

Migrant entrepreneurship in official minority language contexts: a literature review

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Abstract

Purpose – Numerous studies have investigated the role of language proficiency in the integration of migrants into their host countries; however, they have often overlooked the intricacies of language in cases in which the host country has multiple official languages. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of minor official languages on migrant entrepreneurship by examining the latest developments in the literature.

Design/methodology/approach – We conducted a descriptive literature review using a systematic approach and analyzed 22 publications that examined migrant integration and entrepreneurship in countries with at least two official languages.

Findings – Three primary themes within the current research were highlighted: (1) migrant embeddedness, (2) the role of linguistic competences and (3) migrant entrepreneurial motivation. By leveraging their proficiency in minority official languages, migrant entrepreneurs embed themselves within both the minority and majority communities of the host country. Such an integration process presents them with different sets of advantages and disadvantages at various levels—institutional, market-entry and community—which influence their ability to access resources, navigate a complex entrepreneurial landscape, and achieve growth and sustainability in their ventures.

Originality/value – Although most migrants integrate into the dominant majority language, many countries facilitate their integration through official minority languages—an important factor to consider in both academic research and practice. Based on our findings, we developed three research streams and practical implications for policymakers on the topic of minor official languages in migrant entrepreneurship.

Keywords Migrant entrepreneurs, Linguistic skills, Official minority languages, Multilingual countries, Integration

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

The influence of migrant populations on the economic development of host countries is well established (e.g. [Martin, 2022](#); [Yakubovskiy et al., 2021](#)). Migrants bring a wealth of skills, experience, and cultural perspectives and contribute to their host countries not only through participation in the labor market but also through entrepreneurial ventures ([Azlor et al., 2020](#);

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Omoredé and Axelsson, 2022). However, the migrant experience is shaped by a range of challenges, among which language barriers are particularly consequential (Isaakyan *et al.*, 2022). Language proficiency plays a foundational role in migrant integration (Johnson, 2018), influencing access to both employment and entrepreneurship. However, its impact is especially pronounced in entrepreneurial contexts.

Unlike wage employment, which offers structured roles and institutional support, entrepreneurship requires greater individual agency and active engagement in diverse and often ambiguous communicative situations, such as negotiating with suppliers, navigating regulatory systems, building customer relationships, and accessing financial or institutional resources. In these settings, language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a gatekeeper for trust, legitimacy, and inclusion (Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2024; Nawyn *et al.*, 2012). A lack of host-country language proficiency can create a sense of liminality for migrants—a “betwixt-and-between” state (Turner, 1998) linked to uncertainty and disorientation that naturally undermines entrepreneurial agency and decision-making (Elo *et al.*, 2024). As a result, linguistic competency functions as a form of contextual embeddedness that can significantly enable or constrain entrepreneurial activity (Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2024). Engaging in the host country’s linguistic environment is thus a much more complex and high-stakes process for migrant entrepreneurs than for other economic actors.

A sizable body of literature focuses on migrant and migrant entrepreneurship (e.g. Chreim *et al.*, 2018; Dabić *et al.*, 2020; Sinkovic and Reuber, 2021). While research on language has been recognized as an important factor in migrant patterns (see Adserà and Pytlíková, 2016), its specific role in shaping migrant entrepreneurial opportunities remains underexplored (Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2024). This gap is particularly relevant in multilingual countries in which two or more official languages coexist—typically with one dominant language and others associated with minority groups. Examples of such countries include Finland, where Swedish is also official; Canada, where French is dominant in Quebec and English elsewhere; and South Africa, which has 11 official languages. The multilingual nature of these countries often reflects their histories of colonialism and language heritage, leading to tensions between the postcolonial or elite language and the titular language (e.g. Swedish and Finnish, respectively, in Finland) (Dana *et al.*, 2019; Elo *et al.*, 2022). This dynamic can influence how migrants are linguistically and economically integrated. Nevertheless, with appropriate policies, multilingual contexts may help unlock benefits—such as enhancing inclusion and facilitating international trade—despite the historical and sociopolitical complexities of language use (Elo and Ivanova-Gongne, 2020).

In such multilingual contexts, the choice of which official language migrants adopt—particularly when that language holds a national minority status—can significantly shape their integration and entrepreneurial trajectories. This choice may stem from prior knowledge of the language, linguistic similarities (e.g. shared language family), or relocation to a region where a minority language is dominant, among other factors.

On the one hand, governments that actively and equitably support all official languages provide more inclusive environments for migrant entrepreneurs by ensuring their access to resources, services, and information, regardless of the official language they choose (Elo *et al.*, 2022). This approach contrasts with countries in which multiple languages are widely spoken but not officially recognized. For example, in Estonia and Latvia, large Russian-speaking populations face limited access to public services in their native languages, since Russian is not an official language despite its widespread use. Similarly, in the United States, Spanish is commonly spoken by millions of people, especially among migrant communities, yet it holds no official status at the federal level. In such contexts, minority language support for migrant entrepreneurs often relies heavily on ethnic communities rather than on official government channels.

