilities that reside within individuals, and which help them in problem-solving. Some examples of assessing these skills involve (a) self-report measures, (b) observation reports by well-trained informants, who can provide information that individuals are unable to access, and report, and (c) measurements of performance in behavioural tasks which require the deployment of specific skills.

All these skills can be acquired in both formal and informal environments (National Research Council, 2011). When it comes to formal environment is better for individuals when they are taught these skills by the end of their post-secondary study. Through the long educational journey of one's life policymakers and teachers need to make sure that they provide a curriculum and environment that provides learners with opportunities to encounter all these skills with ways like project-based learning, experiential learning, and collaborative learning. Such attempts to foster the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills should bearing in mind that skills and knowledge are intertwined and should therefore be taught simultaneously (Rotherman & Willingham, 2010).

### **2.3. Investment Theory and Integration**

In Sections 2.1 and 2.2 a clear picture emerged of what we define as highly skilled refugees and migrants, and the definitions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that are necessary in the contemporary labor market. In this chapter there is going to be an understanding of these people's integration. First, an explanation is going to be given about what integration means for a migrant or refugee in general (Section 2.3.1.), ending up with a focus on the specific role of language to their integration (Section 2.3.2.).

#### ***2.3.1. Skilled Migrant Workers' Integration***

As already mentioned in Section 2.1.2., skilled migrants and their integration are interconnected. In countries where visa streams are defined by educational attainment, these immigrants are considered to face fewer challenges in their integrations. They are also viewed as a smaller burden to the welfare state, and they are not considered a threat to

domestic workers because they only fill in specific shortages in the labour market. Furthermore, in a survey completed in Glasgow in the UK, which asked 1,400 migrants about their intervention, the results showed that migrants exhibit much lower levels of social integration than British-born citizens, but that English language acquisition and employment tended to be positively associated with social integration (Kearns & Whitley, 2015). However, what needs to be taken into consideration is that, despite the belief that skilled worker migrants are not a burden to a country (Iredale & Appleyard, 2001), they are usually subject to gender and racial bias linked to the public preference for a certain type of migrant who is viewed as unproblematic.

Multiple measures exist to assess the integration of refugees and migrants. One reason is that someone's language level acquisition and level of education cannot be the only barrier to their integration. Furthermore, the diversity of the refugee and migrant population also complicates attempts to assess integration. Among the refugees and migrants in a country there are likely to be elderly immigrants, younger people or young people with foreign-born parents (OECD, 2023), and in each of these different cases, there will be a variety of different factors, making integration a unique experience for each individual. Some of the factors that can be taken into consideration for their integration are: the immigrant skills and labour market integration, meaning factors such as employment levels and education attainment; the living conditions of the immigrants, like the household income, the housing conditions or access to healthcare; the immigrant civic engagement and their social integration like the nationality acquisition, the host society's attitudes towards immigration and in general the participation by all members of a diverse society in economic, political, social and cultural life (Craig, 2015; OECD, 2023). To conclude, integration can be understood as a synthesis of factors coming all together and it can be connected to everyday experiences, successes and setbacks.

### ***2.3.2. The Role of Language in Migrants' Integration***

In the UK, however, where this study focuses, one of the non-tradable visa points for someone to enter the country is English language proficiency. The level that the UK requires for people who enter the country to work is between B1 and C2 (Government Digital Service, 2014), as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001). This suggests that people who enter the UK with a skilled worker visa are likely to already have an above-average, or even a high level of linguistic proficiency, which (as seen above) is likely to facilitate a smoother integration into the host society. In this

section, we will focus on examining the role of language learning in skilled migrants' integration.

In 2011, 89% of foreign-born living in the UK self-reported speaking English 'well' or 'very well'. Additionally in 2018, 51% of foreign-born adults spoke English as their first language at home (English language use and proficiency of migrants in the UK - *Migration Observatory*, 2023). According to the OECD (2023), increased time spent in the host country is associated with improvements in linguistic proficiency. In particular, 50% of the immigrants who are beginners in a language and 70% of those with intermediate skills reportedly achieve an advanced proficiency after at least five years of residence. This fact can also be linked to the immigrants' motivation to learn the language at an advanced level for utilitarian reasons such as employment and to integrate successfully with the target language community. Norton (1995) describes this motivation as an "investment" trying to capture the relationship of the language learner to the changing social world, as according to her, an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity, which is constantly changing across time and space.

Is the investment in a language though achieved through holding a certificate for it like the visa permits require? To answer this question, a distinction could be drawn between certified and actual linguistic proficiency. In a study of the Greek context, Kostoulas (2015, 2018), notes that a lot of language learners prioritize obtaining language certification (which improves prospects in a competitive job market), but do not always achieve satisfactory levels of communicative competence. Similarly, Norton (1995) reports on a study of immigrant women who were highly motivated to learn the language of their host country but were highly uncomfortable and unlikely to speak in specific social conditions (e.g., in front of their employer or in front of strangers). These examples suggest that simple 'proxy' measures, such as certification and motivation, do not always provide an accurate picture of actual linguistic proficiency.

A more promising direction, for describing how linguistic proficiency connects to integration, would be to take a relatively holistic approach. In a series of publications, Norton and colleagues (Norton, 1995; 2000; Norton & Gao, 2008; Norton 2011; 2013; Darwin & Norton, 2015; Darwin & Norton, 2021) have put forward the term "investment", to describe how newcomers to a country engage in linguistic and cultural learning that helps them towards integration. Investment theory brings together three components: ideology, capital, and identity (Darwin & Norton, 2015). The learners' capital can be economic, cultural,

social, or linguistic and the value of the learner's capital shifts as it travels across time and space. In addition, learners' identities are shaped and positioned in different ways and their ideologies compete as they move across spaces (Darvin & Norton, 2016). In other words, the construct of investment has a deeper meaning which connects the learner's desire and commitment to learning a language to the language practices of the community (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

If we view investment as a trajectory of development towards integration, then it can be classed as an *intentional* phenomenon. Intentional phenomena are a class of phenomena that are directed towards something, and their 'intentionality' is the direction towards which they develop. Kostoulas and Stelma (2016) suggest that, in the context of language learning, intentionality is what unites cognitive, affective, and social aspects, and this is a perspective that can be transferred to investment towards integration. In a later publication, Stelma and Kostoulas (2021) describe intentionality as a complex phenomenon, emerging from dynamics that include a variety of aspects which refer to individual's intrapersonal characteristics, to their interactions with other people, to repeated utilized procedures and policies and to sociocultural aspects. This perspective was then used by Palavouzi (2023) in a case study that showcased how the intentional dynamics could be used to describe the integration of a highly skilled migrant in Greece. This study aims to take the above line of thinking a step further, by examining how well intentionality theory can inform discussions of integration among wider social groups.

