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**Exploring the entrepreneurial barriers and coping
strategies of highly academically skilled immigrant
entrepreneurs in Sweden: ethnic minority perspectives**

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the entrepreneurial barriers and entrepreneurial coping strategies that highly academically skilled ethnic minority entrepreneurs [EMEs] experience in operating a start-up in Sweden. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 10 participants to support the inductive nature of this study and to better understand the entrepreneurial experiences of this population group. Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework is used to understand perceived entrepreneurial barriers and coping strategies across social, political-institutional and economic domains. Findings from this study indicate that the majority of entrepreneurial barriers are directly related to social and political-institutional embeddedness. These were related to: racial / ethnic discrimination, lack of local network, accessibility of information, administrative difficulties, language and culture. Whereas, the majority of entrepreneurial coping strategies refer to social embeddedness: network, networking activities, teaming up with Swedes and engaging in entrepreneurial education.

While the ability for highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs to operate their venture is not solely subjected to the acquired human capital from entrepreneurial education, in some cases, it impacted how entrepreneurs operated their ventures in Sweden. As a result, further research is suggested, with a larger sample, to: (1) draw more representations for increased generalisability to grasp contributors to venture continuity; (2) better understand the role of entrepreneurial education for start-up activity in Sweden; (3) determine the impact of each entrepreneurial barrier and entrepreneurial strategy for venture growth.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial barrier; Entrepreneurial Coping Strategy; Highly Academically skilled Immigrant Ethnic Minority Entrepreneur; Highly Academically skilled Entrepreneur; Immigrant Entrepreneur; Ethnic Minority Entrepreneur; Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework; Social Embeddedness; Political-Institutional Embeddedness; Economic Embeddedness

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1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research related to the role of entrepreneurship and immigrant entrepreneurship. This will be followed by the aim of the study and outline of the thesis.

1.1 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has long been regarded as a major contributor to global socio-economic development (Ács, Autio & Szerb, 2014). As markets continuously diversify, entrepreneurship promotes economic advancement, social change and the creation of employment opportunities (Institute of Entrepreneurship Development, 2020). An increase in product and service ranges, competition and knowledge sharing make entrepreneurship a powerful vehicle for economic growth and development (Audretsch, 2007). It is also apparent that each country depends on its entrepreneurs to contribute towards their gross domestic product [GDP], the measure of a nation's overall economic productivity (Wong, Ho & Autio, 2005).

The trend for entrepreneurship serves different purposes depending on the context. For example, in developed countries it is often driven by capitalism (Kirchhoff, 1994). While for capacity-constrained developing countries, low employment opportunities, particularly among youth, often lead many to engage in entrepreneurship (Naudé, 2010). Regardless of the context and drivers, be it necessity-driven or opportunity-driven orientation, entrepreneurship undoubtedly shapes the overall development of society (Stoica, Roman & Rusu, 2020). This is reflected within many countries, where the state invests in initiatives, grants and schemes to support entrepreneurs to develop due to the potential contribution they bring to communities (Naudé, 2010).

A clear example on how entrepreneurship is used as a way to shape the development of overall society was seen in the Entrepreneurial Inspiration for the European Union [ENSPIRE EU] Project, conducted between 2007 and 2013. This aimed to inspire and support European residents to be entrepreneurs, particularly through highlighting and promoting a good entrepreneurial supporting structure (Nielsen, 2017; KeepEU, 2021). Not only was this aimed to increase the EU entrepreneurial economy, but also to support

marginalised populations within the EU through entrepreneurial activities. This project was targeted towards three different marginalised populations. The first target was *'people'*; people lacking the same opportunities as an average European. The population that fell under this category included: women, ethnic minorities, migrants, seniors and people with disabilities. The second target was *'disconnected people'*; people who were far from the labour market. This category also included people who had been long-term unemployed and those who lacked or who had low education levels. Finally, the last group consisted of *'discouraged people'*; people who were discouraged with existing education systems. This category particularly included youth at secondary levels of education, not planning to continue academia. Through this project, marginalised groups were supported to be able to return and contribute towards society as a whole, through self-employment or entrepreneurial activities (Nielsen, 2017; KeepEU, 2021). This example highlights the importance of entrepreneurship not only for the national economy, but also for the development of individual well-being and society.

1.2 Entrepreneurship in Sweden

Similar to other countries, Sweden has used entrepreneurship as a driver for economic growth. In the last two decades, previous research has shown that entrepreneurship changes in Sweden have a causal relationship with the country's economic growth (Box, Lin & Gratzner, 2016). In fact, Sweden is considered an innovation-driven country with its long history of self-employment, in positive correlation with GDP growth (Box, Lin & Gratzner, 2016).

Previous study shows that high levels of opportunity and entrepreneurial activity exists due to favourable economic conditions (Stoica, Roman & Rusu, 2020). Thus, the role of the state to create a suitable ecosystem is arguably significant. Sweden itself has actively created entrepreneurial initiatives to promote entrepreneurial activities. This can be seen from the increase of recent initiatives focusing on start-up competitions, business registration services, and business incubation and acceleration programmes in Sweden (Swedish Institute, 2021).

The value of entrepreneurship is also reflected through Sweden's incorporation of entrepreneurial policies and education to all of its residents. Sweden, alongside other Nordic

countries, believes that entrepreneurial policies should encompass broad level benefits holistically to their population through education (Lund, Lindfors, Dal, Sjøvoll, Svedberg, Borup, Jensen, Ovesen, Rotefoss, Pedersen & Thordardottir, 2011).

1.3 Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Sweden

Sweden, like other European countries, has experienced various waves of immigration. However, in comparison to other European countries, Sweden is considered to have one of the fastest growing diversity rates. Based on recent data in 2019, Sweden has the second highest share of population born abroad among EU countries, behind Luxembourg (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development [OECD], 2021). This is congruent with an increasingly multicultural demographic across Sweden, where every fourth resident in the country has an immigrant background (Swedish Institute, 2021).

While an increase of immigrants and diversity within society has its benefits, it can also create challenges in terms of cohesion. Several previous studies in Nordic countries show that there is a negative relationship between diversity and trust at individual level in a host country (Ivarsflaten & Strømsnes, 2013; Wallman, Lundåsen & Wollebæk, 2013). An increase in diversity may also cause the population to focus on their solidarity in their in-groups while distrusting out-groups (Putnam, 2007; Gustavsson & Jordahl, 2008). It has been shown that groups of immigrants with observable differences in comparison to the respective native-born majority, have stronger out-group categorisation (Heath & Brinbaum, 2007). Such insights make it apparent that immigrants with noticeable differences like those from Middle Eastern, African, Asian, and Latino backgrounds tend to have a stronger likelihood of experiencing out-group categorisation than other Caucasian immigrants. This suggests that immigrants are not all treated equally.

In the case of Sweden, previous reports and studies reveal that non-Caucasian immigrants tend to receive lower trust and have a higher negative perception among the Swedish population (Högskolan i Gävle, 2021; Wallman, Lundåsen & Wollebæk, 2013). Studies and reports also show that there have been increasing negative perceptions around multiculturalism, particularly towards the Middle Eastern, African and Asian community (Rydgren & Ruth, 2011; Ahmadi, Darvishpour & Palm, 2020; Högskolan i Gävle, 2021). This includes avoiding having a neighbour of non-European / non-Western descent and

believing that people with immigrant backgrounds do not perform as effectively in the labour market. Furthermore, it has been noted that more and more of the Swedish population prefer to have Swedish colleagues rather than people with immigrant backgrounds (Ahmadi, Darvishpour & Palm, 2020; Högskolan i Gävle, 2021). Aligned with the explanation above, Hardin (2003) argues that distrust is also connected to stereotyping and having negative preconceptions about others.

Similar to the aforementioned reports, various studies show that wide discrimination practices exist within the job market towards people with ethnic minority backgrounds in Sweden (Grand & Szulkin, 2002; Rydgren, 2004; Carlsson & Rooth, 2007; Nordin & Rooth, 2009). Despite sharing human capital attributes such as education, and number of years residing in Sweden, research suggests that the ethnic minority population still experiences lower salaries and higher unemployment rates (Rydgren, 2004). Arguably, the discrimination experienced among Sweden's ethnic minority population leads them to pursue other sources of income such as starting their own venture as opposed to formal employment in the labour market.

Previous studies show that many immigrant entrepreneurs start their entrepreneurial career out of necessity, particularly due to discrimination and high rates of unemployment (Constant & Zimmermann 2006; Abada, Hou & Lu, 2013; Contín-Pilar & Larraza-Kintana, 2015). The experienced disadvantages among this population group pushes many towards engaging in entrepreneurship as a way to increase their social class in Sweden (Najib, 1994; Elmlund, 1998). In some cases, immigrants have a higher rate of self-employment in comparison to native or other groups (Levie, 2007; Desiderio & Salt, 2010; Ohlsson, Broomé & Bevelander, 2012).

According to Hjerm (2004), immigrant entrepreneurial activity results in both micro and macro level implications for Sweden's economic development. While individually, it facilitates income generation and fast-track integration, broadly speaking, it contributes towards reduced unemployment rates amidst the Swedish labour market. The increase of immigrant entrepreneurship activities in Sweden has also received attention among scholars (Tavassoli & Trippl, 2019; Barth & Zalkat, 2020; Hammarstedt & Miao, 2020).

There is compelling evidence indicating that non-Caucasian immigrants, or those of ethnic minority in Sweden tend to have stronger experiences of discrimination from the population,

within the labour market and also other aspects of their daily activities. With this in mind, it could be argued that ethnic minorities also face different entrepreneurial barriers in comparison to other Caucasian immigrants or native populations in Sweden.

1.4 Aim for Study

Evidently, plenty of research has been conducted regarding ethnic minority and immigrant entrepreneurship, but little specifically exploring highly academically skilled immigrant ethnic minority entrepreneurs [EMEs]. While studies have highlighted that barriers exist among the ethnic minority and immigrant population group, it is unclear whether these barriers differ among highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs. Given that these individuals are well educated, the authors do not see any obvious reason as to why they could be discriminated against within the labour market. With their entrepreneurial educational background, advanced knowledge and skills they are presumably well-equipped to mitigate any possible entrepreneurial barriers and offer competitive advantage. This forms the rationale behind this study, aiming to explore whether there are factors hindering or facilitating entrepreneurial activity. And, if applicable, whether there are coping strategies that enable individuals to flourish with their entrepreneurial ventures.

1.4.1 Defining Ethnic Minority Entrepreneur

Immigrant entrepreneurship is a phenomenon that has been widely researched across many disciplines (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013, p.822). This has brought inconsistency when defining the embodiment of ethnic minority entrepreneurship. Partly, as the term '*immigrant entrepreneurship*' is often used interchangeably with '*migrant entrepreneurship*', '*ethnic entrepreneurship*' and '*ethnic minority entrepreneurship*' depending on the cultural context of research (Fregetto, 2004, p.25). Another aspect is that entrepreneurial behaviour across first and second-generation immigrants differs due to accompanying configurations of social and human capital, as opposed to those born in a specific host country (Masurel & Nijkamp, 2004, p.722). It is helpful to recognise that ethnic minority entrepreneurship is a subgroup of immigrant entrepreneurship. An ethnic minority entrepreneur can be defined as a business owner who does not belong to the majority population, but a minority ethnic community.

