

Reading Skills, Silencing Diplomas: A Thematic and Deconstructive Analysis of Brain Waste in Lithuania

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ABSTRACT

This article re-conceptualizes “brain waste” based on the experiences of highly qualified immigrants living in Lithuania, not merely as a measurable mismatch, but as an institutional-textual regime in which language, equivalence (recognition), and licensing thresholds are intertwined, determining the readability of competence. Conducted with an interpretive design, the study involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with 14 participants from different disciplines and statuses, analyzed using reflective thematic analysis. The narratives were also examined through a deconstructive reading, in terms of where the dichotomies of “qualification/document,” “native/foreign,” and “presence/absence” are established and where they clash. The findings reveal that (i) sub-qualification employment creates a “chronic waiting” pattern; (ii) the language–recognition–license triad is the main threshold determining entry points; (iii) while social networks enable initial job retention, they carry the risk of lock-in to secondary sectors in the long term; (iv) initial contact practices (name, accent, photo) can function as a “threshold label”; (v) status mismatch has detrimental effects on mental and physical well-being. Processually, the narratives are linked to the flow of promise → threshold → waiting → micro-break → reorientation → settlement/separation; here, “micro-breaks” (short internships, scholarship language courses, accelerated equivalency) are turning points that make competence “readable.” The theoretical contribution is to position brain waste as a readable and nameable phenomenon and to show that dichotomies can be loosened through design; the practical/policy contribution is to demonstrate that thresholds can be rewritten through recognition justice, early and intensive language support, fair hiring design, and bridge programs (mentoring-internships, psychosocial support). The single-country context and qualitative design point to the transferable but limited generalizability of the findings; nevertheless, the study shows that textual and institutional arrangements can transform the “foreign” into a colleague even with small design moves.

Keywords: Brain Waste, Sub-Qualification Employment, Qualification Recognition (Equivalence), Language Proficiency, Licensing, Social Networks, Deconstruction, Thematic Analysis, Lithuania

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes a country's labor market resembles a long waiting room: files sit in drawers, ink on diplomas fades, resumes are read with the meticulousness of a petition, but the response is delayed. Brain waste is precisely the name for this delay, the loosening of the link between qualifications and employment at the thresholds of language, recognition, and belonging. The latest European Union data shows that this phenomenon is not exceptional but structural: in 2023, the rate of over-qualification among non-EU citizens in the EU was 39.4%; the rate among

other EU citizens was 31.3%, and among EU citizens themselves, it was 20.8% (Eurostat, 2024). This gap points to a persistent inequality that explains why educated individuals wait longer at the gates of employment.

Over-qualification is often conceptualized as vertical mismatch: higher education graduates working in low- or medium-skill jobs. Eurostat's long-term monitoring reveals that non-EU citizens consistently had the highest rates of over-qualification throughout 2004–2024, with other EU citizens also systematically at higher risk compared to nationals (Eurostat, 2025). This persistence suggests that migrants are not only initially, but continuously, included in the labor market under a regime of inequality.

Large-scale comparative studies deepen this picture. Comprehensive indicators from the OECD–European Commission show that migrants, even if they have a higher education level, are more frequently employed below their qualifications than their peers; conversely, a diploma obtained in the host country reduces the native-migrant overqualification gap by approximately 75% across the EU (OECD & European Commission, 2023). This finding points to an issue of recognition and transferability rather than a “shortfall”: the language, accreditation, and legal validity of the credential determine the “readability” of the skill.

Indeed, select empirical studies unpack the mechanisms underlying migrants' apparent education-job mismatch. An analysis published in *Work, Employment and Society* shows that finding work through social networks among migrants who have recently moved from East to West can increase orientation toward secondary sectors and the risk of overqualification; language proficiency and regulatory regimes determine the intensity of this relationship (Leschke & Weiss, 2020). Meanwhile, data from the European Sociological Review highlights the distinction between “apparent” and “real” mismatch, finding that factors such as language proficiency, educational quality, and skill transfer can systematically influence measured rates of overqualification (Prokic-Breuer & McManus, 2016). Taken together, these studies invite us to think of brain waste not as an individual flaw, but in the context of institutional recognition regimes and market segmentation.

Inequality also carries intergenerational traces. A recent demographic study shows that even for the second generation (children of immigrants born in the host country), the risks of overqualification remain high in many contexts compared to native peers, indicating that the gap is embedded not only in the “initial arrival” moment but also in processes of belonging and recognition (Kim, 2024). This finding suggests that brain waste is not a temporary adjustment pain, but rather a reproduced inequality unless appropriate policy sets are implemented.

This article examines these dynamics in the Lithuanian context, in light of both official indicators and in-depth interviews, using thematic coding and a deconstructive reading. As Lithuania transitions from being solely a country that experiences “brain drain” to one that increasingly attracts international students, workers, and refugees, it offers a laboratory where the doors of the labor market intersect with the threshold of legal/statutory status. Indeed, according to the Lithuanian Migration Department, the number of foreigners living in the country exceeded 200,000 for the first time in September 2023; at the same time, 6,258 foreigners were employed in highly skilled jobs (Migration Department, 2023). This dual picture—high inflows, limited high-skilled employment—highlights the institutional barriers to matching skills.

editions of the OECD's International Migration Outlook emphasize that migration flows reached record levels in 2023; in contrast, skills-appropriate and sustainable employment is a policy priority that needs to be implemented rapidly (OECD, 2024). The EU's Employment and Social Developments 2023 assessment also strongly documents the link between perceived discrimination and overqualification, particularly among highly educated migrants (European Commission, 2023). This framework suggests that the recognition of qualifications, language requirements, and professional licensing thresholds in Lithuania affect not only individual careers but also the country's overall productivity and equity horizons.

The theoretical lens of this study is deconstruction: we operate on the assumption that dichotomies such as qualified/unqualified, native/foreign, center/periphery, and presence/absence are not natural but institutional and discursive constructs. We argue that language and document recognition regimes construct a kind of “conditional hospitality”; that migrant qualifications are often read as “absence,” even though the same qualifications are actually present in the market. This perspective allows us to trace the inequalities revealed by statistics in everyday narratives—in interview data.

The aim of the article is to reveal (i) the institutional and cultural thresholds at which brain waste is produced in Lithuania, (ii) how it is sustained within the triangle of language-document recognition-professional regulation, and (iii) how individuals respond to it (adaptation, retraining, withdrawal from the field, entrepreneurship). Methodologically, qualitative data consisting of semi-structured in-depth interviews will be analyzed using thematic coding; subsequently, the dualities, silences, and “excluded traces” in the texts will be discussed through deconstructive reading. Thus, we will address brain drain not merely as a measured mismatch but also as a read and named mismatch.