#### **2.4. A Synthesis of What is Known about the Integration of Highly Skilled Migrants**

The review above suggested that skilled migration is a prevalent phenomenon in the UK, and that it has different characteristics from other aspects of migration and refugee flows. As seen in section 2.1.2., European policies which prioritize the political aspects of refugee integration tend to obscure the individual characteristics of highly skilled migrants, which necessitate more 'bottom up' work, including empirical work to better understand the complexity of their situation.

The integration of highly skilled migrants can be understood as a process of investment (Norton, 1995), which is a sustained effort to assimilate and absorb the characteristics of the host society. Although, in its typical formulations, investment theory tends to be applied to language learning, in the case of highly skilled migrants (as defined in Section 2.3.1.), linguistic considerations are only part of the process, and perhaps not the

most important part, as they often already have advanced linguistic proficiency (Section 2.3.2.). What seems useful, then is to broaden our perspective to include a wider range of linguistically mediated skills that are considered valuable in the contemporary society and job market, namely the '21<sup>st</sup> century skills' (Section 2.2.).

To do this, a conceptualization of investment is put forward, which is inspired by Norton (1995) but also draws on Stelma and Kostoulas' (2021) work on intentional phenomena. In this conceptualization, the investment of highly skilled refugees refers to their developmental trajectory towards integrating into the UK society and labour market. This developmental trajectory is sustained by their commitment towards integration, their linguistic and professional capital (which may be re-evaluated in the new society in which they are placed) and the specific ways in which they deploy their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. This means that highly skilled migrants 'investing' towards their integration are likely to engage in sustained development of their cognitive and intrapersonal skills (e.g., through professional development or further education), and their interpersonal skills (e.g., through sustained and active networking)

At the time of writing, an analysis of how such investment (broadly defined) emerges and how it sustains integration appears absent from the literature. Similarly lacking is a description of how highly skilled workers, entering the post-Brexit UK with a visa, manage to integrate into the country. This study aspires to address both these gaps in the literature, and the following chapter (Chapter 3), which focuses on methodology, will describe how this was achieved.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1. Overview**

This chapter presents the methods used in this study, which attempted to fill the gaps on the literature review about the integration of highly skilled workers, entering the post-Brexit UK with a visa. More specifically, this study aims to concentrate on the integration of migrants who have entered the UK with the “skilled worker visa”, after Brexit. The empirical part of the study, which was conducted in the city of London, aimed to provide insights into the integration into the UK society and labour market of this under-researched population.

A qualitative approach was used, as it appears to be the most appropriate approach for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals ascribe to different issues (in this case their integration). It is also an approach that builds from particular to general themes with the researcher making interpretation of the meaning of the data, which might include participants’ personal experiences, perspectives, and histories (Creswell, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2013).

More specifically, what will be presented in the following sections will be as follows. First, there is going to be a presentation of the research questions that emerged from the literature review and the gaps found in the bibliography (Section 3.2). Then the data generation section will follow, which will focus on providing readers with all the necessary information about the interviews (i.e., the way that data were generated) and about the participants who took place in the study (Section 3.3). Next, follows the data analysis, providing a description of how the data were used to generate findings (Section 3.4). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical concerns which arose during the research preparation and how I, as a researcher, dealt with them (Section 3.5).

#### **3.2. Research Questions**

Using Norton’s (1995) investment theory and the construct of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills as a theoretical lens, the study aims to generate timely and empirically grounded answers to the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Who are the skilled worker migrants who are entering the post-Brexit UK with a visa?

**RQ2:** What is the skilled worker migrants’ linguistic and professional capital?

**RQ3:** What is the commitment of the skilled worker migrants arriving with a visa in the UK towards integration?

In order to be able to answer these questions there was a need to explore and understand the meaning that individuals ascribe to their integration, as the qualitative approach requires. To that end, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews, which are presented in more detail in the following section.

### **3.3. Data Generation**

The qualitative design which was used is the phenomenological research, by conducting semi-structured interviews in order to describe the lived experiences of individuals about the phenomenon of integration as it was described by the interviewees themselves (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews are a highly appropriate way for understanding the participants' experiences, opinions, and attitudes towards the construct that is being studied; they are much easier than designing a well-constructed questionnaire; and are a more approachable method of getting the information needed as it is a method that is considered as a conversation and is focused on a small number of participants (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008).

A convenience sample from people living and working around the city of London was used for pragmatic reasons. According to the literature, convenience samples are a non-probability sample that involves participants who are easily accessible to the researcher(s), and who are either selected by the researcher(s), referred to the researcher(s) or are self-selected (Clark, 2007; Stratton, 2021). Although this sampling method is limited and limiting in the sense that findings cannot be generalized to a target population, it costs fewer resources, it is quicker and simpler than other forms of sampling characteristics that are convenient for the time given and the purpose of this research (Stratton, 2021). More specifically, the people who I used for my sample were people with whom I was acquainted during my stay in the city, including colleagues at work, friends, and new people I met, making the sample a product of both a purposeful sampling and a snowball recruitment strategy (Stratton, 2021). A set of inclusion criteria was also developed based on the literature review (Table 1, overleaf). The number of participants was not preselected; rather a decision was made to continue interviewing, within the frame of pragmatically imposed constraints, until theoretical saturation would be achieved.

**Table 1***Inclusion criteria*

Inclusion criteria
People who have entered the UK after the Brexit period.
People who have gained or are about to gain a skilled worker visa.
People who have arrived with a visa sponsored by a company.

All the participants were included by using our contact at work or on a day out encounter where I informed them in a friendly conversation about the research that I was conducting and its purpose, asking them if they would be interested in participating. I also asked them if they knew other people that might meet the profile required and that would possibly like to participate. Then I proceeded in sending them a more detailed email following most of the necessary information when conducting a study (Rowley, 2012). This included the brief explanation of the research, the approximate time of the interview duration (thirty minutes), a request to record the interview, the assurance of confidentiality, a reminder of their right to withdraw at any time, and a query about their availability on the next following weeks. The email also included a consent form (Appendix A) which they were asked to complete and send via email, or sign personally, before the completion of the interview.