On the other hand, researchers such as Easlick (2022) have argued that host governments often prioritize integration into the majority official language, treating minority official languages as supplementary. Integration into a minority official language is therefore advantageous for both social and economic integration, provided it is accompanied by

proficiency in the majority language (Easlick, 2022). Despite the growing interest in the sensitivity of migrant entrepreneurship to language proficiency, few studies have focused on countries with multiple official languages. Due to this lack of attention, critical questions remain, such as the unequal advantages of integrating into minority versus majority languages, as highlighted by Easlick (2022). Furthermore, institutional tendencies may risk overlooking the diverse language needs within multilingual societies (Easlick, 2022) and the international business context (Barner-Rasmussen *et al.*, 2024).

Our study aims to close a gap in the business literature regarding minority official languages as a potential resource for migrant entrepreneurship. While several linguistic studies have explored migrant integration into minority languages (e.g. Bermingham and Higham, 2018; Rosiak, 2022), and others have addressed the importance of language in migrant entrepreneurship (e.g. Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2024; Wei *et al.*, 2019), to our knowledge, few have brought these areas together. In this descriptive literature review, we investigate the role of official minority languages in shaping migrant entrepreneurship, guided by the following research question:

How do migrants' proficiency in official minority languages affect their opportunities and entrepreneurship in multilingual nations?

To answer this question, we conducted a literature review focusing on the topic of migrants' integration into official minority languages and its effects on their entrepreneurship. We deliberately excluded nonofficial minority languages since integration into them is typically unsupported by public policies and therefore has different implications for migrants' social status and business outcomes. Similarly, we did not consider native-born minority populations, who often occupy more privileged positions and are generally better integrated into the society in which they reside, particularly compared with migrant minorities.

Drawing on a unique dataset of relevant publications, this review contributes to the literature by highlighting the role of linguistic competence—specifically in official minority languages—as a determinant of migrant entrepreneurship. Furthermore, our review reveals the often-marginalized position of these languages, which can restrict migrants' access to information, support, and business development opportunities in regions in which they hold only limited institutional authority.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We begin by presenting our methodology for identifying and analyzing relevant academic research, followed by a summary of the selected publications. We then discuss the key findings and conclude with academic and practical contributions and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

In this study, migration refers to cross-border movement between countries and explicitly excludes internal migration within national boundaries. We use the term *migrant entrepreneurship* as an umbrella concept to describe entrepreneurs who establish and operate businesses in a country in which they are not native-born (e.g. Baycan-Levent and Kundak, 2009; Polychronopoulos and Nguyen-Duc, 2023; Wahlbeck and Fortelius, 2019). Some studies have referred to this demographic as migrant entrepreneurs (e.g. Chiswick and Miller, 2003; Langlois and Razin, 1995; Razin and Langlois, 1996; Sui *et al.*, 2015), (ethnic) minority entrepreneurs (e.g. Arcand, 2012; Sithas and Surangi, 2021), or, more recently, refugee entrepreneurs or asylum seekers, due to escalating geopolitical tensions worldwide (e.g. Embiricos, 2020; Newman *et al.*, 2023). While various terms have been employed to characterize such individuals, we use *migrant entrepreneurs* due to its widespread usage in scholarly discourse and international policy frameworks when elucidating this phenomenon (e.g. Polychronopoulos and Nguyen-Duc, 2023; Sinkovics and Reuber, 2021). This group encompasses not only recent migrants striving to forge roots in the host nation but also the descendants of multigenerational migrants who retain strong

ties to their ethnic heritage. Our focus is not on whether migrants intend to stay permanently or temporarily in the host country; rather, it is on the salience of their foreign background and their embeddedness in the host society through entrepreneurship.

The existing literature has identified a spectrum of recurring obstacles confronting migrant entrepreneurs. They encounter challenges such as language barriers, limited access to financial resources, the need to navigate intricate regulatory frameworks or legislation, and overdependence on support from their ethnic communities. For instance, [Sithas and Surangi \(2021\)](#), in their comprehensive review of 30 articles, emphasized the impact of identity-based discrimination on minority entrepreneurs. Similarly, [Solano \(2023\)](#) encapsulated comparable difficulties and underscored their persistence across different migrant groups. [Chliova et al. \(2018\)](#) distinguished refugee entrepreneurs from other migrants, noting that forced migration—often without preparation—exacerbates vulnerability through trauma, psychological distress, and health-related issues, affecting cognitive functioning and business performance. Despite specific challenges, many of the barriers faced by refugees overlap with those of other migrant entrepreneurs—at the institutional, market, community, and individual levels—underscoring their collective vulnerability within the entrepreneurial ecosystem ([Chliova et al., 2018](#); [Solano, 2023](#)).