This introduction situates the phenomenon within European data and the current context of Lithuania. Next, in the literature review section, we will detail theoretical approaches to quality mismatch and the most recent empirical evidence on the employment outcomes of highly skilled migrants; in the methods section, we will

transparently present our data collection and analysis steps; in the findings section, we will interweave thematic patterns with deconstructive analysis; in the discussion, we will relate the findings to European-level trends and the theoretical framework; finally, we will bring together feasible policy avenues under the headings of recognition, language policies, and professional regulations, with an emphasis on ethics and social responsibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Multi-Layered Nature of "Brain Waste"

Brain waste is an unequal and often persistent regime of mismatch that manifests itself when highly educated individuals work in sub-skilled jobs, their competencies are not recognized, or they are unable to access their fields of expertise due to structural barriers. At the European Union level, this phenomenon is particularly high among third-country nationals: The European Commission's 2023 policy document states that approximately 39.4% of third-country nationals working within the EU are "overqualified" for their jobs; the same indicator is reported to be 31.8% for EU citizens who have migrated to another member state within the EU and 21.1% for the native population working in their own country. This picture provides strong public data on how delays in the recognition of qualifications and administrative barriers reinforce labor market inequalities (European Commission, 2023).

Against the backdrop of official EU-level statistics, a number of factors emerge that determine migrants' labor market outcomes: host country language proficiency, signals from education acquired in the host country, the functioning of certification/licensing in regulated professions, job entry channels through social networks, and the persistence of discrimination. The impact of language proficiency on wages and employment has been confirmed by economic studies extending to intergenerational comparisons; Findings from UK data showing that controlling for language significantly alters the migrant-native wage gap confirms the central role of language in the debate on the "transferability" of human capital (Ochmann, 2024).

On the other hand, formal recognition of qualifications (credential recognition) is directly linked to hiring probabilities. In Sweden, experimental studies have shown that the recognition of foreign higher education diplomas increases the employment and earnings probabilities of newly arrived immigrants (Tibajev & Hellgren, 2019). Similarly, survey-experimental designs conducted among employers reveal that the explicit inclusion of official recognition information in resumes significantly increases the chances of being invited for qualified jobs (Damelang, Ebensperger & Stampf, 2020). These findings suggest that qualification recognition is not merely a bureaucratic procedure but a fundamental signaling mechanism that influences employers' risk perception.

Social networks play a dual role in immigrants' entry into the labor market. As well as the opportunities offered by "weak ties," ethnic/hometown networks also have the potential to "lock" immigrants into certain sectors and occupational niches. Findings showing that migrants who find work through social networks face an increased risk of overqualification in intra-European mobility reveal how networks intersect with subjective and objective overqualification (Leschke & Weiss, 2020).

Discrimination literature adds a darker tone to the picture. Multicountry field experiments and meta-analyses show that immigrant candidates experience persistent disadvantages in application processes in developed democracies, including Europe, with lower call rates even under "equal qualification" conditions (Lancee, 2019; Quillian et al., 2017). This fuels an explanatory narrative linking brain waste not only to delayed recognition of qualifications but also to the operation of foreignness and belonging dichotomies coded as "risk."

The intergenerational traces of brain waste are also strong. A recent study based on Swedish population records shows that the likelihood of overqualification among children born in the host country to immigrant parents (second generation) remains higher than that of the native majority for most groups, pointing to a persistent "friction" in the link between educational attainment and job outcomes (Kim, 2024).

Finally, the health-related consequences of brain waste shed light on the cost of the "mismatched" use of labor. A large cohort study tracking immigrant university graduates in Sweden showed that overqualification increases the risk of hospitalization due to psychiatric and somatic illnesses (Brendler-Lindqvist, Tondel, Helgesson, Nordqvist & Svartengren, 2022). Systematic reviews in Europe also reveal that the link between working conditions and mental health among immigrants and refugees is more negative than in host communities (Herold et al., 2024). These findings remind us that brain waste is not only an economic loss but also a public health issue.

Regulated Professions and Recognition Regimes

At the forefront of the institutional layers that fuel brain drain are qualification recognition and professional regulation. The EU's Directive 2005/36/EC on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications established a common framework to accelerate recognition among member states; with consolidations made through 2024, this regulation aims to minimize bureaucratic differences that hinder mobility (EU, 2005/36/EC). The accompanying

2023 Commission Recommendation proposed additional steps to facilitate the recognition of third-country nationals' qualifications, highlighting the demotivating effect of complex/slow processes on applications (European Commission, 2023). This regulatory framework aligns with the broader "talent attraction and retention" strategy of the 2023 European Year of Skills initiative (European Commission, 2023).

Theoretical Framework: The Convergence Point of Deconstruction and Thematic Coding

The Critical Lens of Deconstruction

In this study, interview texts will be analyzed through a deconstructive reading inspired by Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction traces the binaries that carry concepts (host/guest, native/foreign, quality/document, merit/suitability) within the text, revealing the "remnants" and cracks in the discourse; it follows the return of what the text leaves out while constructing itself. In the literature on organizational studies, Kilduff's (1993) pioneering contribution shows how deconstruction can expose the implicit ideological presuppositions in fundamental texts, while in geography, Barnett (2005) revisits the tension between hospitality and hostility as an ethical policy question along the Levinas/Derrida line. The current theoretical summary of Derrida readings links the tension between the deferral of meaning (*différance*) and the opening and closing of institutional boundaries to the "guest" to everyday administrative practices, as indicated by new issues discussing the possibility of democracy and the aporetic relationship between "absolute hospitality" and conditional laws (Herzog, 2024; Barnett, 2005; Kilduff, 1993).

This lens allows us to reverse the hierarchy between "qualification" and "document" that is often taken for granted. The document (credential) is not only proof of knowledge/skill but also an instrument of social closure; qualification recognition regimes and licensing processes establish invisible thresholds regarding who will be admitted as a "guest." Therefore, deconstruction questions the innocent neutrality of credentials; the concept of "hostipitality," which reveals the intertwining of hospitality and hostility, also opens up the ethical-political dimension of professional regulations for discussion.

Transferability of Human Capital, Social Closure, and Segmentation

The "discounting" of migrants' human capital in the host market is a long-standing debate in both economics and sociology. Recent theoretical syntheses show that transferability is more explanatory when considered alongside educational signals, language proficiency, and institutional recognition processes (Cantalini, Guetto, & Panichella, 2023; special issues of the *International Migration Review* and recent articles in the). Long-term assessments at the European level emphasize that the ways in which internal/external migrants integrate into the labor market within the EU's common market remain sensitive to institutional differences, and that singular "integration" models are insufficient (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021).