The interviews were all conducted in English, as it was our common language of communication, and because all the participants were fluent in it. One interview (with participant P4) was conducted face-to-face by me visiting the setting where she worked in and the rest were conducted through Google Meet. Some of interviews were completed with a video call, while others decided that they feel more comfortable with a voice call which was completely respected. It is considered that during phone or video call interviews, some of the richness of the interaction may be lost, but other advantages can be gained like the time saved or the removal of potential interviewer bias (Bryman, 2001). For example, conducting interviews in this way saves a lot of travelling time, a factor that was needed to be taken into consideration due to the timeframe of the HOU's winter semester and due to long distances and the busy life that London entails. What is good for every researcher to assume is that all potential interviewees are busy people and that they need to deal with their time as precious enough to be used for something that might benefit or interest them (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). So, in terms of the interviewees' availability, it was the best

decision, in addition, with the relief that three of the participants showed, concerning the fact that they were not obliged to turn on their camera during the interview process.

As it concerns the participants' data, these are presented in Table 2. The interviewees included two males and five females of a young generation (ages 24 to 29) and one participant aged 43 years old. The participants' duration of stay in the UK varied from nine months to two years. Five of the participants were educators, in the early years sector, while one of them was a physiotherapist and another one a health research psychologist. As concerns the duration of the interview, they were some participants who were more detailed in their answers, showing a familiarity on sharing their thoughts and experiences while others gave shorter answers providing the need of further questions or clarifications in order to retrieve the necessary information. Because of this diversity in their answers, the duration of the interviews varied from 12 to 34 minutes per participant.

**Table 2**  
*Interview participants' data*

Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Duration of stay in the UK	Duration of the interview
P1	24	Female	Pre-school teacher	A year and a month	34:01
P2	27	Female	Kindergarten teacher	9 months	34:50
P3	23	Female	Teacher	1 year and two months	14:18
P4	43	Female	Nursery Manager	1 year and 10 months	23:59
P5	28	Male	Physiotherapist	2 years	12:34
P6	29	Male	Research psychologist	2 years	17:07
P7	28	Female	Pre-school teacher	2 years and 8 months	25:26

Now that there is a clear picture of the participants and their data there is a need on focusing on how I retrieved information from all the interviews and the details the participants gave me. In the next chapter (Section 3.4.) there is going to be a presentation of the data analysis.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

It can be said that the data analysis started from the very first interview. More specifically, after each interview I listened to the recording, making notes on the important points and on any practical inconveniences that needed to be taken into consideration for the rest of the interviews, as suggested by Rowley (2012). Silverman (2010) suggests that because of the time-consuming process of the transcription is better for the researcher to start the transcriptions and analysis with some interviews and then decide how many of the remaining interviews need detailed transcription. However, since the number of the interviews was prohibitive, I focused on transcribing all the recordings at once. In particular, Terrell's (2016) prolonged engagement method was used, meaning that the interviews, the transcripts and the analysis of the interview were all completed by the same researcher, a fact that can offer trustworthiness because of the familiarity that the researcher develops with the various key points and the deeper understanding of the interviewees' perspectives (Rowley, 2012)

The analysis method which was chosen was thematic analysis. This is a process that involves the 'deep' examination of a data set, trying to identify patterns while coding, and creating a narrative through the derived themes (Braun et al., 2019). What I tried to do was to find the key themes that arise from the research questions into a coherent narrative, focusing on the meaning that the participants' answers gave. These narratives are presented in Chapter 4.

Following that, the participants' experiences were reread, and salient themes were identified. These were recorded in data analysis tables, as suggested by Miles et al. (2018), which helped with the process of data reduction. Thematically similar information was grouped in analytical axes, and the information in each axis was reconstructed in an analytical memo. These memos provided the initial attempt to answer the research question, and after multiple re-readings and waves of re-analysis and comparison with the literature, they took the form of the findings that are presented in Chapter 5.

### **3.5. Ethical Concerns**

When it comes to ethical concerns, what needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that the qualitative research has its roots in the human sciences including sectors like anthropology, sociology, education and more (Buchanan, 2000, as cited in Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). This means that qualitative researchers need to have the skills to

study their participants as individual persons, to capture their voices, to understand their social world through these voices and to represent their perspectives or use their views to tell stories (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). This can be a task that involves a lot of ethical considerations as the researcher needs to meet all these obligations with respect to those involved in, or affected by their investigations (Cohen et al., 2007). When we talk about ethics, we mean that researchers should take into consideration issues like respect and beneficence for participants, making sure that they benefit instead of harming them and that they provide justice in societal and individual level (Artal & Rubenfeld, 2017; Yip et al., 2016).

As it concerns the deontic guidelines, the dimensions of research ethics are quite complex as they are divided into two groups: *procedural ethics*, which involve consent through ethics committees, and *ethics in practice*, which respond to issues that might arise in everyday life through a research procedure (Block et al., 2013).

When it comes to procedural ethics, a consent form (Appendix A) was provided to all participants with clarifications on the purpose of the study, the recording of the interview and the private information remaining anonymous. Their confidentiality and anonymity were indeed respected through the whole process of the research and the data analysis, as none of the participants' name was used, either a whole transcript or recording which might lead to revealing of personal information was published.

Regarding ethics in practice, what was taken into consideration is the fact that the participants would be people from my surrounding environment meaning, my social and workplace network. On one hand, this can be considered as an advantage, as it can offer the participants a feeling of trust and honesty making them more comfortable to share their experiences and reflections with someone they know (Brewis 2014; Hodkinson, 2005). On the other hand, this fact can also lead to some problematic issues, like for example, the feeling of confusion between the relationship of the researcher and the participant or the feeling of betrayal when I might share some of the participants' personal experiences in my research making them probably feel that their individuality is stripped away from the fact that they can be objectified in a writing (Brewis, 2014).

What was also taken into consideration is whether the consent form will be signed without undue pressure from the participants, considering the fact that they might want to help me because of our personal connections. Some ethics were considered from the side of

the researcher as well in terms of how I will feel or react in cases of unexpected answers and on whether the analysis of the data will be objective due to the previous relationship formed with the participants.

All these facts were already taken into consideration and there was an effort to avoid similar issues. First of all, all the participants were informed in as much detail as possible about the focus and expectations of the study, and they were asked if they would be interested in participating in a study like that. No undue pressure was put on the participants to sign the consent form. In addition, it was stressed that they can withdraw of the research whenever they like. Moreover, I made a question upon the end of each interview concentrating on anything that might have made them feel uncomfortable in order to make the interview as convenient as possible for all the next participants as well. None of the participants mentioned any feelings of awkwardness.

Lastly, regarding the researchers' point of view, there was an effort to act passively during the interview extending the question only with the purpose of answering the research questions and not on commenting on the content of the interview itself trying to be as objective as possible. The participants' answers, though, were not the kind that could make the researcher uncomfortable in any way. At last, as it considers the analysis of the data I discussed my findings with my tutor, in order to secure the objectivity on the outcome. To conclude, there was not any other unexpected ethical issue met during the implementation of the study.

