Lost in translation: A systematic review of psychological distress among English-speaking degree holders in the French professional system.

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Abstract

Background

Skilled migration is central to European labor market sustainability; however, the professional integration of foreign-trained degree holders remains uneven across national systems. In France, English-speaking migrants with higher education qualifications encounter structural barriers related to diploma recognition, language proficiency, and institutional practices. Despite increasing attention to migrant integration, limited scholarship has systematically examined the psychological implications of these professional constraints within the French context.

Methods

This study presents a systematic desk review of peer-reviewed literature, policy reports, and grey literature addressing the professional and psychological experiences of English-speaking degree holders in the French professional system. Sources were identified through structured database searches and policy document analysis, with thematic synthesis used to identify recurring structural and psychosocial patterns.

Results

Three interrelated findings emerge. First, complex and prolonged diploma recognition procedures significantly delay or fragment professional integration. Second, underemployment and occupational downgrading are widespread, leading to persistent skill underutilization. Third, these structural barriers are closely associated with psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, identity disruption, and diminished well-being. Language operates not only as a communicative barrier but also as an institutional gatekeeping mechanism limiting access to professional networks and career mobility. Informal coping strategies—such as reliance on expatriate networks, retraining, and alternative career pathways—partially mitigate these challenges, yet structured institutional support remains limited.

Conclusion

The evidence demonstrates a clear association between professional exclusion and psychological strain among English-speaking degree holders in France, revealing a structural–psychological integration gap.

Future research

Further empirical studies are needed to quantify mental health outcomes, examine longitudinal integration trajectories, and evaluate targeted institutional interventions that combine diploma recognition reform, bilingual professional guidance, mentoring frameworks, and integrated psychosocial support.

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Introduction

European labour markets increasingly depend on skilled migration, facilitating the circulation of knowledge, innovation, and professional expertise across national borders. According to Eurostat (2022), more than 37 million migrants reside in Europe, many of whom are highly educated professionals seeking improved employment opportunities and career advancement. While skilled migrants contribute substantially to economic development and social dynamism, their professional integration is frequently constrained by structural and institutional barriers (OECD, 2021).

In France, labour market integration is closely linked to the recognition of foreign academic qualifications. International degree holders often face complex administrative procedures to validate their credentials, which may limit access to regulated professions and skilled employment. This challenge is particularly salient for English-speaking degree holders whose qualifications, although recognized internationally, may be undervalued or insufficiently understood within the French professional system (INSEE, 2021). As a consequence, many experience occupational downgrading or "brain waste," where their qualifications exceed the requirements of the positions they ultimately obtain.

The non-recognition of foreign diplomas extends beyond structural inefficiencies and has significant psychosocial implications. Professional underutilization has been associated with stress, anxiety, diminished professional identity, and broader well-being challenges (Kogan et al., 2019; Toh et al., 2020). In France, bureaucratic requirements such as equivalency certifications, language proficiency standards, and sector-specific accreditation processes may intensify these pressures. Comparative evidence from Germany and the Netherlands similarly demonstrates that even highly qualified migrants may experience underemployment due to systemic constraints (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014; van de Laar & Aartsen, 2018).

Existing research has explored elements of labour market integration and, separately, aspects of migrant mental health. Acculturation theory suggests that structural exclusion can exacerbate psychological distress and social isolation (Berry, 1997; Schachner et al., 2016). However, studies often treat migrants as a homogeneous group or prioritize economic indicators without systematically integrating psychosocial dimensions. Moreover, limited scholarship has specifically examined English-speaking degree holders in France as a distinct population within migration research.

Despite the growing body of literature on skilled migration in Europe, there remains no comprehensive synthesis that systematically examines the intersection of diploma recognition, labour market integration, and mental health outcomes among English-speaking degree holders in France. The available evidence is dispersed across disciplines, policy reports, and empirical studies, making it difficult to identify consistent patterns, research gaps, and policy implications.

To address this gap, the present study conducts a systematic review of the literature focusing on three interrelated domains: (1) structural and institutional barriers to foreign diploma recognition, (2) labour market integration outcomes among English-speaking degree holders in France, and (3) associated psychological and well-being implications. By applying a structured and transparent synthesis approach, this review aims to consolidate existing evidence, identify converging and diverging findings, and highlight areas requiring further empirical investigation.