Moreover, in Western society, an ethnic minority is often referred to as non-Caucasian in descent (Schaefer, 2004).

1.4.2 Defining Highly Academically Skilled Immigrant Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurs

For the purpose of this study, highly academically skilled immigrant ethnic minority entrepreneurs [EMEs] are regarded as first generation immigrants who have undertaken some form of business/entrepreneurship education out of their own volition, in addition to starting their own business in Sweden. Thus, this exclusive group falls under ethnic minority entrepreneurs. Figure 1 summarises the descriptors used to define the types of entrepreneurs.

Figure 1: Definitions of entrepreneurs

Type of Entrepreneur	Definition
Immigrant entrepreneur	Individual who was not born, or whose parents were not born in the host country and engages in starting their own business.
Ethnic minority entrepreneur	Business owner who does not belong to the majority population of non-Caucasian descent.
Highly academically skilled immigrant ethnic minority entrepreneur	A first-generation immigrant (with an ethnic minority background) who has completed business/entrepreneurship education out of their own volition and has started their own business in Sweden.

2. Literature / Theoretical Review

In this chapter, an overview of the study's theoretical framework is given. Furthermore, previous study and findings in regard to entrepreneurial barriers and entrepreneurial coping strategies is discussed.

2.1 Mixed Embeddedness

It is important to note that a recurring theory cited within immigrant entrepreneurship literature is Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework. This framework is used to systematically investigate the patterns of variation that exist within migrant entrepreneurship (Mitchell & Högberg, 2015). The Theory of Mixed Embeddedness acknowledges the multifaceted realities encompassed within immigrant entrepreneurship and attempts to better understand the dynamic interplay that exists between social, political-institutional and economic dimensions, thus being a holistic approach (Kloosterman, Van der Leun & Rath, 1999). A consideration of the wider socio-economic and political contexts makes Mixed Embeddedness a useful tool to address the nuances between an entrepreneur's characteristics (Davidsson, 2015). The comprehensive structured analysis has received widespread attention among immigrant entrepreneurship scholars, due to its ability to pinpoint the influence various contexts and accompanying processes / outcomes have on the opportunity structures accessible to immigrant entrepreneurs (Rath & Kloosterman, 2000; Mitchell, 2015).

Opportunity structure is the core conceptual framework of mixed embeddedness in immigrant entrepreneurship study (Kloosterman, Van der Leun & Rath, 1999). Opportunity structure itself can be defined as a structure comprising a set of openings in the market. Arguably, immigrant entrepreneurs tend to capitalise on a set of openings in the market when establishing their business (Kloosterman, Van der Leun & Rath, 1999). However, one thing that needs to be taken into consideration, is that market situation, market condition and market opening are heavily influenced by social, political-institutional and economic factors. Undoubtedly, this has an impact on immigrant entrepreneurial activity. According to Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath (1999), it is the combination of three components: social embeddedness, political-institutional embeddedness and economic embeddedness

that shapes the trajectory of an immigrant entrepreneur's firm creation and success. Entrepreneurs, according to Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath (1999, p.3) are shaped by these forms of embeddedness on a micro, meso and macro level.

Social embeddedness indicates the social network of immigrant entrepreneurs, covering the social relations and human capital that entrepreneurs have access to within their communities e.g. educational qualifications. Previous study shows that social networks play a big role in defining the success of an immigrant's business, particularly as they provide accessibility for immigrant entrepreneurs to find relevant resources and information (Rath, 2007; Cahn, 2008). In many examples, immigrant entrepreneurs are able to rely on their social capital in order to start their own venture, despite lacking financial resources (Kloosterman, Van der Leun & Rath, 1999; Rath, 2007). Furthermore, immigrant entrepreneurs also largely benefit from their ethnic social network in accessing vital economic resources and reducing costs since most use informal employment contracts (Rath, 2007).

Economic embeddedness includes forces such as financial capital, accessibility of markets and the growth potential, which can be accustomed to immigrant entrepreneurs (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001). Arguably, markets are the main components of the opportunity structure in immigrant entrepreneurship (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001). The market fosters opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs as it provides an economic platform to create new products and sell them to potential customers. However, for this opportunity to arise, there must be a demand from the customer for certain goods or services (Rath, 2007). Ultimately, for immigrant entrepreneurs to succeed with their new business, there is a need to understand the customer demand to provide relevant goods or services, and secure specific shares on the market (Swedberg, 1994).

The political-institutional embeddedness of an opportunity structure encompasses societal norms, state interventions such as governmental policies, procedures and laws, which regulate how businesses are operated. These components control the market for the immigrant entrepreneur by regulating the condition of how the market works e.g., the chosen products that could be sold to customers, the actors having the privilege to sell them, and the requirements to be able to sell them (Kloosterman, 2010). Political-institutional factors can create a barrier for immigrant entrepreneurs by restricting the creation and movement of a venture. Depending on the context, political-institutional aspects can also form as a

facilitator for an immigrant entrepreneur’s venture, if there is a stable and supportive environment for the new business to operate in (Rath, 2002).

A summary of each can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of embeddedness, adapted from Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath (1999)

Type of Embeddedness	Characteristics
Social embeddedness	Social network, human capital, interactions and community.
Economic embeddedness	Market, market growth, financial capital and accessibility.
Political-institutional embeddedness	Societal norms, laws, rules, regulations and policies.

Considering the diversity of mentioned embeddedness, such a framework was deemed credible to use within this study to distinguish the factors (if any) that promote or hinder entrepreneurial activity among highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs.

2.2 Studies using Mixed Embeddedness

Several studies utilise this model in an attempt to depict the experiences individuals of ethnic minorities have when engaging in entrepreneurship (Ohlsson, Broomé & Bevelander, 2012; Daniel, Henley & Anwar, 2019).

A large-scale quantitative study using inferential statistical analysis from a social sciences data set in the UK examined ethnic minority entrepreneurship [EME] activity over a period of time (Daniel, Henley & Anwar, 2019). The Theory of Mixed Embeddedness (Kloosterman, Van der Leun & Rath, 1999) was applied to identify whether there has been a shift in companies breaking out of lower growth sectors, the influencing factors, and if this differed across ethnic minority groups. Notably, the time, context and opportunity structure in which EMEs engage in entrepreneurial activities has been associated as a strong determinant of their ability to break out to higher growth sectors. This suggests that the socio-economic and institutional conditions in which individuals operate within could be attributed towards the level of EME venture success. Interestingly, gender, education, proficiency in English and occupational status were seen as key characteristics influencing EMEs ability to break out to higher growth sectors. This study shows the role of network, gender within a developed country and how available opportunities / resources within an individuals' environment largely determines the entrepreneurial activities they chose to engage in (Daniel, Henley & Anwar, 2019).

More specifically in Sweden, a quantitative study by Ohlsson, Broomé and Bevelander (2012) analysing data from STATIV (database of statistical integration conducted by Statistics Sweden) on register for Sweden's total population in 2007, aged 25-64 and NUTEK (Swedish Agency for Economic & Regional Growth) on local labour market data explored the interrelationships between self-employment and different structural layers of the Swedish society. It was identified that self-employment among immigrant entrepreneurs in Sweden was impacted by a combination of situational, cultural and institutional factors. The Theory of Mixed Embeddedness supported the notion that individual tendencies on entrepreneurship cannot be explained by single factors (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Kloosterman, 2010). Instead, all factors and aspects of immigrants' inclusion in their host countries need to be considered.

The study, however, contradicts popular thoughts among scholars highlighting that entrepreneurs of ethnic and immigrant backgrounds face structural barriers, requiring specific intervention in order to enable them to engage in entrepreneurial activity (Rath & Swagerman, 2016; Nazareno, Zhou & You, 2019). Considering this, conducting duplication of studies, using different types of research methods could assist in validating the findings in regard to how ethnicity and immigration background affects self-employment.

Furthermore, taking individual factors, such as family background, culture and individual traits into consideration could provide useful insights into the influence such characteristics could have on individuals' experiences of entrepreneurial barriers.

2.3 Entrepreneurial Barriers and Entrepreneurial Coping Strategies

Entrepreneurial barriers and entrepreneurial strategies have been explored across various contexts and population groups (Pruett, Shinnar, Toney, Llopis & Fox, 2009; Giacomini, Janssen, Pruett, Shinnar, Llopis & Toney, 2011; Sandhu, Sidique & Riaz, 2011; Lee & Eesley, 2018; Daniel, Henley & Anwar, 2019; Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021).

This section draws upon various studies and is organised depending on the type of embeddedness they fall into (social, political-institutional and economic) using the Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework. It should be noted that in some cases there may be an overlap between predominant embeddedness that studies relate to.

2.3.1 Social Embeddedness - Barriers

2.3.1.1 Inner Barriers and Lack of Human Capital

One barrier that has been mentioned several times in previous studies is the inner barrier. A lack of confidence paired with an inability to trust one's own capabilities has been cited as one of the main entrepreneurial barriers hindering entrepreneurs to progress with their entrepreneurial journey (Choo & Wong, 2006; Giacomini et al. 2011). In addition, lack of human capital, namely a lack of specific skills, experience, knowledge and competencies across specific areas can be a stumbling block for entrepreneurs (Choo & Wong, 2006; Giacomini et al. 2011; Smith & Beasley, 2011; Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021).

2.3.1.2 Personality and Trait

Sandhu, Sidique and Riaz (2011) focus on entrepreneurial barriers from a psychological focus through examining traits among Malaysian postgraduate students, including

individual aversion to risk, fear of failure, aversion to stress and hard work. Similarly, a mixed method study, looking at 2526 surveys across highly skilled Syrian women immigrants aged 18-70 in Sweden disregard contextual factors (Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021). Instead, it focused on individual level characteristics such as previous self-employment, employment in prone occupation, gender, leadership, interest and age and their effect on entrepreneurial inclinations.

Previous research conducted by Åsterbro, Hertz, Nanda and Weber (2014) demonstrates that entrepreneurs tend to have specific traits differentiating them from other populations. Åsterbro et al. (2014) argue that the main personality traits of entrepreneurs include: an ability to take risk, self-efficacy (individual belief in their capacity to execute necessary behaviour to achieve their goal), internal locus of control (individual belief in which specific success or failure are attributed to their own efforts, skills and characteristic), and need for achievement. With this being said, individuals who do not possess these traits may experience barriers when starting their entrepreneurial journey.

In regard to personality and trait, Kerr and Kerr (2020) argue that there may be similarities between individuals who have entrepreneurial traits and those who migrate to another country. Perhaps this is due to the fact that immigrants take a risk when leaving their home and moving abroad. Another factor involves dealing with uncertainty when starting a life in a host country with different cultures and presented realities. Although such a finding is empirical, it could be concluded that those who have experienced migration have personality traits that correlate with an entrepreneur's typical orientation (Kerr & Kerr, 2020).

2.3.2 Social Embeddedness - Coping Strategies

2.3.2.1 Supportive Social Network

Previous research states that supportive social networks that provide insight, advice and encouragement to entrepreneurs can arguably foster entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Jain & Ali, 2013). In addition, it can assist entrepreneurs through the sharing of previous experiences, thus helping them to identify new business opportunities. Having other members from a network can be used to compensate for traits and/or knowledge that entrepreneurs may lack (Jain & Ali, 2013).