## Chapter 4

### The Interviews

This chapter presents an overview of the information that the participants disclosed during the interviews described in Chapter 3. The information is organized in seven sections, each corresponding to a participant, and it is used to pave the way for a synthesis of the information in the following chapter.

#### 4.1. Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) is a 24-year-old Chilean woman, who was been in the UK for a year and a month with a skilled worker visa as a pre-school teacher. P1 arrived in the UK just three months after the Brexit as an *au pair* (i.e., a resident babysitter for a family). She mentioned that despite some irregularities in her travel documents, she stayed in the UK for eight months, with the basic intention of learning English, a language which she was unable to speak at that time. Eight months later, she returned to Chile and prepared all the paperwork to migrate with a skilled worker visa. She justified her decision on the grounds of the easy ability to travel widely from the UK, the cultural diversity, and the beautiful architecture, all of which made her fall in love with the UK.

In P1's opinion, Brexit has had a beneficial impact on her, as it placed her in the same position with European citizens in terms of securing employment in the UK. She noted that in the past, as a citizen of a non-European country, she did not have this opportunity. She claimed that she is still in the process of figuring out if migrating in the UK had been a good decision for her, citing both pros and cons to her situation. The job opportunities were some of the advantages she mentioned, and she also noted professional development as a significant advantage. However, she pointed out that she had expected to learn more things in her occupation, something that she feel was not happening. In her view, some markers of professional development would include improvement of her linguistic proficiency in English, and the ability to cope with challenges such as long work hours and living away from her home and family.

Her visa application process included four months of waiting and some monetary investments including an A2-level certificate in English. She mentioned that her home studies were recognized as advanced qualifications in the UK. Notably, her studies in Chile had prepared her better for her profession, compared with some people who study in England as pre-school teachers: she mentioned that the latter only do an online course,



instead of a long placement like she had done. She also stated that in Chile early year's education receives relatively more attention compared to the UK, where it is dealt as a daycare.

The basic barrier that she mentioned during her interview is related to her English language proficiency. She reported experiencing difficulties including everyday vocabulary, communicating with children and staff from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and difficulties in her writing skills, an area where she feels disempowered, compared to her native language tongue. Another difficulty she mentioned in her interview was related to prices of the country including taxes, transportation, rent and cost of living.

In general, she described a great effort and will to settle in the country, even though she was not sure she would like to stay in long term. To achieve this, she has included native English people in her personal life. In her professional life, she said, she was only investing in small-scale professional development trainings, and would only continue her studies or invest in higher qualifications if she finally decided to stay in the country on a longer term. From the interview, it became clear that she struggled with multiple issues, including the monetary investment she needed to make, as an immigrant, for improving her qualifications, and the sense that her job is not valued enough in the country, compared to other jobs like finance.

## **4.2. Participant 2**

Participant 2 (P2) is a 27-year-old Kurdish woman from Turkey, who arrived in the UK with a skilled worker visa as a kindergarten teacher. Before migrating into the UK, she had lived in France, initially as an Erasmus+ exchange student, and afterwards for work in the education sector. She had learned some basic English in school and then acquired an English degree certificate to complete her postgraduate studies, which were offered in the English language. The most important factor that weighed on her decision to migrate to the UK was her English language proficiency and the geographic proximity of Britain to her home country, compared to countries like the USA. Although she did not mention any visa-related expenses, she did concentrate on difficulties of finding out details and completing the process alone, as her employers were unable to provide her with guidance.

As far as the language barrier was concerned, she claimed that her postgraduate studies in English exempted her from the requirement to take an English language examination. However, despite her satisfactory command of English, she mentioned that

she encountered language difficulties mostly in her job and –to a lesser extent-- in her personal life, as her friends are not British. The difficulties she faced were mostly linked to pronunciations and idioms. However, the most important difficulty that she mentioned during her interview is the culture itself and the way people express themselves in the country, claiming that this is one of the skills that one has to gain if you decide to stay; trying to gain a British way of interacting with people. In terms of her professional efficacy, she felt that she sometimes encountered cultural and educational barriers and differences. She did contemplate personal development and extension of her professional qualifications, but in her view such a future-oriented goal would be driven by her own personal drive for improvement as a teacher, as opposed to societal or institutional demands.

Like P1, Participant 2 was still in the process of discovering if migration into the UK had been a good choice, as she mentioned that all the countries have some pros and cons. Considering the cost of leaving, the long work hours and the size of the city, she contemplated moving to a smaller city in England, or even a different country after her two years contract expires. In contrast with P1, she did not mention an effort to keep in touch with British people. Significantly, her free time did not include much socializing except some Kurdish school in her evenings and a hiking group on Sunday.

### **4.3. Participant 3**

Participant 3 (P3) is a 23-year-old female teacher from the USA, who proved quite reserved in her answers, with the interview lasting 14 minutes. Unlike the other participants, she entered the UK with a Tier 4 Students visa, and was doing her Master's degree in special education, while concurrently working as a teacher. At the time of the interview, she had been in the UK for a year and two months, and she intended to secure a skilled worker visa after the completion of her studies, by making use of the policy which allows students a grace period of some months to explore their employment prospects before moving to their next visa. The reason why she chose UK was so that she could study and work abroad, while being mindful of the opportunities to travel around Europe.

As a native speaker of English, P3 did not face significant linguistic challenges. The only difficulties she reported concerned dialectal variation in the pronunciation of some words, which had only minimal impact in her job and none in her personal life. She claimed that she could overcome these challenges by trying to remember the right pronunciation. Other than that, she reported that she had found it easy to put her skills in practice, and easy to extend her personal qualifications if needed. She noted, however, that such

professional development was not necessary in this context, whereas in her home country (the USA), an M-level qualification would be expected for her chosen career path.

When it comes to the extension of her skills, the only need P3 mentioned was learning the UK curriculum. In terms of her integration, she also mentioned that she had found herself spending time with immigrants, as she felt that they have things in common and they can share experiences. With regard to her future prospects, she mentioned that she would like to stay in the UK during her 20s and travel a lot, and she is thinking of returning back to her country when she would be ready to settle around her 30s.