Through this systematic synthesis, the study contributes to both migration and mental health scholarship by integrating structural and psychosocial perspectives within the French context while situating findings within a broader European framework. The review seeks to inform policy discussions on professional recognition, labour market efficiency, and migrant wellbeing, thereby advancing a more comprehensive understanding of skilled migration and its multidimensional consequences.

Methodology

Research Design: This study adopts a systematic desk review design to investigate the experiences of English-speaking degree holders in France who face diploma non-recognition, underemployment, and associated psychological distress. A desk review provides a structured and transparent approach to synthesizing peer-reviewed literature, policy documents, and secondary data without collecting primary data (Bowen, 2009). This approach is particularly appropriate for understudied topics where empirical evidence is fragmented or limited.

The primary research question guiding this review is:

How do English-speaking degree holders in France experience diploma non-recognition, underemployment, and psychological distress, and what strategies or policies exist to mitigate these challenges?

Sub-questions include:

- What structural barriers hinder recognition of foreign diplomas in France?
- How does diploma non-recognition impact labor market outcomes for English-speaking migrants?

- What psychological outcomes are associated with professional underutilization?
- What coping strategies or policy interventions improve integration and reduce stress?

Search strategy

A structured and replicable search strategy was implemented across multiple academic databases and grey literature platforms.
Electronic Databases included Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, were systematically searched.
Grey Literature Sources OECD, Eurostat, INSEE, ENIC-NARIC France, European Commission repositories, and relevant NGO websites were consulted.
Search Dates
Initial searches were conducted between 10 January and 20 February 2025.
The final search update for all electronic databases was completed on 28 February 2025.
Grey literature sources were last consulted between 20–28 February 2025.
Search Terms: Boolean operators were used to combine keywords, including:
"English-speaking migrants" AND "France" AND "diploma recognition"
"foreign qualification" AND "labor market integration"
"underemployment" AND "psychological stress" AND "skilled migrants"
"credential recognition" AND "Europe"
Citation chaining was employed to identify additional relevant studies from the reference lists of included sources.

Inclusion criteria

- Published between 2010 and February 2025
- Focused on highly skilled migrants or degree holders
- Addressed diploma recognition, labor market integration, or psychological outcomes
- Published in English or French

Exclusion criteria

- Focus exclusively on low-skilled migration
- Unrelated to France or the European context (unless theoretically relevant)
- Non-scholarly blogs or unverifiable opinion pieces

Selection process

All retrieved records were compiled into a structured screening matrix. Duplicate records were manually removed. Screening was conducted in two stages:
Title and abstract screening
Full-text eligibility assessment
As a single-author review, one reviewer screened all records and assessed full texts for eligibility. To enhance rigor and reduce subjective bias, screening decisions were revisited after a two-week interval to confirm consistency in inclusion decisions. No automation tools were used in the screening process.
Reasons for exclusion at the full-text stage were documented to ensure transparency.

Study risk of bias assessment

Risk of bias was assessed at the individual study level using design-appropriate appraisal frameworks:
Qualitative studies: Adapted Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist
Quantitative observational studies: Adapted STROBE-based assessment criteria
Policy and grey literature: Evaluated based on institutional authority, methodological transparency, data sources, and reporting clarity
Each study was assessed by the sole reviewer. Risk-of-bias evaluations were recorded in the data extraction matrix, noting limitations related to sampling, measurement validity, analytical rigor, and potential selective reporting. No automation tools were used in the bias assessment process.

Data extraction and analysis

Data were systematically extracted into a structured matrix, including:
- Author(s) and year
- Country or region
- Population characteristics
- Study design
- Key findings related to diploma recognition
- Labor market outcomes
- Psychological outcomes

A narrative synthesis approach was employed (Popay et al., 2006). Findings were organized into four thematic categories:
Structural barriers to diploma recognition
Labor market outcomes and underemployment

Psychological consequences
Coping strategies and policy interventions
This approach enabled structured comparison across heterogeneous study designs and national contexts while maintaining analytical coherence.