Theories of social closure and credentialism argue that credentials are not only a symbol of individual achievement but also a means of controlling entry into professions. This theoretical framework allows us to understand how diplomas/licenses can reproduce power asymmetries between "guests" and "hosts" in the labor market (Araki & Kariya, 2022). In parallel, segmentation theory—particularly the concentration of migrant labor in the secondary sector and the blockage of upward mobility channels—brings to mind the structural dimension of brain waste (Kesici, 2021).

Language, Networks, and Discrimination: Intersecting Mechanisms

The benefits of the host country's language extend beyond wages to access to "gateways to professions"; when language, certification, and networks interact, it has been shown that migrants who find work through social networks face an increased risk of overqualification (Leschke & Weiss, 2020). Field experiments and meta-analytic syntheses confirm the persistent role of discrimination—even among equally qualified candidates—in the invitation/hiring phase (Lancee, 2019; Quillian et al., 2017). This triple mechanism (language–network–discrimination) indicates that brain waste should be understood not as an "individual adaptation defect" but as a result produced by textual/discursive hierarchies and institutional thresholds. From a policy perspective, recent theoretical work on the EU's responses to the Syrian and Ukrainian humanitarian crises argues that security and identity frames generate a xenophobic double standard, in which some refugee groups are constructed as culturally proximate and "deserving," while others are kept in a permanently suspect position (Uygur & Eser, 2024). Such discursive hierarchies help institutionalize the very foreignness/belonging dichotomies that later reappear in hiring practices, credential recognition regimes, and the everyday production of brain waste.

Health and Subjective Well-Being Dimension

The health literature highlights the link between status incongruence and mental health. A prospective registry study in Sweden found that overqualification increases the risk of hospitalization for psychiatric and somatic illnesses (Brendler-Lindqvist et al., 2022). European-scale systematic reviews emphasize that the relationship

between migrants' working conditions and mental health is even more critical for those with refugee/asylum seeker status (Herold et al., 2024). Thus, brain waste becomes a debate about the fairness of life chances beyond economic/institutional arbitrariness.

The Coexistence of Thematic Coding and Deconstruction

In qualitative research methods, thematic analysis is a widespread and flexible approach due to its power to systematically reveal patterns of meaning in the data. Braun and Clarke's contemporary "reflexive" thematic analysis framework makes the researcher's position and interpretive decisions visible; thus, it intersects with the "deconstruction of dualities" call of deconstructive reading (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This convergence allows us to trace how dualities such as quality/document, merit/suitability, native/foreign are constructed in texts (interviews) at the level of thematic patterns, while also capturing the deferred meanings and cracks within the text itself.

Conceptual Matching Table (Theory–Analytical Focus–Field Application)

Theoretical approach	Main Concept/Claim	Connection to Brain Waste	Analytical Question in this Study
Deconstruction (Derrida)	Deconstruction of binaries; <i>différance</i> ; hospitality/condition	How the dichotomies of "quality/document," "native/foreign," and "host/guest" are constructed in the language of the interviews and where they clash	Which metaphors do participants use to describe "not being recognized"? Which narrative moves legitimize or reject suitability/merit? (Kilduff, 1993; Barnett, 2005; Herzog, 2024).
Human capital transferability	Language proficiency, education in the host country, work experience	The signaling effect of language and host country education that reduces the "discount"; role in entry thresholds	How do recognition, language, and host country education narratives work in participants' career transitions? (Ochmann, 2024; Tibajev & Hellgren, 2019).
Social closure / credentialism	Credentials are a means of controlling entry into the profession	Exclusion through credential/licensing regimes in regulated professions	Which "threshold" experiences come to the fore when describing credential/licensing processes? (Araki & Kariya, 2022; EU 2005/36/EC; EC 2023 Recommendation).
Segmentation	The concentration of migrant labor in the secondary sector	The "lock-in" effect of social networks and the excessive qualification of ethnic niches	Networks or institutions? How do participants describe this "lock-in"? (Leschke & Weiss, 2020; Kesici, 2021).
Discrimination	Different treatment for equal qualifications	The "invisible hand" perpetuating brain waste	How do linguistic traces of discrimination emerge in interviews? (Quillian et al., 2017; Lancee, 2019).
Health/well-being	Status mismatch–mental health link	Overqualification → increased psychiatric/somatic risk	Narratives of "fatigue" and "burnout"; how are coping strategies labeled? (Brendler-Lindqvist et al., 2022; Herold et al., 2024).

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Theoretical Basis of the Research Questions

This framework informs the study's fundamental questions: (i) How do participants' experiences of brain waste construct and disrupt the dichotomies of quality/documentation and local/foreign through which narrative strategies? (ii) How do language proficiency, education in the host country, and formal recognition processes constitute a "threshold regime" in career transitions? (iii) How do social networks, segmentation, and the cycle of discrimination shape participants' paths to finding work and advancing in their careers? (iv) What traces do these experiences leave on mental health and subjective well-being?

Based on the answers to these questions, we argue that brain waste is produced by institutional thresholds and discursive hierarchies rather than individual shortcomings, and therefore requires public interventions such as simplifying recognition regimes, expanding language support, and strengthening anti-discrimination mechanisms. (EU 2005/36/EC; EC, 2023 Recommendation; European Year of Skills initiative).

METHOD

Research Design and Epistemological Positioning

This study examines brain waste (the mismatch between qualifications and employment) from an interpretive perspective, using a qualitative design based on in-depth interviews. The analysis consists of two layers: (i) thematic analysis is used to reveal recurring patterns of meaning in the interview texts; (ii) deconstructive reading investigates how dualities (e.g., qualification/document, local/foreign) are constructed in the texts and where they break down. Reporting and methodological transparency are structured according to COREQ (Consolidated criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) and SRQR standards; care has been taken to clearly document design decisions throughout the study (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007; O'Brien et al., 2014).

Deconstruction is positioned in this study as a way of approaching the text with a "suspicious friendship": it traces how discourse constructs itself, which voices it includes and which it leaves "behind," and which binaries it uses to make sense. The methodological use of deconstruction in organizational studies has been demonstrated through the analysis of both founding texts (Kilduff, 1993) and organizational narratives (Boje, 1995); and there is also a critical line of inquiry into how categories of difference are constructed and legitimized in management discourses (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). This study adapts this body of work to understand the recognition of migrants' qualifications and their experiences of professional thresholds.