#### **4.4. Participant 4**

Participant 4 (P4) is a 43-year-old woman from Sri Lanka who has arrived at the UK from Dubai with a skilled worker visa on early years education. Her background was enriched with lots of studies mostly based on the education sector, including A-levels in languages, Montessori education, courses in journalism and psychology and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education – International (PCGEi; a Level 7 qualification). Before migrating into the UK, she had 20 years of experience working in Dubai as a reception and a primary teacher. She mentioned that this background helped her with her integration in the UK as most of her studies were UK-certified or international, and she also had a good level of linguistic proficiency in English. Specifically, she mentioned that both her parents were English teachers, making English the permanent language at home and all her studies were in the English language, something that makes her a confident speaker that had not encountered any difficulties with the language arriving in the country.

She felt that her skills were valued as she had changed two jobs during her two years of stay in the country earning promotions in both within a few months, and leading to her current post as a Nursery manager. Referring to her skills, she was the only participant who mentioned not only professional, but also personal skills like having lots of ethics and interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Like most of the participants, she referred to the extension of her qualification and skills only as a personal need and not as a requirement to stay in the country.

An important factor that also differentiated her from the other participants was that she was married and had three children. This meant that she had had to apply for a visa for all her family members, which involved a very substantial financial investment that amounted to 10,000 GBP per person, as she stated. The main reason of P4's immigration to

the UK was her children's education and the ability of getting eventually an indefinite leave to remain in the country in contrast with Dubai, where according to her one is not provided with citizenship opportunities.

During the interview, she mentioned multiple things that she enjoyed when spending time in the country, like the nature including parks, the weather which —she explained— was not unbearably hot, and the relatively good work-life balance in terms of the working hours and the days off in the weekends. Regarding the difficulties of settling in the country, she underlined the extreme high cost of living, including rent and children's education in a private sector. She mentioned the importance of money even when it came to the extension of someone's qualifications, as she pointed out that unlike permanent citizens, immigrants are not provided with government funding for education. She admitted that, when it came to her and her husband, she would prefer going back but that she was considering staying in the country having her children's benefits in mind.

#### **4.5. Participant 5**

Participant 5 (P5), whose 12:30-minute interview was the shortest due to his very brief answers, is a 28-year-old Greek man who migrated in the UK with a skilled worker visa as a physiotherapist two years ago. His mother was Canadian, so English was as a second native tongue for him. He had gained relevant professional experience in Greece and in the Netherlands. The reasons that P5 chose to migrate in the UK were the career opportunities, and his desire to explore a different country, as he explains that the market here is bigger than in Netherlands. He considered this a sound decision, but (similarly to other participants) he also mentioned disadvantages, including the financial state of the country, meaning the inflation leading to higher prices and a lower quality of life because of that.

As concerns the visa application process, his occupation as physiotherapist was in the professions with increased demand since is included in the public health sector. He mentioned that English language proficiency was one of his visa requirements, the others being a minimum savings amount of 2,000GBP and being sponsored by a company. However, since his mother was Canadian, he had the ability to apply for the visa using his Canadian passport and was exempt from an obligation to prove his English language proficiency. The process lasted three and a half weeks, the briefest time mentioned by the interviewees. The job in which he was employed at the time of the interview was his second employer in the UK. This meant that although his visa had been sponsored by his first

company, he had to pay for the Visa expenses on his own in the second job, including paying the outstanding Visa fees for his first employer.

In terms of language difficulties, he mentioned that the only challenge that he might have faced has been in some day-to-day English and the slang were British people might use different ways to explain things. In a professional level, he explained that he had not faced any difficulties as he had worked abroad before. In addition, learning medical terminology proved to be a relatively less challenging task for him, as much of it etymologically derives from the Greek language, which facilitated the acquisition for him.

As concerns his skills, he mentioned that he had to get used to the UK healthcare system which differed in subtle ways from the Greek one with which he was more familiar, but that he has been learning by doing and by revisiting the literature. As other participants mentioned, he found the extension of someone's qualification primarily a personal need and aspiration, but he explained that professional bodies do expect the bare minimum from each employee. Financial reasons were included in the extension of somebody's qualifications, as he explains that they can be self-funded or companies-funded with the government not really helping on that.

Finally, he was still undecided as to how long he would stay in the country with the working conditions improvements being the first factor for a decision like this.

#### **4.6. Participant 6**

Participant 6 (P6) is a 29-year-old Greek man who has arrived in the UK with a skilled worker visa as a psychologist doing some health research at a UK University. P6 had been in the UK before Brexit, doing his Master's degree in Birmingham for a year. He returned to Greece to complete a funded PhD, but decided to return to the UK because he lacked research opportunities in Greece. At the time of the interview, he had been in London for two years. He mentioned that the reason he chose the UK was because he has been here before, making him familiar with the culture and most importantly because he knew the English language. His visa process lasted about 4-5 months and he mentioned several times in his interview that being in the UK with the visa might be stressful sometimes, compared to the pre-Brexit situation. He stated, as others did, that he had to pay the fees of his visa and to have a specific amount of money in his bank before migrating.

When it came to integration, he suggested that even though he already had some British friends during his Master's studies, and was already somewhat familiar with the

culture, he had to re-integrate as he moved in London, which is much busier than Birmingham. Even though his language was at a good level already because of his previous study in the country, he self-described as having a mainly academic knowledge of the language, and said that he had personal life difficulties which mostly had to do with the slang, everyday situations or words, like ordering something, and the pronunciation and the accent of the native speakers. In a professional level, his difficulties pertained to online meetings, his confidence on online speeches, or the small struggle to understand people from other parts of the world or the UK. The way he was trying to overcome these difficulties was by asking familiar people or colleagues to correct him, by watching UK television, or listening to UK songs and by trying to make friends that are not Greek. He said that having native speakers in your life is a very good way for someone to improve their language and that he would recommend it to someone who needs help improving his language skills. He also said that he sometimes corrected native students' essays and that noticing the mistakes they make helps to raise his linguistic self-efficacy.

When it comes to skills, he felt that his skills were valued as the position he applied for was a fit to his knowledge and studies and that this was the reason that they provided him with the visa. Like other participants have mentioned, he did not believe that it would be necessary to develop any other skills in order to stay, unless he decided to start lecturing. However, he noted that this would be an easy skill to develop, as his university offers these lessons for free. When it comes to his professional life, he claimed that even though he already had the skills to do research, it took him some time to gain the confidence and to do the job in a level that would satisfy him, as the research here requires much more paperwork, ethics, meetings and organizations than in Greece.

He mentioned that, ideally, he would like to stay until he gets the UK passport but factors like the financial situations, the crisis in the UK and the stress of Visa made him open to any other opportunities, but only in English speaking countries or positions that do not require local languages. The way he likes spending his time, like some other participants also mentioned, was travelling, underlining though the high prices in London which make this more difficult not being as able to do it as he would have liked to.