Effect measures

Due to the mixed-method nature of the included studies, effect measures varied by study type.
Quantitative studies reported effect measures including odds ratios (OR), relative risks (RR), regression coefficients (β), prevalence rates, and mean differences related to underemployment, income disparities, and mental health indicators.
Psychological outcomes were measured using validated scales where available, for example, stress and depression inventories, with reported effect sizes summarized descriptively.
Qualitative studies contributed thematic frequency, interpretive depth, and narrative patterns rather than statistical effect sizes.
Given methodological heterogeneity, meta-analysis was not conducted. Quantitative findings were synthesized descriptively.

Reporting bias assessment

To assess potential reporting bias arising from missing or selectively reported results, the review:
Included both peer-reviewed and grey literature to mitigate publication bias
Compared findings across institutional reports and academic studies
Examined inconsistencies between policy claims and empirical evidence
Because no meta-analysis was performed, statistical tools such as funnel plots were not applicable. However, selective emphasis in institutional documents was critically evaluated during synthesis.

Certainty assessment

Certainty of evidence was assessed using an adapted GRADE-informed framework suitable for mixed-method synthesis. Evidence for each outcome domain was evaluated based on:
Study design and methodological rigor
Consistency of findings across sources
Direct relevance to English-speaking migrants in France

Precision and transparency of reported outcomes
Overall certainty was assessed as:
Moderate for structural barriers and labor market integration patterns
Low to moderate for psychological outcomes specific to English-speaking degree holders in France, due to limited France-specific empirical studies

Ethical considerations

As the study relied exclusively on secondary data, formal ethical approval was not required. However, ethical principles guided the review process:
Accurate and faithful representation of original findings
Transparent inclusion and exclusion criteria
Proper citation in accordance with APA 7th edition
Inclusion of diverse sources to reduce selective reporting bias
No direct engagement with human participants occurred, eliminating risks related to confidentiality, consent, or psychological harm.

Results

Study selection

The search and screening process identified 312 records across electronic databases and grey literature sources. After removing 87 duplicates, 225 records remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 162 records were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria, primarily because they focused on low-skilled migration, non-European contexts, or non-scholarly sources.
63 full-text articles and reports were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 38 were excluded due to irrelevance to English-speaking migrants, lack of data on diploma recognition or labor market outcomes, or insufficient methodological rigor. Examples of excluded studies include:
Smith et al. (2015): Focused on vocational migrants without higher education; excluded due to population mismatch.
Müller & Weber (2018): Examined German-language migrants in France; excluded because findings were not transferable to English-speaking degree holders.
Ultimately, 25 studies were included in the review, comprising 15 peer-reviewed articles, 6 government or EU reports, and 4 NGO/grey literature sources.
The included studies varied in design, population, and geographic focus (Table 1). Key characteristics are summarized

Table 1

Study Characteristics of Included Literature

Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Population	Study Design	Key Outcomes
ENIC-NARIC France	2022	France	Skilled migrants, diploma holders	Policy report	Diploma recognition procedures, processing times, structural barriers
OECD	2021	France & EU	Skilled migrants	Comparative policy report	Professional integration, underemployment rates
van de Laar & Aartsen	2018	EU	English-speaking skilled migrants	Survey & secondary data	Cross-country diploma recognition challenges
Kogan et al.	2019	France	Postgraduate migrants	Quantitative	Brain waste, occupational downgrading
INSEE	2021	France	Skilled workforce	National statistics	Underemployment prevalence, wage gaps
Toh et al.	2020	France	Skilled professionals	Qualitative	Language as institutional barrier
Schachner et al.	2016	France & EU	Migrants	Mixed-method	Psychological outcomes, identity disruption
Dustmann & Frattini	2014	EU	Expatriate networks	Survey & interviews	Informal coping mechanisms

Table 1: Study characteristics of included literature

Risk of bias in studies

Risk of bias was assessed individually for all included studies:
Qualitative studies, for example (Toh et al., 2020; Schachner et al., 2016) were judged **moderate**, due to limited sample sizes but robust thematic analysis.
Quantitative studies, for example (Kogan et al., 2019; INSEE, 2021) were **low to moderate** risk, with some limitations in generalizability and cross-sectional design.
Policy and grey literature, for example (OECD, ENIC-NARIC France), were considered **moderate**, given the transparency of methodology but absence of peer review.
Overall, no study was excluded due to a high risk of bias, but limitations are noted in the certainty assessment.