Sample and Data Collection

The data source consists of semi-structured in-depth interviews with 14 adult participants living in Lithuania and having different employment/residence statuses. Participants were selected through purposive sampling; the sample composition was designed to ensure diversity (sector, field of education, reason for migration, length of stay) that would differentiate institutional thresholds (language, document recognition, licensing, networks) that could lead to brain waste. The interviews were conducted online and/or face-to-face under conditions that prioritized participant privacy and comfort; the interview guide covered qualification recognition processes in the host country, entry channels into employment, experiences of advancement/barriers at work, and subjective well-being dimensions. The rationale for the sample size was based on the principle of "information power"; the focus of the research questions, the richness of the sample in terms of experience, and the depth objective of the analytical strategy, as well as the understanding of satisfaction (conceptual and semantic), determined the sample size (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016; Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2016; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Data Production. Interviews were conducted by the researcher, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. In preparation for analysis, transcripts were read several times; initial notes (analytical memos) focused on the interview context, affect, and potential dichotomies. During the reporting phase, sample and process details were reviewed according to the COREQ and SRQR checklists (Tong et al., 2007; O'Brien et al., 2014).

Ethical Principles and Data Protection

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Measures such as anonymization (pseudonymization), file encryption, and access restrictions were implemented. The research was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, EU 2016/679) regarding the processing of personal data; and the purpose of data processing, storage period, and rights (access/correction/deletion) were clearly communicated to participants (World Medical Association, 2013; European Union, 2016/679).

Analytical Approach: Integration of Thematic Analysis and Deconstruction

The first layer of the analysis is thematic analysis: the researcher reread the data repeatedly to become familiar with it; using an inductive coding strategy, they marked segments that embodied both the emic concepts of the experience and the institutional filters (language, document, license). Codes were combined to form candidate themes; themes were revised based on criteria of internal consistency (coherence of meaning within the theme) and external differentiation (clarity of connections between themes). The thematic framework was structured to be presented with quotation–comment pairs in line with the principles of transparency and traceability required by reporting standards (O'Brien et al., 2014; Tong et al., 2007; see also Mays & Pope, 2000).

The second layer is deconstructive reading. Here, the text is reread in terms of how binaries are established and where they are disrupted. The researcher examines the rhetorical moves that determine opposition matrices (e.g., quality/document; native/foreign; suitability/merit), trace and supplement figures, regimes of presence/absence, and rhetorical moves that determine tensions between hospitality and envy (e.g., conditional acceptances, metaphors of the border, narratives of "law" called regulation). This reading draws inspiration from texts that develop deconstruction practices in organizational studies and discourse theory (Kilduff, 1993; Boje, 1995; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). In this way, the thematic view opens up the cracks and deferred meanings of the

text, revealing the power relations within institutional thresholds (recognition, licensing, language requirements) that are considered natural on the surface.

The Coding Process, Researcher Positioning, and Analytical Robustness

The coding process was conducted not as a one-time "assessment" but as a cyclical series of interpretation and comparison. The researcher produced analytical memos at each stage, continuously comparing themes and dichotomies; code definitions and inclusion/exclusion criteria were recorded in the "living document" of the code book. Reflexivity was systematically employed, particularly in a normatively charged field such as migration, labor, and recognition, to make visible the impact of the researcher's position (field experience, linguistic ability, institutional knowledge) on interpretation. To this end, brief reflexive audit notes were kept and sources of bias were explicitly tracked (Berger, 2015; Mays & Pope, 2000). Statistical reliability measures such as inter-researcher kappa were not used, as they are not appropriate for the nature of the reflexive thematic analysis approach; Instead, credibility was enhanced through peer debriefing, negative example seeking, and the chain of evidence (quote–interpretation–theme) (O'Brien et al., 2014; Tong et al., 2007; Mays & Pope, 2000).

Saturation and Sample Power. The current literature on saturation distinguishes between "hearing the code" and "understanding the meaning"; coding saturation occurs earlier, while semantic saturation occurs later. This study is justified by the number of interviews based on information power and semantic saturation criteria, as it targets not only the scope but also the semantic depth of the themes (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2016; Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). Furthermore, in line with assessments emphasizing the contextual and purpose-related nature of saturation, the sample size was guided by the principle of analytical adequacy rather than a predetermined fixed threshold (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Mays & Pope, 2000).

Reporting, Reliability, and Transferability Standards

Findings were reported in accordance with SRQR and COREQ items; the sample, context, researcher–participant relationship, data generation, analysis steps, and supporting quotations for themes were clearly presented. Evidence chains and discussion of negative examples were provided for reliability; detailed descriptions of context and sample characteristics were provided for transferability; and inter-source consistency and internal/external control readings were provided for robustness (O'Brien et al., 2014; Tong et al., 2007; Mays & Pope, 2000).

Data Protection and Storage. De-identified transcripts and analytical notes were stored in an encrypted version control repository; access was restricted according to the principle of least privilege. After the research is completed, raw records that may contain personal data will be destroyed in accordance with the GDPR's principles of purpose limitation and storage period (Regulation (EU) 2016/679).

Table 1. Research Flow and Evidence Standards (Summary)

Stage	Purpose	Implementation	Evidence/Standard
Design	Appropriate quality design and ethical framework	Semi-structured interviews; Helsinki and GDPR compliance	WMA (2013); GDPR (2016/679)
Sample	Information power and diversity	Purposive sampling; n=14	Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, (2016)
Data generation	Deep and secure data	Audio recording, verbatim transcription	SRQR/COREQ reporting
Coding	Uncovering meaning patterns	Inductive coding, memo and comparison cycles	O'Brien et al. (2014); Mays & Pope (2000)
Thematization	Internal consistency/external divergence	Candidate theme → revision → reporting	SRQR, COREQ
Deconstruction	Deconstruction of dualities	Contrast matrices; "trace" and "complementary" figures	Kilduff (1993); Boje (1995); Zanoni & Janssens (2004)
Reliability	Credibility and traceability	Chain of evidence; cross-reading; negative example	Mays & Pope (2000); SRQR

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METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS AND PRECAUTIONS

As a qualitative study conducted within the context of a single country, it does not claim generalizability; transferability is supported by a detailed description of the context and a chain of evidence for the themes. The possibility of self-selection was balanced by diversity in the sampling strategy and the search for counterexamples.

Reflexivity notes and co-reading sessions were used to make researcher influence visible and prevent interpretations from becoming "monolithic" (Berger, 2015; Mays & Pope, 2000).

FINDINGS

This section presents a thematic analysis of the qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews alongside a deconstructive reading. The findings proceed without disrupting the flow of the narratives, but with tables and quotations where necessary. The themes are read not merely as "categories," but as traces of the threshold experiences that participants constructed, broke, and reconstructed in their everyday language.

Thematic Analysis: Mapping Quality–Employment Thresholds

The interviews revealed that brain drain is concentrated along five main axes: (i) sub-qualification employment and wasted talent, (ii) the threshold effect of the language–recognition–license triad, (iii) the conflict between the expected/promised and the encountered, (iv) tensions between belonging and othering, (v) mental health and coping strategies. Transitions between themes are intuitively interlinked in most narratives: the language threshold affects recognition processes; delays in recognition lead to sub-qualification employment; sub-qualification employment affects belonging and mental health.