#### **4.7. Participant 7**

Participant 7 (P7) is a 28-years-old Chinese woman who was working in a Nursery as an early years educator. Just like P3, P7 arrived in the UK three years ago with a student's visa. She completed her postgraduate studies on pre-school education in China and continued by

finishing a distance Master's degree in the UK on childhood education. After her graduation, she visited the UK to receive her diploma.

The reason she decided to stay in the UK was the Covid restrictions since she would have to spend a lot of money to travel back to China and to isolate in a hotel for a long period. So instead, she found a job in the UK after her Masters and changed her visa into a skilled worker one. Another reason for which she chose the UK instead of another European country is because her postgraduate studies had taken place there and she was more familiar with this country. P7's visa application was about the requirement of the study visa where she basically had to spend 6-8 months to learn English more rapidly in order to enter her Master's degree. However, when she switched to the skilled worker visa, she had to pay the fees for the application and the NHS anyway. She reported that her decision to stay in the UK was satisfying as, in contrast with some other participants she mentions that she has a good work and life balance as they work much more in China, an opinion that comes in agreement with P4's participants and the Dubai work life.

When it comes to integration, she underlined this good balance but she mentioned that she missed her family and Chinese food. She also finds it difficult that she could not take more than two weeks of holidays in her job meaning that she cannot visit her home frequently as it is a very long journey. She also mentioned that she had struggled a lot with the language in the beginning and that she believed that her English was not good. However, she had found that her work in the Nursery, meaning the contact with children and parents and her partner, who was British, had helped her increase her language skills and feel more confident about it.

As concerns the skills, her experience and background from her country did not really help her as she explains that the education system is completely different in China. The skills that helped her get a job in the country are the ones that she got from her postgraduate studies as it was in the UK, mentioning also that the basic thing that she had to do was just look after the children. She noted that cooperation with other colleagues is very important in her occupation and that the skills she needed to develop were about the educational system in the UK, like safeguarding issues, where she felt that she had the support she needed from her colleagues. When it comes to upgrading her skills, she explained that she would like to do so, only if she decides that she would like to continue working in the education sector, something that she is not yet sure about. At last, she has

mentioned that you get support from your job if you decide to extend your skills, but that she was unable to do so, because she was on two-year instead of three-year visa.

When asked her opinion about the country and whether she would like to stay, she did not mention any financial difficulties, and explained that for now she would like to stay but that she is thinking that she might like to return in her country in the future because of her family. Also, she explained that it is difficult to get a skilled worker visa and that if she decides to stay and change her occupation, she was not sure how easy that would be.



## Chapter 5

### Discussion

This chapter begins by revisiting the research questions that were posed in Chapter 3 and provides some tentative answers, which emerged from the data analysis. This is then followed by a discussion of theoretical implications, limitations of this study and suggestions for further empirical work.

#### 5.1. Revisiting the Research Questions

First, there will be a clarification on who are the highly skilled workers. This will be done by describing a 'portrait' of the highly skilled migrants who arrive in the city of London with a visa, and discussing why they are considered 'highly skilled'. Secondly, there will be an explanation of how their pre-existing linguistic and educational background helped them integrate into the UK. Lastly, there is going to be an analysis of whether, and how, these migrants invest in expanding their qualifications in order to integrate into the country.

##### 5.1.1. *Who Are the Highly Skilled Migrants?*

Analyzing the profile of the specific highly skilled migrants who participated in this research, we observe that the majority are aged 24-29, including a 43-year-old participant who is a statistical outlier in this case. Only two of them come from Greece, which is part of the European Union (EU), with the rest of them having origin from countries outside the EU. We see a variety of origins like Chile, Turkey, USA, Sri Lanka, and China, with three of them having lived in the Netherlands, France, and Dubai before entering the UK. The duration of the participants' stay in London is between nine months to two years. While it is not easy to determine whether this distribution is an artifact of the sampling strategy or a more general feature, the image that emerges is that of a relatively young, internationally mobile population.

As far as their educational and professional background is concerned, all the participants are highly educated. They all have an undergraduate university degree, more than half have already proceeded to Master's education and at least one more mentioned that they would like to get a Master's at some point. Considering the content of their studies, five out of seven participants are in the education sector working as pre-school teachers or managers; one is in physiotherapy, and one is in research (health psychology). All the participants had previous experience working in their professional sector back in another country, if not full-time, within placement, training, or for short-term and

replacement arrangements. The outcome is that most of the participants had experience of varying degrees, about how each sector works in contexts outside the UK, and they bring an international perspective to their professions. In other words, this appears to be a population with significant educational experience and in some cases professional experience, as well, mostly in the services industry. In this case, too, it is hard to tell whether the distribution of skills and professions is a more general feature of the population or a product of convenience sampling. However, it is likely that it reflects the policy priorities of the UK government, and attempts to address skills gaps in particular industries, such as teaching and health as it is proved from the UK's shortage occupations list (Immigration, 2021).

As concerns their linguistic profiles language, all participants have very high levels of English language proficiency, in addition to other languages that they may speak. Approximately half use English as their second home language, and are therefore highly proficient speakers. In this sense, they can be considered legitimate 'owners' of English on par with native speakers (Prodromou, 2010). Among the rest, many mentioned having learned English since a young age, and eventually building on this knowledge during their studies. It seems, therefore, that English language proficiency was not an obstacle in many cases. This very likely resonates with the observation in the literature that highly skilled refugees are generally not perceived as aliens in the hosting countries (Bielewska 2018; Triadafilopoulos, 2013; Weier & Klekowski Von Koppenfels, 2020) since they are not linguistically othered. Although linguistic differences are often viewed as class markers in the UK (Milroy, 2000), the fact that London (and the UK more broadly) is very diverse in terms of the pronunciations encountered (Accents in Britain, 2019), probably ameliorates any perceptions of difference.

In conclusion, what is noticed is that these participants do not easily fit the typical migrant's profile. Rather, they are a mobile population who intentionally chose to relocate to the UK to improve their economic and social conditions. All of them are highly skilled in terms of education, considering the fact that they are university graduates, and most of them have a certain level of income since they got the chance to receive the visa sponsorship. Being a very different population also means that many of the observations in the current literature about the integration of migrants and refugees are less likely to apply to the highly skilled migrants.

### ***5.1.2. Participants' Capital and their Integration into the UK***

Turning to Research Question 2, we are going to analyze whether, and how, all the linguistic and educational background that was mentioned in the previous chapter helped these people to integrate into the UK.