2.3.2.2 Family and Co-Ethnic (Community) Support

Central to anyone pursuing an entrepreneurial career is the need to have social support, particularly the acceptance and support of parents, family members and friends (Shivani & Sharan, 2005). Shivani and Sharan (2005) identify '*perceived family support*' as one of the most important factors influencing the level of success achieved by an entrepreneur. In their study, female entrepreneurs were found to perceive having lesser support from family. This implies that society as a whole could benefit from having an awareness of the merit entrepreneurship can offer as a profession/occupation. Specially designed measures could, for example, be adopted for promotion of women in entrepreneurship.

Family support has been shown to be one of the coping strategies for entrepreneurs to overcome entrepreneurial barriers as it can be used as a strategy to cope with a lack of finances through implementing the bootstrapping strategy (Ebben & Johnson, 2006; Barakji & Kalssli, 2017). In the context of immigrant entrepreneurship, in addition to family, co-ethnic support can be considered as a key driver in determining the survival of an early venture. Due to the disadvantages immigrant entrepreneurs face in a host country, many migrant entrepreneurs turn back to their co-ethnics to expand their network, or to gain both financial and non-financial support; such as access to resources, administrative and regulatory information, which are crucial for venture continuity (Barakji & Kalssli, 2017).

2.3.3 Political-Institutional Embeddedness – Barriers

2.3.3.1 Institutional Environment

The institutional environment, including a country's laws, rules and regulations in relation to entrepreneurship, could be perceived as barriers for entrepreneurs. For example, the financial banking regulations in Romania and Russia do not provide loans for small business, and the non-existence of governmental support for small business and entrepreneurs is regarded as a considerable challenge (Johnson, McMillan & Woodruff, 2000; Iakovleva, Solesvik & Trifilova, 2013). Other studies show that institutional barriers such as administrative costs and current economic situation plays a big role in realising entrepreneurial intentions of students (Pruett et al. 2009; Giacomini et al. 2011).

From a cross-cultural perspective, Giacomini et al. (2011) identify entrepreneurial barriers faced by students as predominantly concerned with institutional and psychological factors such as lack of structure, administrative cost, knowledge, and self-confidence. Another cross-cultural study found that collective thinking existed across USA, Chinese and Spanish students with regards to students' perceptions of primary entrepreneurial barriers: high risk, current economic status, lack of start-up capital and entrepreneurial competence (Pruett et al. 2009, p.588). Contrastingly, Daniel, Henley & Anwar (2019) identify that it is the socio-economic and institutional conditions in which individuals operate that attributes to the level of EME success.

In the Swedish context, several studies show that ethnic minority immigrant entrepreneurs face institutional barriers when it comes to their ventures, such as access to finance. Recent studies show that ethnic populations across Sweden receive higher loan denial rates, while also receiving higher charge rates on their loans (Aldén & Hammarstedt, 2016). Another institutional barrier that immigrants with ethnic minority backgrounds perceive is the lack of access to information and understanding of administrative and regulatory aspects of business (Enow, 2010).

Ethnic minority immigrant entrepreneurs also face structural barriers throughout their entrepreneurial journey in Sweden. Ethnic minority immigrants, particularly those from outside the EU face immigration challenges when attempting to fulfil the requirements from the migration agency in order to secure a legal residency status in Sweden (Migrationsverket, 2021). They may also face challenges in having their qualifications recognised in Sweden, as some academic qualifications need to be validated under the Swedish system (Universitets och Högskolerådet, 2021). An inability to transfer qualifications could arguably reduce their credibility in Sweden's start-up ecosystem.

2.3.3.2 Culture

External factors such as culture have been regarded as a crucial aspect in enabling entrepreneurs to thrive. As highlighted by Morrison (2000), culture can influence an entrepreneur's perception of available opportunities for a venture. Culture can therefore be seen as either an entrepreneurial barrier or as a facilitator for entrepreneurial support. In a

study conducted by Krueger (2008), certain social and cultural values were seen to affect entrepreneurial intentions and perceived desirability of entrepreneurial activities.

In the Swedish context, few studies show that immigrant entrepreneurs in Sweden face cultural barriers throughout their entrepreneurial journey (Aaltonen & Akola, 2012; Barakji & Kalssli, 2017). This is because immigrants with ethnic backgrounds may require time to adjust with the culture of the host country. The different customs and culture between ethnic entrepreneurs and the native-born population may lead to misunderstandings between the venture and its potential customers from the local population, particularly due to cultural misinterpretations on how a business should treat their customers (Barakji & Kalssli, 2017). Although immigrant entrepreneurs tend to have stronger trust within their ethnic community in host countries, research shows that they experience lower levels of trust from the native-born community population or other ethnic immigrants (Aaltonen & Akola, 2012). From an entrepreneurial context, building trust can be considered one of the biggest challenges determining the success of ventures, as the biggest customer potential comes from the native majority of the population, as co-ethnics form only a fraction of the population. Integration efforts have been hailed to be one of the main strategies in tackling the cultural barriers between immigrants with ethnic background and the native-born population (Barakji & Kalssli, 2017).

2.3.4 Political-Institutional Embeddedness - Coping Strategies

2.3.4.1 Cultural Integration and Assimilation

Cultural integration and assimilation to the host country have been proven to be an important strategy for immigrant entrepreneurs to be able to adapt to the new reality. Furthermore, understanding the host culture's customs and learning the local language enables entrepreneurs to better integrate themselves into the market, thus gaining further trust from the host country population (Barakji & Kalssli, 2017).

2.3.4.2 Education and Training

Entrepreneurial education and training are proven to be an important coping strategy enhancing an entrepreneur's cognitive capabilities and self-esteem for realising their entrepreneurial intentions (Jain & Ali, 2013). Through this, entrepreneurs not only improve their skills, competencies and experience but may also improve their social network, which could be beneficial for their entrepreneurial journey. In a previous study, Upton, Sexton and Moore (1995) found that there is a positive relationship between entrepreneurial training, entrepreneurial tendencies / intentions and entrepreneurial success.

2.3.5 Economic Embeddedness – Barriers

2.3.5.1 Lack of Capital and Limited Access to Finance

Lack of capital has been identified as one of the main barriers for entrepreneurs (Volery, Doss, Mazzarol & Thein, 1997; Robertson, Collins, Medeira & Slater, 2003; Choo & Wong, 2006). This can be particularly critical for ethnic minority immigrant entrepreneurs, as it often is the main determinant for entering less crowded market opportunities and forces the entrepreneur to focus on low growth and low return markets (Barett, Jones, McEvoy & McGoldrick, 2002).

While for the majority of entrepreneurs this barrier can be overcome through external financing, ethnic minority immigrant entrepreneurs tend to have limited access to finance in their socio-economic environment (Barett, Jones, McEvoy & McGoldrick, 2002). This is particularly due to the widespread institutional racism in banking sectors and credit markets (Ward & Reeves, 1980; Jones, McEvoy & Barrett, 1994; Barrett, 1999). Ethnic minority immigrant entrepreneurs tend to reside in low socio-economic areas, which leads them to have lower and limited equity in both their business and personal property (Deakins, Majmuda & Paddison, 1997). While some ethnic minority immigrant entrepreneurs rely on financial support and resources from their own family and community, it should be noted that these resources are usually insufficient for starting a business in a high growth sector (Jones, McEvoy & Barrett, 1994).

2.4 Existing studies on Highly Skilled Immigrants Entrepreneurship

While many studies have been conducted in relation to immigrant entrepreneurship, few focuses on highly academically skilled immigrants' entrepreneurship. Existing studies on highly skilled immigrant entrepreneurship, mostly focus on high technology migrant entrepreneurship in the USA context.

Hart and Arcs (2011) argue that highly skilled technology immigrants in the USA may have a higher advantage in regard to recognising and acquiring opportunity due to their prior experiences before migrating to the USA. This is attributed to the diverse culture they have been exposed to from both home and host cultures. Hart and Arcs (2011) further argue that highly skilled technology immigrants in the US have other "advantages" in regard to the ability of taking risks in their entrepreneurial journey. This is partly due to immigrants being prone to discrimination blocks in regard to career progression, and therefore, when they decide to pursue an entrepreneurial career, they possess strong resilience qualities as opposed to the native-born population and often have less to lose. Despite the advantages that highly skilled technology immigrants have in terms of opportunity recognition, Hart and Arcs (2011) also highlight deeper challenges and barriers experienced in regard to opportunity exploitation.

One of the main barriers includes difficulties accessing resources, particularly due to the lack of social network in the host country. In addition, gaining trust from network, external stakeholders and social institutions, such as venture capitalists was regarded as a challenge. The study found that there was a tendency for being discriminated against by the social institution. Notably, this was due to social institutions in the USA being long associated with an '*old-boys club*' mentality, leading to discrimination towards immigrant entrepreneurs. Coping with such obstacles, Saxenian (2006) argues how highly skilled technology migrant entrepreneurs capitalise on their co-ethnic networks who have linkages to their country of origin.

Another study in the Netherlands focusing on highly skilled entrepreneurial refugees from Syria shows that the main barriers faced include a limited welcoming environment, particularly related to acquiring financial start-up capital (De Lange, Berntsen, Hanoeman & Haidar, 2020). Without local support from incubators, mentors, or networks, refugees are unlikely to navigate administrative procedures and meet the required criteria. Furthermore,

their legal status as refugees and having temporary residence permits leads to difficulties in obtaining microcredits in the Netherlands.

While it does not directly look at the barrier, one of the studies in Sweden that looked at highly skilled female entrepreneurs with Syrian refugee backgrounds found that entrepreneurial role models and a positive perception of entrepreneurship in Syrian culture influenced entrepreneurial intentions (Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021). Evidently, there are many variables that determine the success of an immigrant venture. This is largely due to the perception of barriers they face, whether that be direct or indirect.

With limited existing studies on highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs, there is a need to understand barriers and accompanying coping strategies (if any) from a broader context. Despite the existing findings, it is currently unknown what role knowledge and skill play in shaping the capacity to start a venture in comparison to less skilled immigrants (Noronha et al. 2018).

2.5 Other Existing Immigrant Entrepreneurship Studies

In addition to entrepreneurial barriers and coping strategies, the majority of research is concerned with entrepreneurial orientations, behaviour of immigrant entrepreneurs (Lee & Eesley, 2018; Pruett et al. 2019; Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021). Prevalent studies exist exploring what impact context has on students' entrepreneurial engagement, aspirations and intentions (Giacomin et al. 2011; Sandhu, Sidique & Riaz, 2011).

2.6 Need for Study

As it has been mentioned previously, while several studies investigate the barriers and coping strategy that people of ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds face when engaging in entrepreneurship, little research exists exploring this from a highly academically skilled perspective. Conducting this study will not only fill the gap in academic literature on the field of immigrant entrepreneurship, but also could provide a crucial insight to the policy makers on how to support immigrant EMEs in Sweden.

In this study, focusing solely on highly educated immigrant EMEs will assist in understanding unique patterns that exist with regards to the barriers faced, and any accompanying coping strategies used in Sweden's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework will be beneficial in exploring the barriers from several perspectives.