Table 2. Themes, Analytical Definitions, and Representative Excerpts (Anonymized)

Theme	Analytical Definition	Representative Quote (Participant, Country/Field)	Analytical Note
Sub-qualification employment	Orientation towards "secondary" jobs that are not compatible with higher education/expertise; underutilization of skills	"No one asked for my diploma; it was as if my past had been erased. I carried trays for a while; when I came home in the evening, I counted the gap between what I was capable of and what I was doing." (Ukraine, AI manager → service)	The disconnect between competence and actual work erodes self-worth; the fear of skill "freezing" was frequently mentioned.
Language–recognition–license threshold	Host country language proficiency, document recognition, and licensing determine entry points for regulated professions	"Engineering job postings said 'B2 Lithuanian.' I didn't even apply. It was like 'no language, no qualifications.'" (Nigeria, telecom engineer → student/freelancer)	Certificates are not innocent: language/license requirements either make or break the signal of qualification.
Expectation–reality gap	The contradiction between the promise of arrival in the country and the reality of the labor market; disappointment	"I thought it would be easier to enter the European system; I thought 'my experience speaks for itself.' Turns out you need flawless 'local experience.'" (Nigeria, physician/academic)	The "silent conditions of meritocracy": the 'native experience' standard is in effect, visibly or invisibly.
Belonging/othering	The oscillation between feeling "foreign" at work and in daily life; the feeling of being included/excluded	"It seemed strange to be asked for a photo with my CV; as if appearance speaks first, then qualifications." (Return to Lithuania, public health management)	Identity markers (name, accent, photo) function as threshold labels ; the line between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.
Mental health and coping	Chronic uncertainty, downward job mobility, and the emotional effects of rejection; resilience and reorientation	"Most applications went unanswered; I lost sleep for a while, my hair fell out. Then I learned to look for 'small victories'." (Georgia, physician → aesthetic entrepreneurship)	Status mismatch produces narratives of intense anxiety and burnout; entrepreneurship and retraining as coping strategies.

Source: Created by Authors

This thematic picture suggests that participants gathered around the "threshold experience": on one side, qualifications shaped by education/experience; on the other, doors built by language–recognition–licensing requirements. Those who cannot pass through the gate gravitate toward sub-qualification jobs; even when they pass, a label remains on their identity: accent, photograph, diploma geography. The qualification–employment match is not merely a "technical" equation, but an ethical-political regime of recognition.

Code Patterns and Co-Formation: The Shadow of "Language" and "Document"

The node that left the most intense mark in the coding was the joint mention of language and document/license. Language deficiency did not occur in isolation but co-occurred with recognition delays and licensing barriers; this triad is particularly binding in regulated professions such as health, education, and law. The following co-occurrence matrix summarizes how the themes "triggered" each other (as an indicator of intensity).

Table 3. Code Co-Occurrence Matrix (intensity: ●●● high – ●● medium – ● low)

	Language	Document/license	Social network	Traces of discrimination	Mental health	Reorientation
Language	—	●●●	●●	●●	●●●	●●
Document/license	●●●	—	●	●●	●●	●
Social network	●●	●	—	●	●	●●
Traces of discrimination	●●	●●	●	—	●●	●
Mental health	●●●	●●	●	●●	—	●●
Reorientation (entrepreneurship/retraining)	●●	●	●●	●	●●	—

Source: Created by Authors

The darkest cell in the matrix is the language ↔ document/license axis: for most participants, "learning the language" is not just about communication, but about gaining literacy in the document. A doctor describes the gap between knowledge and legal language by saying, "I know clinical English, but the door opens with Lithuanian"; an engineer suggests that the language of application comes before technical skills by saying, "If you can't get past the language of the announcement, you can't express yourself." It is also noteworthy that co-occurrence is bidirectional with mental health: as language/recognition barriers lengthen, insomnia, high anxiety, and narratives of low self-worth intensify; conversely, even a small acceptance (e.g., a short internship, a scholarship for a language course) strengthens the feeling of "finding direction" in the narrative. This pattern is echoed by study results documenting the "invisible hand" of persistent disadvantages in the hiring phase (Quillian et al., 2017).

In-Depth Explorations within the Theme and Field Vignettes

Substandard Employment. This theme was not only about the level of "work done"; it also shaped the sense of time. One participant expressed the fear of skill decay, saying, "Every day I don't use my profession, what I learned yesterday fades a little more." Another said, "The language of my diploma hasn't opened up here in any way" (); "opening up" is a metaphor for making the document readable in the host regime. These narratives show that sub-qualification employment has become a "chronic waiting" state and that waiting erodes the sense of self-worth. The intersection of brain drain and health is linked to the triad of "fatigue – insomnia – withdrawal"; this intersection parallels findings that excessive qualification increases psychiatric and somatic risks (Brendler-Lindqvist, Tondel, Helgesson, Nordqvist, & Svartengren, 2022).

Language Proficiency Threshold. Thresholds such as licensing in healthcare, teaching qualifications in education, and language requirements in the public sector appear in narratives as a "call to law": The phrase "that's how the system works" is often a limiting statement. In contrast, there are also narratives emphasizing that a "breathing space" has emerged in companies in the private sector that use English for internal communication; one participant, who said, "I didn't feel the need to mask my accent in the global team," pointed to the role of corporate language architecture in reducing brain waste. The cost and continuity of access to language courses were a bottleneck, especially for newcomers; free/subsidized courses were coded as "knot-untanglers" in the narratives.

Expectation–Encounter Tension. The assumption that "experience speaks" often evolved into "local experience speaks." A physician-academic said, "My expectation was that my experience would open doors; in reality, I had to start over 'here.'" Over time, this tension transformed into reorientation strategies (master's degree, short certificates, field change, entrepreneurship). The phrase "one offer makes you forget all the rejections" shows how micro-successes became a "moral anchor" in the narratives.

Belonging/Othering. Requests for photos in job applications and accented speech triggering feelings of "foreignness" in initial interactions were described as threshold markers. One returnee said, "In the UK, the anonymity of CVs was replaced here by the question, 'Who are you?'" On the other hand, minority solidarity networks (fellow countrymen, students, diaspora) opened up micro-belonging spaces; while these networks sometimes had a locking-in effect on secondary sectors (Leschke & Weiss, 2020), they sometimes served as a steppingstone to the first job. Social-psychological evidence from non-WEIRD contexts shows how these dynamics are mirrored at the level of values and emotions: in Turkey, stronger endorsement of multicultural values is associated with lower xenophobia and reduced social distance toward Syrian refugees, even among groups who perceive both realistic and symbolic threats (Uygur et al., 2024). This suggests that the emotional climate and value

orientations surrounding diversity can either reinforce the boundaries of “strangerhood” or help to soften them in workplaces, neighborhoods, and institutions similar to those described in our Lithuanian narratives.