To begin with, we have as a fact that all the participants are already in the country working, which means that all of them got the chance to have a sponsored visa to enter the UK. Five out of seven participants who first entered the country with a skilled worker visa mentioned that one of the application requirements was having a degree related to the job for which they were applying. Other requirements included a linguistic proficiency certificate, plus proof that they had sufficient monetary funds (sums ranging from £1,300 to £5,000 were mentioned) for sustaining themselves when they entered the country. As it concerns the two participants who entered the country with a student visa, it seems that their basic requirement was having a university acceptance, meaning that they had to pay the fees once they applied for a skilled worker visa. However, they were absolved from other requirements like English proficiency as they will have proved it in the first place.

Taking all the above into consideration, it appears that highly skilled refugees are not defined singularly by their skills, but also in terms of social capital. The first things that helped those people enter, and eventually integrate into the UK were their university studies and their English proficiency (all of them had at least a basic level of English understanding), both of which can be class markers (Milroy, 2000; Walter, 2023). Another advantage that this population enjoyed, regarding their integration was that they had a chance to get a visa sponsorship, which was made possible by access to professional networks. Considering the visa fees application, another outcome is that the participants' financial condition back in their home country was dignified as they were able to pay the amount of fees required for the application. Even if we were to assume that they might have required financial help from friends or relatives, that still locates them in a high-mobility population, since they had the ability to pay those fees, which is not a fact for all economic migrants. In sum, there is a clear class dimension that differentiates this population from many other categories of migrants and makes their mobility possible.

As to whether their actual skills were valued, a range of opinions was recorded. All seven participants mentioned that their skills were valued, and pointed out aspects such as the following: (a) that they can provide insight on their job based on their knowledge (P3); (b) due to their studies and experience they got promoted quickly, with the experience being

demanding and enriching (P4); (c) the UK's need in this occupation was increased (P5); (d) their job required their specific background and skills (P6); and (d) their degree equivalence was high comparing the British people's studies (P1). Hence, the fact that their capital helped them integrate and feel valued is confirmed by them as well.

However, this is not a unanimous opinion, as two participants mentioned that they feel that the education is treated as a daycare and that their studies might have helped, but maybe their occupation experience not, as the educational system is completely different (P1, P2). All seven participants underlined the fact that they had to adapt their skills to fit in their workplace needs as the British way of their occupation is different from their own experience. This includes not only the way they work but also their English proficiency as they had to get used to specific pronunciation, accent or everyday words including the cultural way of saying specific things. So here comes the question of whether by working on adapting their skills these skilled migrants invest into their stay at the country and in which ways. This is going to be analyzed in the next chapter.

### ***5.1.3. Participants' Investment in their Stay in the UK***

By beginning to analyze whether the research's participants invest in their stay in the country a good start will be to examine if their migration in the UK was considered as a good decision and whether they have decided if they are going to stay in the country or not.

Starting with their beliefs about their migration, none of the participants referred to it as a bad decision. However, some mentioned that they are still in the process of assessing their decision (P1, P2), and that they would perhaps reconsider it in light of several perceived disadvantages. Some of these included the cost of living (P1, P4, P5, P6), rising inflation (P5), and low quality of life (P1, P5), which were mentioned in almost all interviews. In addition to the above, many participants suggested that they were considering the desire to settle back in their home countries, feelings of homesickness, and the fact that they were unable to visit their family frequently due to expensive tickets and short-term holidays (P1, P2, P7). On the other side, they refer to advantages such as work opportunities and conditions (P1, P5, P6), self-improvement and development (P1, P2, P4), higher education for children (P4), gaining a UK passport (P6), work-life balance (P4, P7), and the ability to travel easily around Europe meeting new friends and cultures (P1, P2, P3). Considering all the things mentioned above, six participants seemed ambivalent about staying in the UK in the future while one explicitly stated that that she planned to return to her home country in her 30s to settle there.

Taking into consideration that none of them was planning a long-term stay in the country, one might hypothesise that their investment in it might not be great. That is proved, indeed, through the findings of the research. More specifically, all seven participants expressed their longing and the exploitation of their free time by travelling inside and outside the UK, meeting friends or their desire to deploy their holidays by flying back home.

Additionally, when it comes to their language difficulties, none of them seem to spend any time completing language learning classes or anything similar. This is perhaps not surprising, considering the high levels of linguistic proficiency that they all had at the time of entry into the UK. Nevertheless, many participants did mention language-related challenges, such as engaging with technical and / or colloquial English in their personal and professional and personal lives respectively. It was suggested that the only way they try to overcome these difficulties is by asking advice from friends, roommates, and colleagues or by spending time engaging with cultural artifacts, such as UK television programming and listening to UK songs.

As concerns their professional investment or qualifications, most of the participants mentioned that the arrival with a visa and the duration of the visa might be an issue on expanding someone's qualifications, as it has to do with financial issues. Since immigrants are not provided with financial assistance to broaden their qualifications, the only way to do that is through their own or their employers' funds. A common observation that resonated in all interviews was that if they decided to extend their qualifications, this would be mostly due to their personal aspirations, needs or interests (i.e. it would reflect individual rather than sociocultural aspects of intentionality; Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021). None of the participants had expanded their qualification portfolios since their arrival in the country, except as necessary for obligatory training required by their employers. Some of them were still in the process of deciding whether they would like to pursue this development path depending on whether they eventually decided to stay in the country or change the country or their occupation. Some others were battling with time or with the expenses.