The following research questions had been proposed:

1. *What are the main perceived entrepreneurial barriers that highly academically skilled ethnic minority immigrants face when starting their entrepreneurial journey?*
2. *Are there any coping strategies that highly academically skilled ethnic minority immigrants use to assist them in entering the entrepreneurial ecosystem and starting their venture in Sweden?*

3. Methodology

This chapter will outline the qualitative design and data collection methodology used for this research. First, the procedure of search strategy will be explained to provide an understanding of how the authors approached the literature review. Thereafter, a section on research method, informant selection, data collection and procedures, data analysis and ethical consideration will follow. Lastly, an overview of the methodological limitations is given.

3.1 Search Strategy for the Literature Review

In order to find current research relevant to this subject, databases such as EBSCO and Google Scholar were primarily used to gain a variety of credible journal articles. A selection of key words including ‘*entrepreneurial barriers*’, ‘*perceived entrepreneurial obstacles*’, ‘*immigrant entrepreneurship*’, ‘*ethnic minority entrepreneurship*’ and ‘*highly skilled entrepreneurs*’ were utilised in various combinations through Boolean logic. Due to the evolving nature of society and an attempt to ensure current research, inclusion criteria consisted of journal articles dated on or between 2008-2021 (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018). As a result of limited research around the ethnic minority population group, articles were expanded to explore student and refugee entrepreneurship.

3.2 Research Method

Collis and Hussey (2013) highlight that qualitative research aims to capture an individual’s thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences to make sense of an explored topic. Such a method seemed appropriate given this study’s objective for understanding the experiences of entrepreneurial barriers and entrepreneurial coping strategies among highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs, and thus, gain rich subjective data. Applying the qualitative paradigm supported the notion that humans are complex beings, each composed of their own multi-faceted realities (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018, p.17). Taking an interpretivist stance, this study regards its participants as actors, attempting to examine and acknowledge

how the world is experienced from idiosyncratic perspectives (Ferguson, Ferguson & Taylor, 1992).

As opposed to a value free deductive quantitative methodology, taking a value-bound inductive approach supported the exploratory nature of this study by welcoming the development and emergence of authentic insights from participants (Locke, 2007). This openness and flexibility towards possible patterns within data afforded an opportunity to gather depth and breadth around a relatively under researched phenomena (Hair, Page & Brunsveld, 2019). In doing so, this research seeks to better understand the relationship among selected variables (entrepreneurial barriers, entrepreneurial coping strategies and highly academically skilled ethnic minority entrepreneurship), facilitating the possibility for new generalisations to broader populations of interest.

3.3 Informant Selection

As the main focus of this study includes highly academically skilled immigrant ethnic minority entrepreneurs who have started a business in Sweden, it was decided to reach out to alumni from entrepreneurship program / business faculties in higher education and those who had participated in local incubator programs.

To begin with, non-probability purposive sampling was used to source individuals by reaching out through LinkedIn, a well-known professional online networking platform (Nikolaou, 2014). This provided an opportunity to initially screen through candidates' backgrounds before officially approaching them. During the process of data collection, snowball sampling was applied as some participants recommended the researchers to contact additional entrepreneurs who had similar backgrounds. More than 450 LinkedIn profiles were screened during the selection process, 18 entrepreneurs were approached, 1 was excluded due to not fulfilling the inclusion criteria, and 10 entrepreneurs agreed to participate in this study.

This study intentionally selected informants with varying demographic backgrounds and focused on those who had operated a start-up with less than 5 years of creation. Focussing on early business owners ensured that early experiences entrepreneurs were captured from a nascent stage perspective. While this approach was not representative of a general

population, it could be argued that it enabled the authors to explore the proposed topic in more depth and gain valuable insights on any entrepreneurial barrier and accompanying coping strategies (if any).

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	
Inclusion	Exclusion
First generation immigrants in Sweden.	Second generation immigrants in Sweden.
Person of colour / ethnic background.	Caucasian background.
Completed higher education (BA/BSc or above) in business / entrepreneurship or completed higher education in other fields and have taken courses, training, or programs in entrepreneurship / business or equivalent.	Lack of higher education background in business / entrepreneurship or equivalent.
Started a new venture in Sweden (less than 5 years).	Only carried out entrepreneurial projects as part of a course, training or program.

3. 4 Data Collection and Procedure

In this study, multiple sources of data were collected to get a more comprehensive phenomenon. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Secondary data such as follow-up interviews, LinkedIn profiles, websites of entrepreneurial ventures, and additional written inquiries were used to provide more comprehensive insights and support the empirical findings. The procedure used for data collection will be further explained below.

3.4.1 Data Triangulation

In order to provide a wider and more comprehensive understanding of the entrepreneurial barriers and coping mechanisms of each participant, multiple sources of data were used (Yin, 2010). Applying triangulation in the research not only increased the quality of findings, but also enhanced the construct validity and reliability of the study's findings (Yin, 2010; Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018).

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews to address the research questions. In doing so, this allowed the researchers to remain open towards possible concepts and findings emerging from the data, supporting the inductive nature of this study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018, p.11). Furthermore, given the fact that individuals all had a unique set of experiences around entrepreneurial barriers, potentially being sensitive in nature, individual in-depth interviews were considered an appropriate option (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). As highlighted by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013) this method enabled the researchers to facilitate and welcome additional emerging data, leading to the discovery of new insights that were not covered during initial interview preparations.

In order to provide opportunities for informants to share their narratives and avoid leading answers, an interview guide was constructed with broad questions, avoiding direct terminology related to entrepreneurial barriers and entrepreneurial coping strategies, as suggested by Gioia et al (2013). Furthermore, to reduce the possibility of confirmation bias and encourage informants to share authentic narratives, the researchers decided not to share the interview guide with the informants (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018). The interview guide can be seen in Appendix A.

Interviews were conducted in English for consistency purposes, minimising the risk of any misinterpretations. Closed-ended questions were used to assist in gathering insights around the identified key variables: '*highly skilled*,' '*ethnic minority*' and '*entrepreneurship*'. This provided useful context when analysing the responses gained from open-ended questions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018, p.211).

Throughout the interview process, informants were asked to reflect upon their entire entrepreneurial journey and how specific mixed embeddedness factors affected their entrepreneurial ventures. To minimise the risk of recall bias and memory distortion, LinkedIn profiles were used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of participants' professional and educational backgrounds. These were then used to cross check the consistency of interview answers and written information regarding their personal experiences. Furthermore, follow-up inquiries (written communication and second interviews) were conducted to verify any inconsistencies from gathered data.

In line with COVID-19 restrictions, interviews were conducted using the Zoom (2021) modern enterprise video conferencing platform. This aligned with the study's affordability as Zoom was provided as part of the student researchers' university license. Despite following country precautions, it should be noted that an inability to carry out all interviews within the same time and location may have influenced data. As participants all had full time work commitments there was a need for the researchers to be flexible in regard to their availability. This was particularly important as accessibility can be considered a major determinant for participant engagement (Patton, 2005). The authors' recognition for the potential impact of time and space on the research process ensured contextual reflexivity (Finlay, 2002).

3.4.2 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was carried out beforehand for the researchers to familiarise themselves with the interview process and ensure the working of technology, fostering data accuracy and calibration (Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim & Yusof, 2017). Interestingly, this practice brought to light the unconscious bias researchers possessed when responding to participants'

answers, through facial expressions and affirming comments such as ‘*no way*’ and ‘*that’s tough*’. According to Powell, Hughes-Scholes and Sharman (2012) it is not uncommon for novice researchers to unintentionally elicit confirmation bias. To combat this, researchers tailored the interview delivery to be neutral, placing an emphasis on active listening. This increased the likelihood of findings being based on participants’ narratives as opposed to figments of the inquirer’s imagination, adding to the study’s confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p.121). In addition, insights from the pilot interview allowed the researchers to refine the interview guide to be more open as shown in Appendix A.

3.4.3 Data Collection Procedure

To begin with, participants’ LinkedIn profiles were screened before contacting persons who met the inclusion criteria. An information sheet (seen in Appendix B) was sent via LinkedIn’s private messaging function once participants agreed a willingness to participate with the study. This provided an outline of the research’s aims and objectives and their rights as participants, ensuring transparency (TuvalMashiach, 2017). At the beginning of each interview, the researchers provided an overview of the process, reaffirming information stated on the consent form, which was sent electronically beforehand. This can be seen in Appendix C. This included a comprehensive explanation of what informed consent entailed and how data would be processed and stored (Europa, 2010, p.8).

The researchers reminded participants of their right to withdraw at any time from the study, which assisted them to have confidence and trust in the research (Watts, 2008, p.440). Time was given to read this independently to ensure an understanding of the study’s purpose, thereby implying informed consent. In addition, verbal consent was given through the recorded Zoom interviews. Initial interviews were conducted with a total amount of time between 40-60 minutes. Content was then transcribed before conducting a thematic data analysis. Follow-up interviews were requested and conducted with participants to ensure sufficient data, further elaboration and/or clarification, lasting between 20-40 minutes. Written inquiries were also sent for data completion and clarification to several participants through both email and LinkedIn.

The use of multiple data sources (initial interviews, follow-up interviews, written inquiries and LinkedIn profiles) provided sufficient information for the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of participants' experiences in relation to their perceived entrepreneurial barriers and coping strategies.

Table 3: Participant background

No	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Citizenship / Long Term Residency	Educational Background	Year Completed Education	Year of Arrival	Venture
1	Dianne	Female	29	Non-EU	- MSc Media and Communication (Sweden) - Incubator programme and entrepreneurship training (Sweden)	2018 2020	2016	Media and design service
2	Adam	Male	26	EU	- BA International Business (Netherlands) - MSc Entrepreneurship and Innovation (Sweden)	2018 2020	2019	Machinery exchange service
3	Ingrid	Female	45	EU	- BA Tourism Management (Indonesia)	1998	2016	Catering service

					- Diploma in Marketing Management (Denmark)	2017		
					- Incubator programme (Denmark & Sweden)	2021		
4	Ethan	Male	31	Non-EU	- MSc Entrepreneurship and Innovation (Sweden)	2016	2015	Food condiment
5	Aidan	Male	41	EU	- BA Business Admin, (Denmark)	2008	2015	Food waste company
					- Incubator programme (Denmark & Sweden)	2021		
6	Kate	Female	34	Non-EU	- MSc Entrepreneurship and Innovation (Sweden)	2020	2019	Kitchen rental service

					- Entrepreneurship Training (Sweden)	2020		
7	Clara	Female	26	Non-EU	- MSc Food Technology and Nutrition & Entrepreneurship Course (Sweden)	2020	2018	Vegetarian food product
					- Incubator programme (Sweden)	2019		
8	Fiona	Female	29	Non-EU	- MSc Human Rights Law (Sweden)	2019	2017	Legal consultation
					- Entrepreneurship Training (Sweden)	2019		
9	Wayne	Male	23	EU	- BA Business Administration (Sweden)	2020	2015	Snack food product
10	Neil	Male	34	Non-EU	- BA Consular and Diplomatic Affairs (Philippines)	2006	2020	Assets tracking service
					- Bachelor of Law (Philippines)	2013		

					- Mini MBA, Entrepreneurship Course and Training (Philippines)	2019		
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3.5 Data Analysis

To ensure credibility, data was analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6 Phases as a guidance tool (familiarisation with the data, creation of initial codes and categories, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report). This was a systematic way of approaching emerging patterns in regard to personal or social meaning around the entrepreneurial barrier and coping strategy topic from a small data set, supporting the inductive data-driven nature of the study (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). With a qualitative paradigm of inquiry, this rigorous method ensured that human experiences and insights were captured systematically (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018, p.12). Thematic analysis also deemed appropriate given its accessibility and the authors' limited prior research experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

Following data collection, transcriptions were carried out by the authors using the technology platform Otter (2021) to assist the process. To ensure accuracy, once interviews were transcribed, the authors cross checked each document with the recorded Zoom video. Transcribed data was then divided into different themes using Microsoft Excel (2021) in relation to Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework, highlighting sentences that connected the study's phenomena, literature review and proposed research questions. Throughout the process, the researchers highlighted the difference and similarities between the collected data, referring to previous study findings and Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework. As highlighted by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2018), the approach used in this data analysis helped the researchers to better understand the phenomenon and identify any connections between the emerged themes.