Mental Health and Coping. Anxiety narratives were high: “Unanswered CVs,” “double shift: applying during the day, thinking at night,” “writing yourself like evidence”... This burden was alleviated by small victories (internships, short contracts, scholarships, positive feedback) and new directions (changing fields, entrepreneurship). “Entrepreneurship was coded as ‘skipping the waiting room’; micro-entrepreneurship, especially in aesthetic health and digital services, provided both economic and psychological autonomy.

Deconstructive Reading: The Dismantling of Dualities and Moments of Rupture

The dualities resonating within the themes are both established and fractured in the language of the interviews. A deconstructive reading allows us to look into these fractures.

“Qualification/Document.” Qualification appears in the narratives as “what I can do”; document as “what I can say.” The participant who says, “My diploma doesn’t speak here,” describes the silence of the document in the host regime. When this silence is made to speak through courses/internships/local references, the dichotomy shifts: “The short certificate I earned here ‘translates’ my past.” Thus, the document functions not only as a validator but also as a translator; the textual nature of “competence” becomes visible.

“Native/Foreign.” This duality is established in the visual and auditory traces of the first contact (name, photo, accent). A returnee admits moments when “the native name made things easier”; a foreigner says “the native-foreign distinction melted away in the global team.” The dichotomy begins to unravel through practices such as corporate language architecture (English internal communication) and anonymous applications: “Only skills spoke in the first meeting.” This is a relaxation of the conditions of hospitality.

“Existence / Non-existence.” The most striking gap lies between the existence of competence and the absence of recognition. The statement “I have knowledge, but it has no name here” reveals that non-existence is actually an institutional reading. A short-term internship or an open-ended job interview is a textual move that turns “nothing” into “something”; presence is invented within the language of the application form and the text of the interview.

“Center/Periphery.” In public sector jobs, language/citizenship thresholds are areas where access to the “center” is defined by law. In the multinational island-spaces of the private sector, however, the “periphery” is moved to the center. One participant explains the difference between “being a team leader in an international company without knowing Lithuanian” and “having a language requirement even at the reception desk in a local SME.” The dichotomy is reversed when the institutional space changes.

These fractures show that dualities are not “natural” but institutional-textual; therefore, they are changeable. Even small textual moves such as making language courses free, speeding up recognition processes, anonymous applications, and internal communication in English can turn “nothing” into “something” and “stranger” into “colleague.” The invisible thresholds indicated by compilations documenting permanent disadvantages in hiring (Quillian et al., 2017) become visible in this field; findings showing the lock-in effect of social networks on the secondary sector (Leschke & Weiss, 2020) can also be read as an affiliation strategy in interview language: “First, I’ll secure a position; then I’ll let my diploma speak for itself.”

Intra-Theme and Inter-Theme Patterns: a Process-Based Model

In the chronology of the narratives, brain waste often followed this processual pattern:

Emergence and Promise: The expectation that “the diploma speaks / experience speaks.”

Encountering the Threshold: Language–recognition–license; “the language of the ad,” “the silence of the document,” “the visual/auditory label of the first contact.”

Adaptation and Waiting: Substandard employment, intense applications, unanswered CVs; crushing self-worth.

Micro-Break: Internship/short contract/scholarship course; a small acceptance creates “readability.”

Reorientation: Certification, field change, entrepreneurship; pieces of belonging shift.

Stay/Leave Decision: A new balance between belonging and opportunity.

Each step in this flow calls to mind a duality: “competence/suitability,” “host/guest,” “present/absent.” As the words change, so too can the threshold. It is precisely here that deconstructive reading translates into the language of policy: “loosening the condition,” “simplifying the text,” “removing the photograph,” “supporting the language”...

Table 4. Theme–Example–Break Triad (with Field Vignettes)

Theme	Short Vignette (Anonymized)	Moment of Rupture	Next Move
Substandard employment	Artificial intelligence manager's concern about “idleness” while working as service personnel	Scholarship language course + short-term internship	Interview for AI Product Associate

Language recognition license	Physician-academician, bachelor's degree requirement and B2 language requirement	Clinical-outside role in a private hospital with internal English communication	Clinical Lithuanian course + equivalency process
Expectation–reality	Telecom engineer not applying due to the language of the job posting	Entrepreneurship course + micro grants	Prototype in the technopark
Belonging/othering	Returnee-migrant, photo CV, and accented first contacts	Company with an anonymous application system	Rapid role expansion within the team
Mental health/coping	High rejection/non-response rates; sleep issues	Short contract + mentorship	Establishing routines; "small victories" ritual

Source: Created by Authors

The impression that the language–recognition–licensing knot we see in the field creates a permanent disadvantage in the hiring phase is parallel to multi-country field experiments and meta-analyses; even under equal qualification conditions, the lower call rates for candidates of migrant origin confirm the effect of "threshold labels" (Quillian et al., 2017). Similarly, the lock-in effect of social networks on entry into secondary sectors has been demonstrated in intra-EU mobility (Leschke & Weiss, 2020). Mental health narratives are consistent with findings that overqualification increases psychiatric/somatic risks (Brendler-Lindqvist et al., 2022). These comparisons suggest that the themes in the field are linked to broader patterns rather than idiosyncratic ones.

DISCUSSION

This discussion examines the threshold experiences revealed by narratives gathered from the field, placing them alongside contemporary empirical and theoretical literature. The aim is not merely to "validate" the findings, but to broaden their horizon of meaning: how language, documentation/licensing, and regulations either make "quality" visible or obscure it; how social networks are sometimes a support and sometimes a barrier; the psychosocial burden of discrimination and status mismatch; and how all of this points to the fragility of dualities in a Derridean reading.

The "Threshold Regime" of the Language–Recognition–License Triad: From Transferability to Signal

The knot that emerges in the field—language proficiency, document recognition, and licensing—shows that the transferability of human capital is not merely an economic "efficiency" issue; it is an economy of signal and legitimacy. Qualifications gain value when they become readable within the host country's language and document regimes; otherwise, the same qualifications are recorded as "non-existent." This sheds new light on the debate over whether migrant education–employment mismatch is "apparent or real": Leading studies based on European data show that measured rates of overqualification are strongly influenced by language proficiency, education quality, and skill transferability; indeed, differences between immigrants and locals in high-level cognitive skills can disappear (Prokic-Breuer & McManus, 2016).