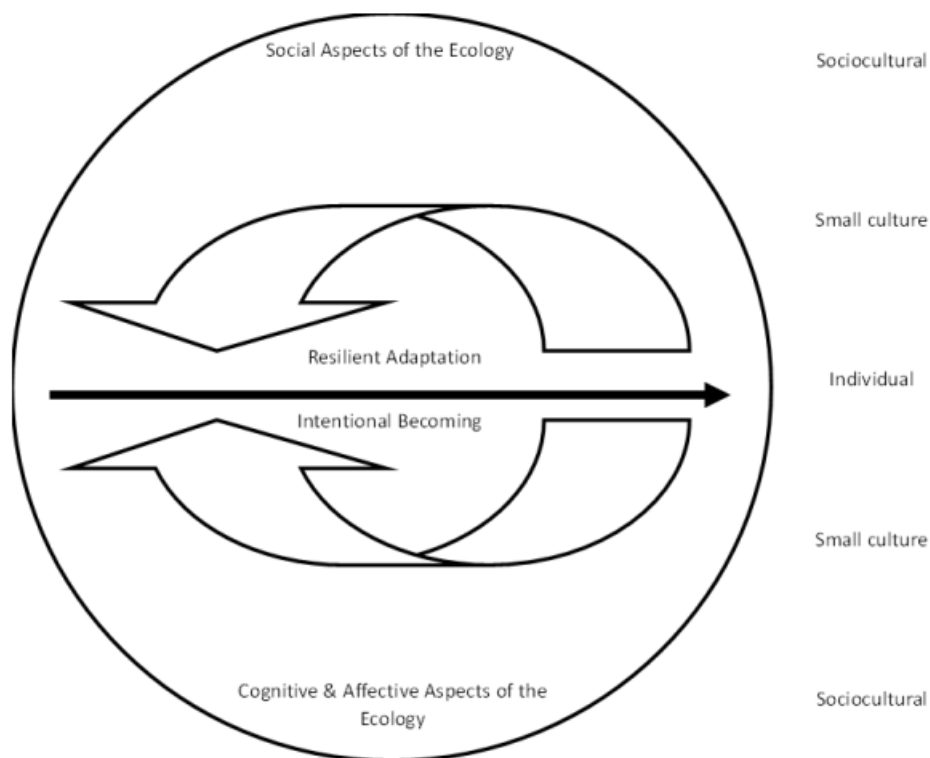
To conclude, perceived disadvantages in the UK, like the cost of living, lead to migrants' ambivalence about their long-term residence decisions. Since the participants' future was still uncertain at the time of the study, they did not seem to invest a lot of time and funds to integrate into the country. On the contrary, their focus was more on doing things that they wanted and liked, thus investing in their personal, rather than professional, development.

## 5.2. The Investment of Highly Skilled Migrants

Existing work on the integration of migrants and refugees into their adapted home countries has described this process as a gradual investment, which leads to cultural and linguistic assimilation (Norton, 1995). In Palavouzi's dissertation (2023), investment is conceptualized as a process of 'intentional becoming' (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Integration as intentional becoming*



Intentional becoming, as conceptualized in this model, is a gradual and persistent development towards a specific future-oriented goal. This development is shaped by a combination of interpersonal and societal factors, which provide it with impetus and direction.

Using this model to understand the investment of highly skilled migrants into the UK, the most salient observation is that the process of intentional becoming appears to be atrophied. In their professional lives, to begin with, participants did not appear particularly keen to broaden their professional qualifications. Similarly, in their personal lives, they did not appear to invest considerably into overcoming the linguistic challenges that they perceived. The reasons for the lack of significant and sustained investment into integration

can be attributed to a combination of factors in the context of the UK. At the social level, there does not appear to be much effort from the government or employers to create affordances (Scarantino, 2003) for development. On the other side of the model, the personal drivers that would have motivated investment (e.g., a strong desire to stay in the country) are dampened by ambivalence regarding the participants' long-term prospects.

### **5.3. Implications for Education and Professional Development**

The most important implication of the findings that were discussed above is that the UK does not appear interested in retaining highly skilled migrants. The literature suggests that highly skilled migrants can contribute to their new settings in many ways (Weier & Klekowski Von Koppenfels, 2020) and are therefore generally viewed as desirable assets in their host countries (Bielewska 2018; Triadafilopoulos, 2013). An added consideration is that this population is highly mobile and therefore capable of exploring relocation options at an international level. In this case, however, the data suggest that there appears to be at least some ambivalence regarding the long-term residence of highly skilled migrants in the UK. Changing this situation would require considerable effort, from the government and employers. Intentionality theory (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021) suggests that intentional action –or in this case, investment– once generated, can create a self-reinforcing loop that leads to stronger investment over time. Therefore, it seems very important to create affordances for investment in education and professional development, like the right type of skills and the higher investment in adult education (Karanikola & Palaiologou, 2021).

When considering what form these affordances may take, it is important to bear in mind the particularities of the highly skilled migrant population. At present, the UK might seem to have a separate and developing migration policy for this population. This policy however does not appear to provide for the sub-sequence of their arrival, where many of the legislative provisions seem to conflate them with refugees and other migrants (Office, 2023; UK, 2020). Such an outlook is obviously well grounded on general humanitarian principles, and especially in the case of refugees, preferential treatment on the grounds of capital seems hard to justify. Nevertheless, a responsive policy that takes into account the linguistic, cultural and professional capital of each new entry in the UK would likely be beneficial for migrants and the host country as well.

#### **5.4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Work**

The findings of this study are, by necessity, limited by its scope. Because this is a small-scale qualitative inquiry, it would certainly seem injudicious to uncritically project the findings to broader populations (Stratton, 2021). Similarly, it is often difficult to tell whether specific findings are reflective of general characteristics of highly skilled migrants or whether they were produced by the convenience sampling strategy that was employed. That said, the purpose of qualitative inquiry, such as the one reported in this project, is not to produce generalizable findings (Creswell, 2013); rather, it is to generate theoretical abstraction, produce or refine theory (Denzin, 2017).

Viewed through this perspective, this study has attained the following goals. Firstly, it has offered insight into how the conditions in a new country may produce ambivalence regarding the long-term residence prospects of internationally mobile migrants. Secondly, it suggests how such ambivalence may have detrimental effects on the investment of these populations, thus hindering their integration. Thirdly, it suggests ways forward, which involve the generation of affordances through education and professional development, which may provide impetus for self-sustaining cycles of growth.

Future work in the field could build on these observations. For instance, it would be helpful to refine our understanding of highly skilled migrants, through large-scale quantitative investigations. Such research could provide a clearer picture of their strengths, needs and aspirations, leading to the design and implementation of appropriate education and professional development opportunities. Another possibility would involve focused case-studies which might provide insight into the dynamic development of investment over time. A fuller understanding of which aspects of the migrants' skill set are mostly valued (e.g., linguistic, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills etc.) would also help in understanding this population.



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## Appendix

### Appendix A

#### *The consent form*



Language Education  
for Refugees and Migrants  
LRM64 (Dissertation)

### Participant Information and Consent Form

#### About this study

This study is aiming to examine the integration of highly skilled migrants into the post-Brexit UK society and labour market.

#### Where can I find additional information?

Researcher: Entona Soutlse  
Email: [redacted]

Supervisor: Achilleas Kostoulas  
Email: [kostoulas.achilleas@ac.eap.gr](mailto:kostoulas.achilleas@ac.eap.gr)

#### Informed consent

Please tick a box (YES or NO) next to each of the statements below:

The researcher has explained to me everything I needed to know about this study, and has answered all my questions.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
I understand that some of the information I give will be printed in research documents, but my name will not be used, and that the researcher will not share any information that makes me unsafe.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
I understand that I can stop helping with this project whenever I want, and that I don't have to explain why.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
I agree to take part in this study.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO

#### Date & Signatures

\_\_\_\_\_