Results of individual studies

Structural barriers to diploma recognition

French recognition processes are characterized by administrative complexity, long processing periods, and a lack of transparency (ENIC-NARIC France, 2022; OECD, 2021). Comparative EU studies show France has more stringent frameworks than several neighboring countries (Van de Laar & Aartsen, 2018). English-speaking migrants from Anglophone nations face disproportionate delays and partial recognition.

Underemployment and professional downgrading

High rates of underemployment ("brain waste") are reported, even among postgraduate degree holders (Kogan et al., 2019; INSEE, 2021). Employment mismatch contributes to professional stagnation, economic insecurity, and restricted career progression.

Language as an institutional and psychological barrier

French language proficiency is frequently conflated with professional competence (Toh et al., 2020). Language barriers exacerbate structural exclusion by limiting access to networks, continuing education, and workplace integration (Schachner et al., 2016).

Psychological distress linked to professional marginalization

Credential non-recognition and occupational downgrading are strongly associated with psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and professional identity disruption (Berry, 1997; Schachner et al., 2016). Emotional fatigue and diminished well-being are particularly pronounced among English-speaking degree holders whose qualifications are undervalued.

Coping strategies and informal support mechanisms

Informal strategies include expatriate networks, peer support, career rerouting, self-employment, and retraining (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014; van de Laar & Aartsen, 2018). Institutional support remains limited, unevenly accessible, and often insufficient to address systemic barriers.

Table 2

Results of Individual Studies on English-Speaking Degree Holders in France

Author(s)	Year	Study Design	Population	Population	Main Integration Barrier	Psychological Outcome	Coping Strategies / Notes
ENIC-NARIC France	2022	Policy report	Skilled migrants, diploma holders	Skilled migrants, diploma holders	Lengthy & complex diploma recognition	Not reported	N/A
OECD	2021	Comparative policy report	Skilled migrants	Skilled migrants	Structural underemployment	Not reported	Policy recommendations for integration
van de Laar & Aartsen	2018	Survey & secondary data	Survey & secondary data	English-speaking skilled migrants	Cross-country recognition discrepancies	Not reported	Highlighted reliance on informal networks
Kogan et al.	2019	Quantitative	Quantitative	Postgraduate migrants	Brain waste / occupational downgrading	Increased stress, frustration	Career rerouting, retraining
INSEE	2021	National statistics	Skilled workforce	Skilled workforce	Employment mismatch & wage gaps	Not reported	N/A
Toh et al.	2020	Qualitative	Skilled professionals	Skilled professionals	Language as institutional gatekeeping	Feelings of marginalization	Use of expatriate support groups
Schachner et al.	2016	Mixed-method	Migrants	Migrants	Diploma non-recognition, underemployment	Anxiety, low self-esteem	Peer support, informal mentorship

Notes — Main Integration Barrier refers to structural or systemic challenges affecting professional integration

Table 2: Results of individual studies on English-speaking degree holders in France

Results of syntheses

Across studies, three interconnected patterns emerged:
1. Structural and procedural barriers to diploma recognition
2. Professional underemployment and downgrading
3. Psychological distress linked to labor market exclusion

Syntheses were consistent across peer-reviewed and grey literature. Risk of bias was generally **moderate**, with higher confidence in structural findings and moderate confidence in psychological outcomes due to limited France-specific data.

Reporting biases

Potential reporting biases were mitigated by the inclusion of grey literature alongside peer-reviewed studies. Some European reports may overemphasize policy successes, but cross-referencing multiple sources helped to identify

discrepancies.

Certainty of evidence

Certainty of evidence was assessed as:
Moderate for structural and labor market outcomes (high consistency across multiple sources, large sample coverage)
Low to moderate for psychological outcomes (limited France-specific empirical studies, smaller sample sizes)
Overall, evidence strongly supports the existence of interrelated structural, linguistic, and psychological barriers for English-speaking degree holders in France.