First and second order analysis was used to assist the researcher in analysing the data (Goia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). Quotes from each informant were organised into first short order summaries, their associated themes, before grouping into second order concepts / common categories. This was a simple technique which enabled the authors to obtain an overview of the themes that arose from the narratives. As the process of data analysis overlapped with interviewing, emerging themes were continuously adjusted throughout the data collection process. Following data analysis, the authors used Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework to organise the findings.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Throughout this study, the European Union's (Europa, 2010, p.7) eight ethical principles were referred to as a guidance, which includes avoiding exploitation, respecting social value, human dignity, the rights and interests of participants. A risk assessment was carried out prior, minimising the potential harm presented from the study (Europa, 2010, p.9). This was especially relevant due to the possible sensitivity that the topic of entrepreneurial barriers could elicit.

Consent was given verbally and briefed at the beginning of each interview, and information about participants' voluntary participation was also explicitly highlighted, stating their right to discontinue at any time. Information regarding the data collection was explained, namely the recording and transcribing process where authors followed institutional and regulatory guidelines, the nature of anonymity and confidentiality of participants' information. Using pseudonyms enabled participants to freely express their thoughts and feelings minimising the risk for withholding valuable information during the interview.

3.7 Limitations

Understanding the methodological limitations plays a critical role for how the data analysis is conducted and subsequently, the discussion and conclusion. More importantly, it will serve as a recommendation for how future research can be carried out. The limitations are described in the following order: research design, informant selection, data collection, and lastly, other considerations.

3.7.1 Research Design

It should be noted that despite the relevancy for this thesis as previously mentioned, qualitative research has its limitations. This includes the possibility of being subjective, making it difficult to generalise findings and replicate in future research, as highlighted by Bell, Bryman, & Harley (2018).

In order to address the possible limitations of subjectivity, the authors decided to have a clear inclusion criterion for the informant selection. Furthermore, the authors ensured that

there was no personal conflict of interest prior to the research. Iterations between Kloosterman, Van der Leun & Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework and research findings have been incorporated throughout the data analysis to maintain the objectivity of this study.

The authors attempted to be explicitly clear regarding the details for each process to improve the possibility for replication of the study. The unique context-attributed with a qualitative approach did however pose a challenge for replicating this study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018). Furthermore, due to the niche inclusion criteria and limited network accessibility, the authors were only able to secure a limited number of informants. A small sample of 10 highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs in Sweden means that findings are not representative of the whole population, as highlighted by Yin (2003). Further research with more participants could be beneficial to validate and replicate findings.

3.7.2 Informant Selection

Admittedly, the term '*highly academically skilled*' could have a wide range of definitions, and informants' entrepreneurial knowledge differed depending on the obtained education. This means that participants accumulated human capital may have resulted in contrasting perceptions of entrepreneurial barriers and coping strategies. To address this limitation, the authors decided to narrow this definition to persons who had completed higher education at BSc/BA or above level, had undertaken entrepreneurial education, either through higher education, or as a freestanding educational course / training. Notably, one of the participants (Wayne) arrived in Sweden for necessity purposes as a refugee. Having a heterogeneous sample with regards to time and reason for arriving in Sweden would have strengthened the generalisation of data.

3.7.3 Data Collection

As Bell, Bryman & Harley (2018) argue, qualitative interview approaches tend to be less insightful and can lead to over-rationalisation from informants. To address this limitation, the authors used semi-structured interviews to maintain the openness and flexibility during the data collection. To ensure data was relevant to the research questions, interview

questions were chosen in line with Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness. Furthermore, data triangulation was used to enable consistency of focussed data and increase the credibility of this study's findings.

3.7.4 Other Considerations

The COVID-19 pandemic and its restriction inhibited the researchers' ability to carry out the study in-person. While conducting online interviews over Zoom allowed the researchers to include informants to participate despite not residing in Sweden, the limitations of online research must be acknowledged. As highlighted by Patel, Bedi, Deitte, Lewis, Marx and Jordan (2020), online interview settings tend to pose unconscious bias, for example the background image that informants used may have created specific stereotypes for the researchers. In addition, informants had different technological capabilities which may have affected the process of online interviewing. This included differing internet speed access, video conferencing specifications and distractions occurred in participants' own environment. An online focus also made it challenging for researchers to gage any cues elicited as opposed with in-person interactions e.g., facial expressions and body movements.

Another limitation that needed to be taken into consideration was that each informant had different traits and characteristics (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2018). This would have influenced the interpretation of each question and accompanying responses for the verbal and non-verbal cues given during the interview. Further, little research exists looking at highly academically skilled immigrant EME entrepreneurship, meaning that the authors' background knowledge in this particular field may have been lacking. This may have influenced the interview delivery and credibility of findings.

4. Findings

This section will use data extracts and present these in relation to the identified themes. Themes are then organised using Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness, looking at social, political-institutional and then economic insights. Both entrepreneurial barriers and coping strategies are explored within each embeddedness. Table 4 below provides a brief summary of data analysis results. Details of the summary can be found in Appendix D.

Table 4: Summary of data analysis results

Type of Embeddedness	Themes	Keywords	No. of Informants (out of 10)
Social Embeddedness	Barriers	Lack of Local Network	9
		Discrimination	6
		Inner Barrier	2
	Coping Strategies	Immigrant Background	2
		Networking Activities	6
		Network	10
		Co-Ethnic Community	3
		Entrepreneurial Education	6

Political- Institutional Embeddedness	Barriers	Rules and Regulation	2
		Accessibility of Information	8
		Administrative Difficulties	6
		Language and Culture	9
	Coping Strategies	Swedish Mindset	2
		Teaming up with Swedes	5
Economic Embeddedness	Barrier	High Market and Labour Cost	2
	Coping Strategy	Bootstrapping	1

4.1 Social Embeddedness – Barriers

4.1.1 Lack of Local Network

Lack of a local network was mentioned by the majority of informants, considered an impediment to market entry and the ability to navigate the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Sweden. In Clara's case, lack of a local network was one of the main reasons why her start-up was discontinued:

“This Swedish typical way...you didn't know the people; how can you enter the market? It can be, because I didn't know how to start this business in Sweden at all, like for food, for example, I didn't know which institution I needed to ask first, I didn't

know how I can get the legal (assistance) or anything (...) no one from us is Swedish so yeah that's the obstacles that we had at the time.”

Similar to Clara, Neil emphasised that having local connections determined the business continuity, particularly due to the difficulties in navigating the start-up infrastructure and other bureaucracy:

“In my case, I don't have a personal number. And I also don't have a bank ID, because I'm just here for one year. Networking for us, it's very, very important (...). And it's stressed its importance in the Swedish context, because again you're non-EU. You're an immigrant. You really don't know how to navigate the bureaucracy (without the local). Network is very important here.”

Ingrid also highlighted her difficulties for acquiring the local network and the hindrance this had on her venture's growth:

“I really need a local. I've been looking for six months now and then nothing until now. (...) networking is important because, like, my other friend who has a company (...) you know, they got (the customers) from someone that they know from someone who knows someone, something like that”.

Overall, the informants who mentioned a lack of local network as a main barrier agreed that having this would ease their performance and promote their venture growth. As Wayne stated:

“...Like marketing activities and everything else, you definitely have to have Swedish networks, like (the network) with Swedish companies or business owners. If you have that, then you're safe.”

4.1.2 Discrimination

Six informants highlighted that discrimination was one of their main barriers for their venture growth and their entrepreneurial journey in Sweden. Having an ethnic name has been considered as the main reason for discrimination, particularly during cold calls or attempts to reach out to potential clients or partners. Several informants also highlighted that having different physical appearance led to discrimination in business. Fiona, who has an

ethnic sounding last name, tried sending an email to potential partners without receiving any response. However, once she used a pseudonym of a white male-sounding name, her potential partners promptly replied to her email:

“I sent an email twice and they didn't respond, and then I sent an email under a very European male sounding name, and they replied to me in a few days, saying “oh yeah sure send us your CV”, so I was like, so my email didn't get lost in your spam folder or anything. You just saw my name and you're like, no, that's a little too ethnic sounding.”

Dianne, who started her venture with her Swedish companion, also noticed how her business partner treated her differently:

“When I contacted him with my name, and in English, I think things are just being pushed aside. But when my boyfriend takes over the conversation in Swedish, you will be like, ah, that's how this is, what you should do. You know, so things are easier with his Swedish proficiency and Swedish name.”

Having a different physical appearance in comparison to the majority native born population has been a major barrier for several informants. Often, informants felt excluded, believing it to be harder to build trust with the local community and expand their network in the business community. As Adam stated:

“When it comes to trust, I kind of had the feeling that, being someone, not from Sweden, not blonde, having a beard impacted me a lot in my process. Again, (I am) happy to have Michael on board, he looks super Swedish, but I think it was harder for me to get trust and get into conversations.”

4.1.3 Entrepreneurial Inner Barrier

Mindset

During the interview Fiona found that in addition to external factors, one of the biggest entrepreneurial barriers was her own mindset:

“I tend to overextend myself and not be realistic about how much I can handle and how much time I can spare, that's what was the main hindrance for this start-up idea that I had”.

Personality

For Adam, his natural orientation towards being extraverted led him to engage in networking activities, which in turn assisted him with his business: *“I'm a super social guy, and I love to network (...) I just love talking to people and getting to know them (...) I think that is really important.”* In addition, he stated an inner drive and motivation to pursue business from a young age:

“I kind of always wanted to be an entrepreneur, (...) I love the idea of, you know, creating things and then bringing it to market. That was always really interesting to me. It's like, literally since I was a kid.”

4.2 Social Embeddedness - Coping Strategies

4.2.1 Immigrant Background

Interestingly, two informants whose business was based on ethnic cuisine food products noted how they utilised their background as a marketing tool. For Ethan, being Mexican helped him: *“in order to transmit the trust and the passion that I had for the company because it was salsa and I'm like very Mexican”*. Whereas Wayne referred to the Swedish trend for wanting to try different foods with the accompanying story behind the product: *“if you can take advantage (...) if you manage to make use of your story. That will definitely help you”*.