At this point, credential recognition itself functions as a political text that leads the individual to the "right door." In Sweden, the official recognition of foreign higher education diplomas has been shown to increase newcomers' employment prospects and earnings (Tibajev & Hellgren, 2019). Employer-focused survey-experiment designs confirm that the presence of official recognition information on a resume significantly increases the likelihood of being invited to qualified jobs (Damelang, Ebensperger & Stampf, 2020). When these two findings are read together, it becomes clear that the document is not only proof but also a translation tool—that is, it translates "competence" into the language of employers and institutions. The turning point described by actors in the field as "my diploma doesn't speak / my certificate translates my background" is precisely the tangible manifestation of this signaling effect.

Regarding the language dimension: both classical and contemporary economics-sociology literature consistently demonstrates the impact of language proficiency on employment and earnings (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 2002). Comments in the field that "the language of the advertisement is the gateway" are a micro-level echo of these findings: the advertisement's language must be overcome before the job description can be read; therefore, the lack of language support is not a simple "skill gap" but a law-like threshold (e.g., public language requirements). It is no coincidence that when the temporal and financial nature of access to language courses changed, the "micro-breaks" (internship, short contract, first invitation) described by participants increased. (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 2002).

The Dual Nature of Social Networks: Support and Exclusion

Social networks are one of the oldest ways to find work; however, accounts from the field reveal that networks have two sides: on the one hand, they are a springboard for entering the job market, and on the other, they carry the risk of locking people into secondary sectors. An analysis based on multi-country data shows that, particularly among recent migrants from Central and Eastern Europe, finding work through networks can increase the risk of overqualification; language proficiency and sector segmentation accentuate this relationship (Leschke & Weiss, 2020). The participants' reflex of "first get a foothold somewhere, then use my degree" dramatically illustrates this empirical finding: the initial foothold sometimes accelerates the transition to a profession; sometimes it locks it in. The key to this lock is often again the language–recognition–license triad; networks buy the time needed to cross the threshold, but they do not erode the threshold itself.

The "Invisible" but Persistent Pull of Discrimination

Frequently encountered initial contact elements in the field, such as "accent," "name," and "photo," remind us how discrimination can operate at the first threshold. Multi-country field experiments and meta-analyses that have marked the last decade have documented that even among equally qualified candidates, minority/immigrant candidates have lower call rates, and this disadvantage shows no sign of diminishing over time (Quillian et al., 2017). The observation that "anonymous application/photo-free CV" practices in the field provide some relief is consistent with the mixed but eye-opening findings of blind hiring experiments: while some trials show short-term improvements, a large-scale trial in France, for example, found that companies called fewer minority candidates when they received anonymous resumes (Behaghel, Crépon, & Le Barbanchon, 2015). These findings underscore that policy interventions are not a "silver bullet"; they emphasize the simultaneous importance of design, implementation context, and monitoring.

Status Incongruity and Well-Being: The Cost of the Waiting Room

Participants' intense narratives of "sleeplessness," "fatigue," and "writing oneself into evidence" point to a strong link between status incongruity and mental/physical health. A prospective study following immigrant university graduates in Sweden showed that overqualification increases the risk of hospitalization due to psychiatric and somatic illnesses (Brendler-Lindqvist, Tondel, Helgesson, Nordqvist, & Svartengren, 2022). These findings also explain why "small victories" in our field have a disproportionate moral impact: micro-acceptance (short contracts, internships, positive feedback) is not only economic progress but also the reproduction of everyday resilience.

Motivation Patterns Vary by Field and Generation

The findings highlight different threshold architectures between regulated professions (e.g., healthcare, education, law) and the multinational private sector: in the former, language/licensing is the legal threshold; in the latter, English internal communication and project-based references lower the threshold. European aggregate data show that human capital acquired in the host country (language, education, experience) yields higher returns in terms of job quality and access to professions; investing in host capital accelerates professional outcomes, especially for refugees and students (Zwysen, 2019; Brell, Dustmann, & Preston, 2020). The insistence on "local experience" in the field is consistent with this channel: local experience is not only proof of skill but also a sign of trust on the risk map of institutions.

Generational effects are also noteworthy. New studies focusing on the second generation suggest that, despite educational achievements, the risk of overqualification can be persistent in some contexts; this is thought to be a process intertwined not only with human capital but also with regimes of recognition (Kim, 2024). Narratives of belonging and othering in the field reveal the everyday faces of this risk of continuity.

Reconciling "Apparent" and "Real" Mismatch: From Measurement to Text

It is necessary to distinguish between the discrepancy that is "apparent" and the discrepancy that actually stems from entry/advancement thresholds. European data shows that in groups with high cognitive competence, the excessive skill gap between immigrants and locals can disappear; the gap is fed more by language, education quality, and transferability limitations (Prokic-Breuer & McManus, 2016). On the other hand, the deterrent effect of recognition and licensing information in the eyes of employers is clearly resolved when it is explicitly stated on the resume (Damelang, Ebensperger & Stampf, 2020). Field narratives bring these two lines together: when "the language of the diploma is opened" (local certification/equivalence), the mismatch narrows with a "textual" move. Therefore, brain drain is not only a measured phenomenon but also a read and named one. s

Deconstructive Reading: The Flexibility of Binaries

A Derridian thread offers two contributions to this picture. The first is a warning that the dualities of "quality/document," "native/foreign," and "existence/non-existence" are not natural orders but institutional-textual setups. In field narratives, the "silence" of the document and the translation function of a small internship/certificate is a textual intervention that turns "absence" into "presence." The second is conditional hospitality: language, document, and license requirements are the conditions that determine how the door opens and closes. When the design of these conditions changes—for example, the acceleration of recognition processes, the spread of blind application as the first contact, the strategic use of English communication within institutions—the dichotomies loosen; the "foreigner" becomes a "colleague." This translation has already begun with micro-fractures in the field; the literature has made the macro-consequences of these micro-moves visible (Tibajev & Hellgren, 2019; Leschke & Weiss, 2020; Quillian et al., 2017).

Conceptual Map: From Micro-Narratives to System Dynamics

The following summary aligns the primary mechanisms where findings intersect with the literature according to recruitment and advancement stages:

Table 5. Mechanism–Field Finding–Literature–Interpretation (Summary)

Stage	Mechanism	Field Finding (Summary)	Literature Support	Interpretation
First threshold (application)	Language proficiency	The language of the advertisement is not "readable"	Dustmann & Fabbri (2003); Chiswick & Miller (2002)	Language is a condition for the visibility of skills; without support, the threshold remains fixed.
First threshold (application)	Blind application/anonymous CV	When visual/auditory labels are disabled, invitations may increase in some areas; results are context-sensitive	Behaghel, Crépon, & Le Barbanchon (2015)	Design and context are crucial; monitoring and evaluation are required.
Introduction	Recognition (equivalence)	Recognition information increases the likelihood of engagement	Damelang, Ebensperger & Stampf, (2020)	The signal effect is clear: the "translation" power of the document.
Introduction/Progress	Licensing/regulation	Health, education, public sector, etc. fields are opening up with a door-opening threshold	(EU professional qualifications directive context; also field)	The threshold can be relaxed as the design changes.
Progress	Host capital (local education/experience)	"Local experience" is becoming a mark of trust	Zwysen (2019); Brell, Dustmann, & Preston (2020)	Host capital is a channel for career advancement.
Side effect	Social networks	Support for initial entry into the workforce; long-term segmentation risk	Leschke & Weiss (2020)	The fine line between "retention" and "lock-in."
All stages	Discrimination	The disadvantage of being called upon for equal qualifications persists	Quillian et al. (2017)	Text and design interventions are needed for equality.
Well-being	Health/well-being	Status mismatch → psychological/somatic risk	Brendler-Lindqvist et al. (2022)	The health cost of the waiting room.