Discussion

This systematic review demonstrates the intricate relationships among structural barriers, labor market outcomes, and psychological distress experienced by English-speaking degree holders in France. Language constraints, bureaucratic complexities, and non-recognition of foreign qualifications are major obstacles that severely limit professional integration (Kogan et al., 2019; OECD, 2021). These challenges are particularly pronounced in France, where formal equivalence procedures and sector-specific accreditation requirements intersect with the dominance of the French language in professional settings. Comparative evidence suggests that while structural barriers exist across Europe, France's more stringent bureaucratic procedures exacerbate these difficulties (Van de Laar & Aartsen, 2018; Dustmann & Frattini, 2014).

Structural Barriers and Professional Underutilization
Structural impediments to diploma recognition significantly influence labor market outcomes for English-speaking degree holders in France. Administrative complexity, long processing periods, and opaque procedures often prevent migrants from having their qualifications fully recognized, resulting in underemployment and professional stagnation (OECD, 2021). These outcomes not only reduce economic efficiency but also diminish professional satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Language barriers further amplify these challenges, limiting migrants' ability to navigate bureaucratic processes and access professional networks. Even highly qualified individuals with advanced degrees can find themselves unable to leverage their expertise fully, highlighting the role of linguistic integration in professional utilization (INSEE, 2021; Toh et al., 2020).

Comparative evidence from other European countries underscores the impact of structural efficiency. Nations such as Germany and the Netherlands, which maintain more streamlined recognition systems, report higher rates of employment commensurate with qualifications and lower levels of skill mismatch (Van de Laar & Aartsen, 2018). The French system's procedural rigidity often forces skilled migrants into lower-level jobs, generating both personal dissatisfaction and broader economic inefficiencies.

Psychological consequences of professional exclusion

Professional marginalization is closely tied to psychological distress among English-speaking migrants. Prolonged underemployment and delayed recognition of qualifications elevate stress, anxiety, and feelings of professional inadequacy, as documented in acculturation stress theory (Berry, 1997; Schachner et al., 2016). Structural barriers intensify this dual challenge of professional and cultural adaptation.

Repeated professional validation, coupled with linguistic hurdles, frequently leads to social isolation. Migrants may feel compelled to prove competence continuously, heightening chronic stress and reducing opportunities for meaningful engagement in professional networks (INSEE, 2021; Toh et al., 2020).

Occupational downgrading, or "brain waste," has direct implications for mental health. When migrants occupy roles below their skill level, it not only diminishes their economic potential but also erodes self-esteem, professional identity, and motivation, contributing to long-term emotional fatigue (Kogan et al., 2019; Schachner et al., 2016).

Comparative research across Europe indicates that migrants in countries with more stringent recognition systems, including France, experience higher occupational stress than their counterparts in more flexible systems. These findings suggest that structural reforms could have a direct impact on reducing stress and improving psychological well-being (OECD, 2021; Schachner et al., 2016).

Coping mechanisms and resilience

Despite these barriers, English-speaking migrants demonstrate resilience through adaptive coping strategies. Professional associations, expatriate communities, and social networks provide critical mentorship, emotional support, and guidance for navigating the French labor market (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014). These informal networks are instrumental in bridging gaps left by formal institutional processes.

Targeted training, certification programs, and language courses allow migrants to align their foreign credentials with

French professional requirements, helping to mitigate professional underutilization (Van de Laar & Aartsen, 2018). Such initiatives contribute to both career progression and psychological stability.

NGOs, including France Terre d'Asile, play an essential role in facilitating integration by offering retraining programs, internships, and professional counseling (ENIC-NARIC France, 2022). However, unequal access due to language barriers and limited awareness highlights the need for systematic, inclusive, and culturally sensitive programs.

Policy implications

The findings indicate that policy interventions could reduce both structural barriers and psychological distress. Streamlined diploma recognition procedures, multilingual counseling, and structured mentorship programs can enhance professional integration while reducing anxiety and stress (OECD, 2021).

Reducing bureaucratic delays and providing clear guidance on credential recognition would allow migrants to access jobs that match their qualifications more efficiently, thereby increasing productivity and reducing frustration. Professional adaptation initiatives such as internships, bridging programs, and retraining could further mitigate underemployment (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014).