4.2.2 Networking Activities

Six informants highlighted networking activities as a strategy to increase their reach and eventually help them in their entrepreneurial journey. In its broad sense, Adam noted how curiosity and reaching out to people on LinkedIn was helpful, *“ask questions (...) without*

being shy". Clara engaged in activities outside her education as a strategy: *"to push my limit in many activities, from school, be a mentor and then volunteer in church"*.

4.2.3 Network

More than any other strategy, a local network was highlighted by all informants as the main enabler for carrying out ventures in Sweden being connected to Swedes was referred to as an important growth strategy for establishing a business in Sweden. For example, Wayne mentioned how having connections enables a quicker progress *"you skip so many steps"*. Aidan capitalised on his direct network insights:

"having a Swedish wife (...) has helped me to understand Swedish culture better and eventually helped me do business relatively comfortably".

In Clara's opinion *"it's always better to have someone with Swedish citizenship"* as although she acquired the necessary skills to carry out her venture, she believed *"when it comes to the regulation and food if you want to build a business"* there is a need to be proficient in the local language. Reaching out to University connections was used as a business strategy by Adam, where he *"reached out to people and they reached out to their people"*, where associating himself with *"one of the top institutions in Sweden"* was a *"tool to build trust"*.

Aidan referred to being involved in a local start-up community, which has helped him *"establish relationships"* and build a reputation of who he is and what his venture offered. Involving himself in an incubator exposed him to other entrepreneurs, one of which signposted him to a food specific incubator programme. Due to a *"reduced network"* Ethan joined a local incubator programme following entrepreneurial education.

Adam used his local Swedish co-founder as a middleman to connect with the local network. He felt a need to *"be super close to the customer"* and teaming up with a Swede with native language competency facilitated relationship building for his start-up. This, he mentioned, was key to their progress particularly as their target customers were farmers, thus both the industry and client group formed as a key driver for the development of the company.

4.2.4 Co-ethnic Community

Co-ethnic community was noted as a strategy for three informants. As her food company was centred around Indonesian cuisine, Ingrid stated how reaching out to a more targeted community enabled her to grow the business: *“Indonesian, of course, is my first customer, and they are actually the reason that it's growing now”*. Similarly, Wayne referred to his Syrian network forming the foundation and early phase of his business:

“Our first customers are basically my family, my relatives, my network (...) that have moved to Sweden (...) they know more about the country, how things work. So, whenever I have a question, I can get them. So, I wouldn't have started the business without them.”

In Ethan's case, his business was Mexican salsa, and he used his cultural identity, leveraging from the Latin American local community as a marketing tool:

“Growing the network with the Latin American community, being Mexican and being Latin American helped me to push the company because (...) they were promoting me with their Swedish circles.”

4.2.5 Entrepreneurial Education

Six informants highlighted education as a means to provide useful tools in the business context. The relevance of their entrepreneurial education differed according to different stages of their business ventures. In Ingrid's case, participating in an incubator was *“really an eye opening”* experience for understanding the processes related to entrepreneurship: *“I learned a lot about entrepreneurship”*. Her business was founded with the peers in this education following on from the programme's project assignments.

For Adam, the knowledge acquired from his master's degree provided a strong foundation during each stage of his business:

“we've been really following it (...) we've been doing campaigns where we just have a landing page, a signup list, we did surveys, we have now built an MVP that we launched two months ago.”

Similarly, Neil mentioned how his entrepreneurial education helped and prepared him to launch his business. In his case, he felt as though he faced more challenges as a non-native:

“I know that the barriers are really high. And, and that's why I made the conscious decision to really study further and have that structured approach when it comes to launching or running a company.”

His perception of facing barriers led him to take a formal educational approach to entrepreneurship “*for opportunities*”.

The relevance of education was only deemed beneficial for the ideation stage of Clara’s business: “*they just give us help for our idea, to make it more tangible and visible, but how to enter the market to make it real. It will be another stage*”. While Adam felt that his education did not add value as the reality of entrepreneurship differed greatly from theory: “*it didn't quite help me out. Because the reality is very different*”.

4.3 Political-Institutional Embeddedness - Barriers

4.3.1 Rules and Regulations

Although several informants regarded the Swedish start-up infrastructure as somewhat more structured in comparison to their home countries, two informants considered the Swedish rules and regulation as a hindrance for their venture growth. Aidan highlighted that the rigid rules and policy can be a major hindrance for his venture:

“The cons are too systematic since everything has been established on a standard, and then you have to go follow the rules, there is no flexibility. There is no shortcut or anything and you have to go follow the rules.”

Furthermore, Aidan highlighted that the rules and regulations in Sweden regarding COVID-19 restrictions hindered him to grab opportunities in the market, particularly due to most activities moving online:

“Since last year it has been very difficult, so many things have been postponed. Majority of the things have been pushed online and it prolongs the six months up to now.”

4.3.2 Accessibility of Information

Another recurring barrier was the accessibility of information and difficulties to navigate through the Swedish bureaucracy system to start and run a venture. Clara, who founded another start-up in Asia, considered Swedish start-up bureaucracy as hard to navigate with its limited accessibility for internationals:

“I know that the support from the government is pretty good, but then when it comes to the very technical and tangible step. It's not realistic for me, not that easy to follow.”

Ethan echoed the same statement, where his difficulties of navigating Swedish bureaucracy gave him the impression that Sweden's start-up ecosystem is not friendly for internationals:

“I think it [setting up a business in Sweden] is difficult, mainly because of the language barrier, because there isn't a lot of information. I mean there's information in English, but it's very tricky to understand, because I think it's not properly translated or maybe, Swedes, maybe, this is a hypothesis. Swedes don't want to open up for everyone.”

4.3.3 Administrative Difficulties

One of the most pressing hindrances noted by informants was administrative difficulties, particularly due to an immigration status for being non-EU citizens. Immigration status caused severe difficulties in securing permits to stay and run their venture smoothly. Ethan, who started his business prior to his graduation, faced difficulties in securing his permit to stay while managing his business operations:

“Truly, immigration was the central problem that I had. Swedes are very strict, if you're finished studying, if you want to be here you need to begin a new visa process.”

Likewise, Clara emphasised that there are more complex requirements that she needs to fulfil to secure her permit to stay in Sweden due to her status as a non-EU citizen:

“I recognise that the immigration in Sweden is quite strict with our background, (we need to prove) our capital and savings. It can be an obstacle for not (being able) to build the business. Also getting the permit to stay here is not that easy right now. So, I don't know, it can be impactful for foreign people like me to stay here, we need the permit but then if we want a permit to (start a) business we need something else, which is much more difficult.”

The difficulties for navigating administration requirements, particularly for non-EU citizens, led some informants to doubt their decision for starting their venture in Sweden. In Kate's case, she decided to discontinue her venture because of this specific reason:

“...being an entrepreneur, no matter where you are it's already hard, but then especially being a foreigner, you know it's harder. Because for example, we didn't have a personal number (...) and that was also one of the reasons why in the end I decided not to stay in Sweden. Because for me, I would rather be in a place where you know maybe it will be a bit easier to get started.”

In conclusion, the majority of non-EU informants emphasised that their status for being a non-EU citizen has put them in the disadvantage position to start their venture in Sweden as Neil stated:

“You can't deny the fact that we immigrants (from) non-EU just couldn't simply navigate (the system) and that we face more challenges, again, documentation, visa, absence of personal number (...) so it's also a challenge.”

In addition to the immigration status for non-EU citizens, another barrier mentioned by the majority of the informants included venture administrative issues. Even for EU citizens who were allowed to stay in Sweden because of the EU free movement policies, they still experienced difficulties obtaining a personal number and bank identification to fulfil venture administrative requirements. Adam, who has German nationality and initially came to Sweden to study MSc Entrepreneurship and Innovation, did not have a personal number and/or bank identification as the program lasted less than 13 months, leading to a delay for his venture to move forward:

“At some point (when registering a company), you need to link it to a bank account. And that was the hurdle for us because most of the banks wanted someone to have a

personal ID (personnummer and bank ID). And we are still in that process actually, now we are looking for another bank and applying there, but then it takes up to three months in the bank that we are currently applying”.

4.3.4 Language and Culture

Other major challenges identified by the majority of informants included the language and cultural barriers, particularly being able to interact with local communities and potential customers. Wayne highlighted that he may have missed numerous opportunities due to the language barrier:

“If you want to exploit opportunities you need that (Swedish language), because for instance there are so many social events run by companies or organisations.”

Adam also noted that his lack of Swedish language skills hindered him from being able to communicate directly with his customers, and led to dependency to his Swedish co-founder:

“You need to be super close to the customer, or the user, which I can't, which is Michael job right now, because he speaks Swedish, but I don't. That's a super big challenge for me.”

Cultural norms were also identified as a barrier for some informants. Aidan found it difficult to understand how to work with a Swedish colleague due to the different working styles, leading to misunderstandings between him and his partners:

“...Swedish people, they are too kind to confront you. (...) when you ask for feedback from your boss or whoever it is, they go around the bushes a lot to get the point and they don't directly tell you because they don't want it to be misunderstood as a part of racism or discrimination or whatever you want to call it. And that's a major issue (...) It's very nice and it's very welcoming, but on the other hand, it's a very issue because it feels like it's something beneath the carpet. But you never see it.”

4.4 Political- Institutional Embeddedness - Coping Strategies

4.4.1 Swedish Mindset

Only one strategy was mentioned in terms of managing political-institutional aspects of entrepreneurship. When completing necessary documents Ethan simplifies his experience of coping: *“you just need to think like a Swede, and you'll manage.”*

4.4.2 Teaming up with a Swede

Half of the informants emphasised teaming up with local citizens as their main coping strategy. Adam felt that teaming up with a native assisted him when it came to fulfilling logistical business aspects. For him, there was a dependency on his Swedish co-founder to overcome administrative obligations:

“Setting up a company, you know, going through the whole process, you need someone with a personal ID number in Sweden, and lucky I had [Swedish co-founder] with me”.

4.5 Economic Embeddedness - Barrier

4.5.1 High Market and Labour Cost

In regard to economic embeddedness, high market and labour costs was the only entrepreneurial barrier mentioned by informants. Ingrid highlighted that due to high labour costs in Sweden, she could not afford to hire an employee to help her grow her venture:

“In Sweden, everything is expensive, you have to do everything alone (...) if I hire people from here, it's going to be expensive. But when your (venture is) growing, you have a growing company like this, you cannot actually pay people in the beginning (because of the) high costs. So, you have to do everything alone”.

For Kate, the high market and labour costs in Sweden not only hindered her to grow her business, but also led her to doubt her decision for being an entrepreneur:

“I think after living in Sweden I realised that I would rather actually be an employee in Sweden, rather than an entrepreneur, because it would cost me a lot of money to actually have the company.”

4.6 Economic Embeddedness - Coping Strategy

4.6.1 Bootstrapping

Ingrid’s inability to pay for employees led her to utilise the bootstrapping financing strategy, relying on personal finances, her own time and resources rather than outside investments. This impacted her working hours:

“In the beginning, I can work from nine o'clock until 12 o'clock at night because of everything. I have to divide my time to do everything.” In turn, to reduce her workload, Ingrid asked her son when he was old enough to do some of the tasks: *“now it's a bit better because I can ask my sons to deliver some food”*.