Source: Created by Authors

Synthesis: From the “Waiting Room” to “Collegiality”

Ultimately, the field narratives suggest a process model: promise → threshold → waiting → micro-break → reorientation → settlement/departure. The literature confirms the mechanisms corresponding to each link in this chain: the signaling effect of language and recognition (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Tibajev & Hellgren, 2019), the ambivalence of social networks (Leschke & Weiss, 2020), the persistence of discrimination (Quillian et al., 2017), the returns on investment in host capital (Zwysen, 2019; Brell et al., 2020), and the health costs of status mismatch (Brendler-Lindqvist et al., 2022). This table shows that brain waste is not inevitable; it is the product of a designable threshold regime. When the “conditions” (language, recognition, licensing, hiring texts) change, the “dualities” also change. Competence thus becomes less about merit and more about readability and legitimacy—which ethically calls us to recognition justice; practically, it calls us to text and process design.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the thresholds encountered by qualified immigrants in their entry and advancement processes in the labor market—language, documentation/equivalence, and licensing—are not merely technical requirements, but textual and institutional designs that determine the readability of competence. Competence appears not as a fixed “essence” of the measured skill, but rather as a meaning economy that gains legitimacy in the language of job advertisements, the signs of resumes, the rituals of interviews, and the lines of recognition documents. Therefore, “brain waste” is not simply a matter of mismatch; it is the social consequence of an unreadable (or mistranslated) qualification text. This perspective is consistent with findings pointing to the risk of permanent overqualification among migrants at the European level and allows us to explain the impact of recognition/language investments on job quality through a signaling mechanism (OECD & European Commission, 2023).

Another methodological implication is that the ***“small breaks”** (short-term internships, subsidized language courses, accelerated equivalency) that repeatedly appear in narrative accounts bridge macro outcomes: the visibility of recognition information in resumes increases the likelihood of being called; language support enables candidates to “pass the language barrier” of job postings; and the transparency of licensing processes opens doors in regulated professions. As employer-based empirical evidence shows, official recognition information alone significantly increases the likelihood of being invited to an interview; this confirms that competence must not only be demonstrated but also translated (Damelang, Ebensperger & Stampf, 2020).

The dual nature of social networks—support and confinement—was clearly visible in the field. Networks that provide initial attachment can lead to the risk of lock-in to secondary sectors if language and recognition thresholds are not simultaneously relaxed. This finding parallels quantitative analyses that have identified a higher likelihood of overqualification in network-based job search within European mobility. The solution is not to exclude networks; it lies in matching network support with institutional translation mechanisms (language-equivalence-mentoring) (Leschke & Weiss, 2020).

Narratives showing that the “first contact” (name, photo, accent) sometimes becomes a threshold label that produces inequality presented a picture consistent with the persistent recall disadvantage revealed by multi-country field experiments. The context-sensitive effects of blind/anonymous applications suggest that a single technical solution is insufficient; recruitment texts, panel compositions, evaluation language, and monitoring-evaluation must be designed together. The systematic rollout of evidence-based hiring designs could replace the codes of “otherness” and “risk” with evidence of competence and fitness for the job metrics (Quillian et al., 2017).

The health dimension made the cost of the waiting room visible: status mismatch is not only a loss of income and status, but also an increase in mental and physical risks. This study suggests that the burden perceived at the narrative level as “sleeplessness,” “exhaustion,” and “withdrawal” aligns with the hospital admission risks observed in data-driven studies. Therefore, adding psychosocial support and community-based resilience programs to language-recognition-licensing interventions is not only ethical but also meaningful as a cost-effective public investment (Brendler-Lindqvist, Tondel, Helgesson, Nordqvist, & Svartengren, 2022).

At a theoretical level, the contribution offered by deconstruction is a form of attention that prevents the naturalization of dichotomies. When the institutional-textual origins of the series “quality/document,” “native/foreign,” and “presence/absence” are made visible, the target of the intervention also becomes clear: if you change the text, you change the boundary. EU regulations on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications offer a design space in this sense: as speed, transparency, and predictability increase, so does the readability of qualifications (European Commission, 2005/36/EC, consolidated). The transformation of micro-fractures in the field into lasting transformations depends on the evidence-based operation of this design space.

The political and institutional outcome can be grouped under four headings at the level of principles—but these should be understood as a direction rather than a “list.” The first is recognition justice: accelerated and user-

friendly equivalence processes, visible recognition markers on CVs, and transparent licensing roadmaps for regulated professions. Second, language infrastructure: intensive, early-stage, free/subsidized courses and workplace multilingualism practices. Third, fair hiring design: simplifying texts, contextually appropriate use of anonymization, diversified interview panels, and monitoring. Fourth, peer support: mentorship-internship bridges, transition programs that reduce the “lock-in” effect of social networks, and low-threshold mental health services. These principles are close enough to be implemented through small design efforts by individual institutions; they are effective enough to influence macro indicators (OECD & European Commission, 2023; Damelang, Ebensperger & Stampf, 2020; Leschke & Weiss, 2020; Quillian et al., 2017).

The limitations of the research also define the limits of the interpretation. While the single-country context and qualitative design limit the claim to generalizability, they enable transferability; future multi-country comparisons, detailed sub-analyses based on regulated professions, and the evaluation of experimental/pilot recruitment-identification interventions will strengthen the causal evidence base. Furthermore, the systematic internalization of intersectionality (race/ethnicity-gender-status) dimensions can reveal which intervention works best for which group.

The final word is an ethical and practical call. If quality is a text waiting to be read, then the task of institutions is to make that text translatable. The door does not have to be a dividing line between “native” and “foreign”; when designed correctly, it can become a threshold opening onto collegiality. The cost is measured in years lost in waiting rooms; the benefit, in a collective competence made visible. The question facing Europe and Lithuania is simple but decisive: If we relax the conditions, who will come? The answer will be written not only in the ink of the economy, but also in that of justice.

Conflict of Interest

All authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

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