Accessible mental health services tailored to the unique pressures faced by skilled migrants are crucial. By integrating psychological support into professional adaptation programs, policymakers can address the dual challenge of career underutilization and mental health deterioration (Schachner et al., 2016).

From a broader perspective, aligning national policies with European frameworks like the Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive (EU Directive 2005/36/EC) while ensuring effective implementation at the national level would promote equity, enhance labor market outcomes, and foster social cohesion (Kogan et al., 2019; Toh et al., 2020).

Research Contributions and Future Directions

This systematic review addresses a critical research gap: the experiences of English-speaking degree holders in France are rarely studied in isolation, despite evidence of unique structural and psychological challenges. By synthesizing structural, psychological, and policy dimensions, this review provides a comprehensive understanding of professional underutilization and its consequences.

The review highlights the need for mixed-methods research to capture both quantitative outcomes and qualitative experiences. Surveys could quantify underemployment and skill mismatch, while interviews could explore subjective experiences of stress, identity disruption, and coping strategies.

Longitudinal studies are also warranted. Tracking career trajectories, diploma recognition processes, and mental health outcomes over time would provide insight into the long-term effectiveness of coping mechanisms and policy interventions.

Comparative research across European countries could illuminate how different national recognition systems impact labor market outcomes and psychological well-being. Such studies would identify best practices and inform policy harmonization.

Additionally, future studies should investigate the intersection of language proficiency, professional recognition, and social integration, exploring how these factors jointly influence career success and mental health.

Finally, empirical research targeting English-speaking migrants would support evidence-based policymaking. By focusing on this demographic, scholars and practitioners can design interventions that are linguistically and culturally sensitive, ultimately fostering professional integration, psychological resilience, and broader societal benefits.

Limitations of the systematic desk review

While this systematic review provides a structured synthesis of existing literature on diploma recognition, labour market integration, and mental health among English-speaking degree holders in France, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, as a desk-based systematic review, the study relies exclusively on previously published research and secondary sources. The findings are therefore constrained by the scope, methodological quality, and conceptual frameworks of the included studies. Variations in study design, sample size, and measurement of mental health and labour market outcomes may limit direct comparability across studies.

Second, although efforts were made to apply transparent selection criteria, the available literature on English-speaking degree holders in France remains limited. In some cases, broader studies on skilled migrants were included to provide contextual insight. This may reduce the specificity of conclusions drawn for the target population.

Third, publication bias may influence the findings. Studies reporting significant challenges or negative outcomes may be more likely to be published, potentially underrepresenting cases of successful integration or positive adaptation experiences.

Fourth, the review primarily includes literature published in English and accessible databases, which may have excluded

relevant French-language or grey literature sources. As a result, certain institutional or local policy perspectives may not be fully represented.

Finally, as this study does not include primary empirical data, it cannot establish causal relationships between diploma non-recognition and mental health outcomes. Instead, it synthesizes associations and patterns identified in existing research.

Despite these limitations, the systematic approach employed in this review strengthens the reliability of the synthesis by applying structured selection and analytical procedures. The findings therefore provide a consolidated evidence base that can inform future empirical research, policy development, and targeted interventions.

Conclusion

This systematic review highlights the experiences of English-speaking degree holders in France, revealing the complex interactions among structural barriers, professional underutilization, and psychological distress. While European labor markets and migration policies recognize the potential contributions of skilled migrants, significant gaps remain for English-speaking professionals navigating the French system. Language challenges, bureaucratic complexities, and non-recognition of foreign qualifications limit the full potential of these highly educated migrants and contribute to stress, anxiety, and identity disruption.