5. Discussion

This chapter will draw upon previous research and the research questions to make sense of the study's empirical findings. The section is organised using Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework, discussing and analysing both entrepreneurial barriers and entrepreneurial coping strategies.

5.1 Social Embeddedness - Barriers

5.1.1 Lack of Local Network

In general, the local network can be considered as a crucial tool for entrepreneurs to get a job, expand the business, or exchange business ideas (Chimucheka, Muchineripi & Chinyamurindi, 2019). A lack of local network has been attributed within previous research as leading to severe consequences for immigrant entrepreneurs, including receiving wrong information, an inability to gain trust from the local community or attract a large number of customers (Masurel, Nijkamp, Tastan & Vindigni, 2002). In addition, not having a local network results in highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs to miss out on opportunities that only the local population would be able to recognise (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). The findings in this study highlighted that it was the lack of a local network which caused the greatest challenge for highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs to operate their ventures in Sweden.

5.1.2 Discrimination

Racial and ethnic based discrimination was referred to by the majority of informants as a main barrier of the entrepreneurial journey in Sweden. This finding aligns with previous research from Aaltonen and Akola (2012), which regards a lack of trust from the native-born population as one of the main obstacles for immigrant entrepreneurs. Another insight was that credibility levels among highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs (e.g high level of education, previous professional experiences, etc) did not necessarily influence the discrimination experienced. Such a finding could be related to previous research, where immigrants with observable differences in a native-born majority tended to have stronger

outgroup categorisation, receiving lower trust and higher negative perceptions (Heath & Brinbaum, 2007; Wallman Lundåsen & Wollebæk, 2013). On a broad level, the perceived prejudice corresponds with the trend for racial discrimination that has been recorded as widely practiced in Sweden, particularly across the labour market and business sector (Grand, & Szulkin, 2002; Rydgren, 2004; Carlsson & Rooth, 2007; Nordin & Rooth, 2009).

5.1.3 Inner Barrier

Personality

One participant (Fiona) mentioned how her strong need for achievement led her to take on many opportunities at the same time. For her, this orientation caused difficulties in regard to her own expectation of the workload she could handle and her overall entrepreneurial capabilities. This is in line with Åsterbro et al. (2014), mentioning that individual behavioural and/or interpersonal traits were seen to form as a major barrier for entrepreneurs when pursuing entrepreneurial ventures.

5.2 Social Embeddedness - Coping Strategies

5.2.1 Network

Correspondingly, having a network was referred again and again across the cross-section of the study's informants as a coping strategy. This is unsurprising, given that previous studies regard this as a core component for highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs to succeed with their ventures (Jain & Ali, 2013). Daniel, Henley and Anwar (2019) point out that the entrepreneurial activities highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs engage in and their corresponding opportunity structures influence the degree to which they grow. Interacting with Swedes enabled several entrepreneurs (Wayne, Clara, Aidan and Adam) to form meaningful connections, facilitating progression within the start-up. This suggests that the trajectory of an entrepreneurial venture is in relation to being connected with Swedes, to elicit specific traits and/or knowledge that they may lack (Jain & Ali, 2013).

5.2.2 Co-Ethnic Community

Building upon this, as presented in the findings chapter, three informants with diverse backgrounds; Indonesian (Ingrid), Syrian (Wayne) and Mexican (Ethan) described a dependency for the co-ethnic community in their ventures. This was for sourcing target customers (Ingrid and Wayne), marketing and networking purposes (Ingrid and Ethan), and for general support (Wayne). Such insights indicate the multifaceted role acquiring co-ethnic connections can have in launching and sustaining a venture.

For Wayne, family support was noted as a factor that initiated his venture, which is in line with previous research, regarding this as a key determinant for the survival of an early-stage venture (Barakji & Kalssli, 2017). Interestingly, Wayne was an informant who arrived in Sweden as a refugee from Syria. Similar to Wayne's view, De Lange, Berntsen, Hanoeman and Haidar (2020) stressed that local support plays a crucial role in helping people from this background to navigate through the onset of a venture.

In Ethan's case reaching out to his local Latin American community was a beneficial way of expanding his credibility for selling Mexican-inspired salsa. This was similar for Ingrid, whose venture involved selling Indonesian inspired dishes depended on co-ethnic traction to expand the customer segment. Both strategies are similar to Saxenian's (2006) study, which found that highly skilled migrant entrepreneurs leveraged on their co-ethnic networks who had linkages to their country of origin. To some degree, and for different reasons, receiving assistance from co-ethnics determined the success levels of the entrepreneurs and their ventures (Shivani & Sharan, 2005). In line with the research of Baraki and Kalssli (2017), regardless of the form of support, be it financial or non-financial capital, such factors impact the continuity of a venture.

5.2.3 Entrepreneurial Education

Entrepreneurial education was attributed as a useful coping strategy for the informants. The knowledge gained offered transferable skills within the entrepreneurial context. Adam noted that the syllabus taught within his MSc programme formed as a pivotal foundation to ensure he followed a legitimate methodology in his venture. It could be argued that this is congruent with Jain and Ali's (2013) findings, where entrepreneurial education is seen to enhance an

entrepreneur's perception of their capabilities in realising their entrepreneurial intentions. Without the acquired human capital, perhaps Adam would not have pursued his venture or believe he had the ability to sustain it.

Insights from Neil and Ingrid mirrored a perception that education played an instrumental role for understanding the processes behind setting up a business. The in-built theory from educational programmes were deemed as a strong base for application within their ventures. This could imply that some highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs depend on education for gaining theoretical understanding of the mechanisms behind business before applying in their ventures and entering the entrepreneurial ecosystem. If this is the case, for some entrepreneurs, their success could be attributed to the level of entrepreneurial education obtained prior to launching, confirming (Upton et al. 1995) findings.

In contrast to the above, Clara believed that her entrepreneurial education was only relevant in assisting her during the ideation phase of her start-up. This suggests that the applicability of entrepreneurial education contrasts depending on the stage of the entrepreneurial journey.

5.3 Political-Institutional Embeddedness - Barriers

5.3.1 Rules and Regulations

For immigrant entrepreneurs, a lack of familiarisation for how businesses function in the host country poses a challenge, largely due to contrasting operational norms from country to country (Pinkowski, 2009). For highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs in Sweden, previous experience of starting a venture and familiarity with business operations from their home countries may not be applicable in Sweden, particularly when it comes to rules, regulations and interaction with the authorities. This is because they need to familiarise themselves with the rules and regulations of Sweden. Coupled with the language barrier, this creates a further challenge for highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs.

In addition to this, it was evident that the global COVID-19 pandemic has created a further challenge for this population group. Despite Swedish COVID-19 restrictions being more relaxed in comparison to other countries, more rules and restrictions were considered a hindrance for the highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs. This was predominantly

due to the fact that most activities were moved online, impacting business growth, particularly due to the difficulties in establishing and expanding social networks in Sweden.

5.3.2 Accessibility of Information

Due to the language barrier, accessibility for information in regard to business administrative regulations is often cited as a main political-institutional entrepreneurial barrier (Pinkowski, 2009). The findings of this study reflect that an inability to understand instructions and information about business operations in the local language was a hindrance for moving forward with the ventures from the ideation stage. These challenges were particularly highlighted by Clara and Ethan.

5.3.3 Administrative Difficulties

This study found that highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs with non-EU citizenship faced greater administrative challenges in comparison to those from within the EU. For those with EU citizenship, under free movement agreement, it is possible to work and reside in Sweden without a work permit. Furthermore, when it comes to employment working conditions and other advantages such as social benefit or tax there is equal treatment with Swedish nationals (EU, 2021). In contrast, those with non-EU citizenship have to fulfil immigration requirements, not only requiring complex paperwork, but also proof that there is sufficient financial capital for the first two years of residing (Migrationsverket, 2021). This posed a challenge for nascent entrepreneurs who started their business post-graduation and also difficult for those without the expected financial, as reflected by Clara.

For the highly academically skilled EMEs with EU citizenship, fulfilling administrative requirements for new venture creation in Sweden was considered as a complex process, as the majority of business administrative tasks in Sweden usually require a registration number and bank ID (BankID, 2021; Skatteverket, 2021). These are only given to individuals who have a right to live in Sweden for more than 13 months, those with diplomatic rights or working in certain international organisations. As a result, graduates who completed a 1-year program in Sweden or came to Sweden solely to start a new venture are anticipated to experience administrative difficulties.

5.3.4 Language and Culture

When an immigrant moves from their home country to a new host country, it is expected for them to learn the local language in order to integrate with the local community. This can create difficulties for highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs who have a short span between their time of arrival in Sweden and starting their own venture. This short time frame may not enable them to have proficient Swedish language skills.

Previous research shows that an inability to communicate effectively with the majority native born population is a barrier for immigrant entrepreneurs as there are inconsistencies with the accessibility of institutional information being in English (Enow, 2010). In Adam's case, his lack of Swedish language capability limited him to get closer to his customers and hindered his venture in growing. Furthermore, a perception existed e.g., Wayne, that a lack of native language abilities results in missing crucial business opportunities in the market. In line with the statement from Wayne, previous study findings also highlight that ethnic minorities have a tendency not to utilise the services provided by various agencies due to an unawareness of what is available (Smallbone, Johnson, Virk & Hotchkiss, 2000).

Similar to language, culture adjustment could also pose a barrier for highly academically skilled EMEs. Those who are unfamiliar with Sweden may require more time to understand and adjust to the Swedish culture. As highlighted by Barakji and Kalssli (2017), cultural discord between an immigrants' culture and host culture can lead to misunderstandings and hinder venture growth, particularly in regard to building customer relationships. This was evident in the interview with Aidan where he described experiencing conflicts with his business partners due to the misunderstandings of Swedish cultural norms.

5.4 Political-Institutional Embeddedness - Coping Strategy

5.4.1 Partnering with a Swede

In their research, Barakji and Kalssli (2017) stated that understanding a host country's customs and language impacts an EME's capacity to effectively integrate within the entrepreneurial market and gain trust from natives. This was the case for Adam, who had to depend on his Swedish co-founder when communicating with their main customer segment,

farmers, who often lacked English language proficiency. Understanding the language and/or teaming up with a native could therefore drive the overall performance of a venture.

5.5 Economic Embeddedness - Barrier

5.5.1 High Market and Labour Cost

Multiple studies have highlighted that financial capital barrier could be one of the main hindrances for entrepreneurs to grow their businesses (Volery et al. 1997; Robertson et al. 2003; Choo & Wong, 2006). This applied to Ingrid and Kate who experienced difficulties covering their venture expenses, mainly employment and other administrative costs. Considering Sweden is one of the highest tax paying countries in the world (OECD, 2021b), and businesses are required to pay high employee contributions (arbetsgivaravgift) which up to 31.42% of brutto salary of their employees (Skatteverket, 2021b), this can create difficulties for new ventures with small or medium capital when employing workers, thus hindering business expansion.

5.6 Economic Embeddedness - Coping Strategy

5.6.1 Bootstrapping

It is not uncommon for start-ups to use the bootstrap approach in their venture, securing funds through for example family support (Ebben & Johnson, 2006; Barakji, & Kalsli, 2017). One informant in particular (Ingrid) noted how utilising her son (of working age) as an informal worker minimised the time and costs related with her venture in Sweden. Arguably, being resourceful in social and human capital results in increased financial capital in the long run.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Aim of the Thesis and Theoretical Contributions

This research aimed to understand the entrepreneurial barriers (if any) that highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs face when engaging with their ventures in Sweden. Additionally, looking into whether there were any accompanying coping strategies that impacted their ability to flourish entrepreneurially in Sweden. The inductive nature of this study has presented several insights into the experiences of highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs. Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness Theoretical Framework was used as a tool to understand these across social, political-institutional and economic dimensions.

From this, three main conclusions emerged. Firstly, it is evident that many of the barriers are congruent with the barriers faced among this population group as a whole relate to social and political-institutional embeddedness: discrimination, lack of network, accessibility of information, administrative difficulties, language and culture. This implies that a highly academically skilled immigrant EME's ability to operate their venture is not subject to the acquired human capital from entrepreneurial education alone. However, for some, it is clear that entrepreneurial education has influenced how they operate their ventures. Due to the unique experiences attributed with each entrepreneur, the benefits of entrepreneurial education are therefore inconclusive, based on the entrepreneur's perception of barriers faced. This offers valuable insight for scholars as it suggests that the means of entrepreneurial education can determine the course of a venture.

Secondly, the recurrence of network as a main barrier is congruent with previous research from Hart and Arcs (2011) where lack of social network in the host country posed as the main challenge for highly skilled technology immigrants. Not dissimilar, but from a highly skilled refugee perspective, De Lange, Berntsen, Hanoeman and Haidar (2020) also note the core role of network in establishing a start-up. From an academic standpoint, this raises cause for researchers to further understand the role of social factors in enabling or hindering entrepreneurial activity among the highly academically skilled immigrant EME group.

Lastly, exploring each embeddedness in isolation has enabled the researchers to identify main patterns around this topic in a holistic manner, as suggested by Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath (1999). From this study, it is clear that all domains of embeddedness are interrelated with each other, as evidenced in previous research (Ohlsson, Broomé & Bevelander 2012; Daniel, Henley & Anwar, 2019). In addition, scholars should consider that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to coping with entrepreneurial barriers, primarily based on the very subjective nature of individuals' perception of what is regarded as a barrier or strategy.

In addition to the aforementioned insights, to the researchers' best knowledge, this study is one of the first studies focussing on highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs in Sweden. Thus, this study is able to fill the academic literature gap on the field of immigrant entrepreneurship and provides crucial knowledge as a base for future research of this topic.

6.2 Practical Implications

The findings from this research will be beneficial in providing insights not only to the highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs, but also to policy makers and other non-profit organisations who work with immigrant integration in the Swedish labour market. In regard to aspiring entrepreneurs, understanding the common barriers and coping strategy of highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs will enable them to prepare for the possible barriers and obstacles that may arise throughout their entrepreneurial journey in a new host country. For policy makers and non-governmental organisations working to support the integration process; understanding the typical barriers faced by highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs could provide insight for developing and shaping strategy and high-level policy to support this population group. Supporting these individuals to flourish in their ventures will contribute to reducing prevalent segregation between the native-born population and immigrants, both economically and socially. Furthermore, it will potentially contribute to Sweden's national economic development and growth.

6.3 Future Research Recommendations

The lack of existing studies looking at highly academically skilled immigrant ethnic minority entrepreneurship and limitations presented in this study welcomes several opportunities for future researchers in this field.

Firstly, while this exploratory research could provide initial insight and open a new pathway for future research in highly academically skilled immigrant entrepreneurship, duplication of the methodological approach is needed to further validate the findings of this study. In regard to the generalisation limitation, future studies should consider conducting a similar study using a quantitative approach with a larger sample of participants to better grasp a representation for the general population and draw more accurate conclusions. Furthermore, conducting a comparative study between highly skilled and low skilled immigrant EMEs could provide comprehensive insights into the similarities and differences between the two populations. This would help in identifying any contributing factors that determine an entrepreneurial venture's success.

While this study offers perspectives of perceived entrepreneurial barriers and coping strategies for highly academically skilled immigrant EMEs, several possible factors affecting these have not been explored. This includes duration of residence in Sweden, reasons for settling in Sweden, previous experience in entrepreneurship, years of professional experience outside entrepreneurship, social geography and geographical cultural background of the participants. Future research should consider delving deeper into these factors to gain further insights on how those specific factors impact perceived barriers and coping mechanisms.

In addition to the above-mentioned recommendations, future research could consider other types of highly academically skilled immigrants that have not been covered in the current study (Caucasian immigrants, second generation immigrants, EU immigrants, etc.) to provide a wider understanding of the highly skilled immigrant entrepreneurship field. Moreover, while this study has broadly drawn upon Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath's (1999) Mixed Embeddedness as a theoretical framework, further research could be done specifically exploring each embeddedness in more detail i.e., social, political-institutional and/or economical aspects.

Considering the lack of research in highly academically skilled ethnic minority immigrant entrepreneurship and the current study only focusing on early-stage start-ups, future study should consider duplicating the study with various participants in different phases of their entrepreneurial journey, e.g. mature business owners (over 5 years).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guide for Semi-structured Interview

Briefing and Research Purpose

Thank you for your willingness to allocate time to participate in this study. This research aims to explore and gain deep insights into the entrepreneurial barriers and coping mechanisms (if any) that highly academically skilled ethnic minority immigrants experience when starting a venture in Sweden. Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without question. The interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes using several open and closed-ended questions. The interview will be recorded for research purposes in line with university regulations. Extracts from interviews will be used to help formulate discussion. These will however be included anonymously through the use of pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Guiding Questions

Background Information

1. First of all, could you please introduce yourself (country of origin, age, education background, professional background)?
2. Can you explain the business idea that you started in Sweden?
3. Were there any reason(s) for you choosing to become an entrepreneur?

Social Level

4. Reflecting on your personal background (skills, competencies, personality), were there any factors that impacted your ability to run your business?
5. What does your network currently look like?
 - How has this impacted your business?

6. When starting your own venture, has your entrepreneurial educational background impacted you in any way?

Political - Structural Level

7. What do you think about the Swedish culture?
 - Has this affected your business in any way?
8. What are your thoughts about the Swedish start-up infrastructure and policy?
 - Has this impacted your business in any way?

Economical Level

9. What do you think about the business environment in Sweden?
 - Has this impacted your business in any way?

Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Background

10. In your opinion, has your background as an ethnic minority immigrant impacted the way you operate your business? How?

Thank you so much for your time and participation in this study.

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

We would like to invite you to be a part of our research study titled “*Exploring the entrepreneurial barriers and coping strategies among highly academically skilled immigrant entrepreneurs in Sweden: ethnic minority perspectives*”. This document provides information about the study and what it means to participate.

What is the project about and why would you like me to participate?

While several studies have investigated the barriers people of ethnic minorities backgrounds face when engaging in entrepreneurship, little research exists exploring this from a highly academically skilled perspective. We would like to understand from your perspective whether there are factors that have hindered or facilitated your entrepreneurial activity within the Swedish entrepreneurial ecosystem. And, if applicable, whether there are coping strategies that have enabled you to flourish with your entrepreneurial venture. You have been chosen as you are educated at a high level in a business/entrepreneurship related field and have experience in setting up your own business in Sweden for less than 5 years. Furthermore, you have an ethnic minority population background.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time. There is no mandatory obligation for you to answer all the questions within the interview or complete the 30-60 minute duration.

What are the benefits of taking part?

As someone who is well educated, participation in this research will offer you the opportunity to share the experiences of starting a venture in Sweden. Your views could be

incorporated in this thesis to increase the public's understanding of what it looks like to start a venture from an ethnic minority perspective.

What are the risks and disadvantages of taking part in this study?

The questions in the interview could be perceived as sensitive due to the nature of the topic. You have the right to not answer or terminate your involvement in the study at any time. The interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes of your time. Your participation will however be greatly appreciated and will be extremely useful information for the thesis.

How will confidentiality be maintained?

Data collected will be protected during the study. Interview notes will be kept securely locked away in a filing cabinet that can only be accessed by us. Files containing personal data will be password protected and anonymised using a pseudonym, in compliance with the *EU Data Protection Ordinance* and destroyed/shredded after completion. Recordings of interviews will be deleted after completion of the research study.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the interviews will be analysed and will serve as a contribution to the MSc Entrepreneurship and Innovation programme. This research will later be published as part of Lund University thesis database. It could also be used within relevant journals to increase people's awareness of your perspectives.

Who will monitor the research?

This research will be monitored by an academic research supervisor at Lund University.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact Karl Yves Vallin on karl_yves.vallin.7560@student.lu.se or Hannah Barker on hannah.barker.4830@student.lu.se.

What do I do next?

If you are still willing to participate and have read the accompanying consent form, we assumed inferred consent has been given.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to read this information. We look forward to hearing your insights.

Yours sincerely,

Karl Yves Vallin and Hannah Barker

Appendix C

Lund University MSc Research Study

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research: *Exploring the entrepreneurial barriers and coping strategies of highly academically skilled immigrant entrepreneurs in Sweden: ethnic minority perspectives*

Name of Researcher: Karl Yves Vallin and Hannah Barker

Please read each statement carefully to ensure that you have a clear understanding of what this study involves.

1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for the above research study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and am satisfied.
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without question.
3.	I understand that I am able to withdraw the use of any of the information collected about myself for the study, at any given time.
4.	I agree to be interviewed by the researcher on Zoom.
5.	I agree to being recorded audibly and understand that I am free to pause or terminate the recording at any time.
6.	I understand that information from collected data may be used anonymously in the thesis and in papers produced for publication.

7.	I understand that any collected data will not be shared with any other organisation without received consent.
8.	I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by Lund University research supervisors for monitoring and auditing purposes within this research.

Declaration from the researcher: I have given a verbal explanation of the research study to the participant and have answered the participant's questions about it. I believe that the participant understands the study and has inferred consent to participate.

Appendix D

Data Analysis Result Summary

Type of Embeddedness	Themes	Keywords	Pseudonym										
			Adam	Aidan	Clara	Dianne	Ethan	Fiona	Ingrid	Kate	Neil	Wayne	
Social Embeddedness	Barrier	Lack of Local Network	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
		Discrimination	X		X	X		X				X	X
		Inner Barrier						X	X				
	Coping Strategy	Immigrant Background					X						X
		Networking Activities	X	X	X	X	X					X	

		Network	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
		Co-Ethnic Community					X		X			X	
		Entrepreneurial Education	X				X	X	X	X	X		
Political Institutional Embeddedness	Barrier	Rules and Regulations		X		X							
		Accessibility of Information	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	
		Administrative Difficulties	X		X		X	X		X	X		
		Language and Culture	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
	Coping Strategy	Swedish Mindset					X						X
		Teaming up with Swedes	X		X	X						X	X

Economic Embeddedness	Barrier	High Market and Labour Cost							X	X		
	Coping Strategy	Bootstrapping							X			