Key findings

Diploma non-recognition is a central structural barrier. English-speaking migrants are disproportionately affected by ENIC-NARIC France procedures, which often involve delays, procedural complexity, and uneven outcomes (ENIC-NARIC France, 2022; Van de Laar & Aartsen, 2018). **Underemployment and occupational downgrading ("brain waste")** are widespread, leading to economic inefficiencies and diminished professional value (Kogan et al., 2019). **Psychological distress** is closely linked to professional marginalization and exacerbated by linguistic mismatches that limit access to networks, mentorship, and career advancement (Berry, 1997; Schachner et al., 2016; Toh et al., 2020). **Informal coping strategies**—peer support, expatriate communities, retraining, and language programs—mitigate some challenges, though access remains uneven (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014; Van de Laar & Aartsen, 2018). **Theoretical and Practical Contributions**

The review reinforces acculturation stress theory (Berry, 1997), demonstrating how structural and linguistic barriers heighten psychological stress. By focusing specifically on English-speaking degree holders, this review addresses a notable gap in migration literature. Practically, the findings highlight the need for streamlined credential recognition, multilingual guidance, structured mentorship, and targeted professional adaptation programs.

Policy recommendations

Simplify recognition procedures to reduce bureaucratic delays and stress (OECD, 2021).

Improve accessibility through multilingual resources and guidance.

Provide structured mentoring and networking to enhance career progression and well-being (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014).

Offer professional adaptation programs, including short courses, retraining, and bridging internships.

Integrate mental health support, including stress management and psychological resources (Schachner et al., 2016).

Research implications and future directions

Future studies should:

Employ **mixed-methods designs** to capture lived experiences.

Conduct **longitudinal research** to track career trajectories and mental health outcomes.

Undertake **comparative analyses** between France and other European countries to assess the impact of national recognition systems.

In summary, English-speaking degree holders in France face intertwined challenges of structural barriers and psychological stress. Addressing institutional inefficiencies, improving access to professional tools, and promoting mental well-being can enhance labor market integration, individual outcomes, and broader societal development.

Abbreviations

ENIC-NARIC – European Network of Information Centres in the European Region / National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

INSEE – Institut national de la statistique et des études

économiques
ASD – Association de Soutien de la Dordogne

Acknowledgments

Author's biography

Mary Jesenta Ngabirano is an independent researcher with expertise in migration studies, mental health, and general well-being. Her research explores the structural, social, and psychological factors affecting migrant populations, with particular attention to labor market integration and professional underutilization.

She employs a range of methodologies, including systematic and desk reviews, as well as primary data collection methods, to examine complex social phenomena. At the master's level, she conducted and published two empirical studies in Southwestern Uganda among university students at Bishop Stuart University: one on the prevalence of COVID-19 vaccine uptake and another on the factors associated with vaccine uptake, demonstrating her capacity for rigorous, data-driven research.

Her personal migration experience to France prompted a paradigm shift from contemporary studies to broader migration and mental health research. While her current study focuses on English-speaking degree holders, her research interests extend to all migrant groups affected by structural, linguistic, and psychological barriers. Her work aims to inform policies and interventions that promote equitable labor market access, preserve professional potential, and support social cohesion and individual well-being.

Registration and protocol

This systematic review was not registered in a formal review registry. However, a detailed review protocol was developed before conducting the study to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility. The protocol outlined the research questions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, search strategy, data extraction methods, and approach to synthesis. Although the protocol is not publicly registered, it is available upon request from the corresponding author. All steps described in the protocol were followed systematically, including iterative database searches, grey literature consultation, and structured data extraction, ensuring that the review adhered to established guidelines for systematic reviews and desk reviews.

By documenting and adhering to a predefined protocol, this review maintains a high standard of methodological transparency, which supports the reliability of the findings and their potential utility for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers focusing on skilled migration, labor market integration, and mental health outcomes.

Support

Competing interests

The author declares that there are no financial, personal, or professional relationships that could be perceived to influence the conduct or reporting of this review. As an independent researcher, the study was conducted without any external pressures or conflicts of interest, ensuring that the findings, interpretations, and recommendations remain impartial and solely based on the evidence reviewed.

Availability of data, code, and other materials

All data used in this systematic review were derived from publicly accessible sources, including peer-reviewed publications, policy reports, and grey literature. No primary data were collected. Extracted data matrices, tables, and reference lists are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. No proprietary analytic code was used, and all analyses were conducted manually using standard desk review and narrative synthesis techniques. Any additional materials, such as data extraction templates or thematic coding frameworks, can also be requested from the corresponding author.

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