Remarkably, linguistic barriers often present a formidable challenge for migrant entrepreneurs, impacting various facets of their business endeavors (e.g. [Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2024](#); [Sithas and Surangi, 2021](#)). These barriers influence entrepreneurs at the institutional and market levels as well as in personal spheres, significantly shaping their entrepreneurial landscape. At the institutional level, linguistic deficiencies manifest in bureaucratic hurdles, regulatory complexities, and limited access to support services in host countries. As [Solano \(2023\)](#) noted, host countries often make language proficiency a prerequisite for legal status—such as permanent residency or citizenship—which, in turn, can be essential for formal business operations. Linguistic inadequacies therefore heighten administrative burdens, which eventually exacerbate disparities in entrepreneurs' integration into the mainstream business milieu.

At a personal level, linguistic constraints evoke psychological stress, resulting in diminished self-assurance and contributing to the fear of failure among migrant entrepreneurs ([Sithas and Surangi, 2021](#)). These personal struggles often interact with other barriers—namely, institutional and market barriers. [Wei et al. \(2019\)](#) discussed how language skills influence migrants' decision to become an entrepreneur, especially when delineating between necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. Linguistic proficiency plays a pivotal role in shaping migrants' social identity within the host community and empowering their entrepreneurial navigation in unfamiliar environments ([Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2024](#)). It serves as a medium for cultural exchange, enabling entrepreneurs to understand local customs, traditions, and norms and therefore fostering deep connections and robust networks within the host country. Proficiency in the local dialect facilitates seamless communication between migrants and their business counterparts, thereby enhancing their market acumen. As noted by [Wei et al. \(2019\)](#), migrants fluent in the local dialect tend to possess extensive networks, demonstrate a greater ability to recognize opportunities, and exhibit a propensity for risk-taking. Meanwhile, a lack of language skills prevents migrant entrepreneurs from accessing formal financial assistance, such as banking services, while increasing their dependence on ethnic communities. Consequently, they may resort to using informal communication channels within their ethnic communities or linguistic enclaves, which may not offer the same breadth of opportunities as mainstream business networks ([Sithas and Surangi, 2021](#)). [Ivanova-Gongne et al. \(2023\)](#) demonstrated that linguistic barriers can profoundly impact migrant entrepreneurs' levels of self-perceived power and their perception of increased psychic distance, evident through mechanisms such as miscommunication, restricted resource availability, and cultural isolation—all of which can weaken entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

Many host countries have officially multilingual environments, such as Canada (French and English), Finland (Finnish and Swedish), and Switzerland (German, French, Italian, and

Romansch). In these contexts, multilingualism is often recognized as a societal resource, fostering intercultural communication, openness, and expanded market access (Barner-Rasmussen *et al.*, 2024). Multilingual skills may thus be framed as assets supporting inclusive and globally connected business ecosystems. However, these multilingual contexts engender a nuanced societal fabric, often delineated along the lines of majority and minority linguistic communities. In most countries, minority language communities are marginalized (e.g. Mohanty, 2010), with the status of a minority language contested (May, 2013), leading to challenges in conducting business (Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, while minority groups constitute a significant portion of the population in some countries—such as French speakers in Canada (22%)—they make up much smaller communities in others, such as Swedish speakers in Finland (6%). Thus, depending on the status of the minority language and its practical use in the country, entrepreneurs hailing from a linguistic minority community might undergo distinctive adaptation experiences, necessitating adjustments in communication styles or business practices (Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2024). In addition, the linguistic preferences of entrepreneurs lead to a heightened attachment to their linguistic communities, instilling in them a profound sense of belonging and an embedded identity (Barner-Rasmussen *et al.*, 2024). This embeddedness, in turn, affects their access to entrepreneurial opportunities within their communities and beyond.

3. Methodology

Our literature review applied a descriptive approach supported by systematic search techniques to assess the role of official minority languages in migrant entrepreneurship. This method is suitable for reviewing the state of the art of a specific research topic and detecting patterns or trends that can explain preexisting propositions, theories, methodologies, or findings (Paré *et al.*, 2015). However, given the nascent state of this research area, we did not aim to conduct frequency analyses of any variables, correlations, or theories. Instead, we distilled the existing literature, searching for research gaps and promoting the advancement of this body of research by synthesizing previous knowledge. We found the descriptive approach effective for identifying and collecting a comprehensive set of relevant publications and documents that met our predefined inclusion–exclusion criteria, enabling us to efficiently pursue our research objectives. Furthermore, the systematic approach allowed us to proceed objectively and transparently throughout the research process, helping minimize bias while ensuring future replicability (Etim and Iwu, 2019). Our research process was composed of five main steps: (1) developing a set of research questions and objectives to form the focus of the research, thus guiding the eligibility criteria for paper extraction; (2) systematically searching three major databases (Web of Science, EBSCO, and Scopus) to identify all relevant studies; (3) carefully screening all findings and excluding unrelated studies; (4) documenting and categorizing extracted material, tabulating interrelated metadata, and synthesizing the findings; and (5) presenting the results.

We began our search by formulating our inclusion and exclusion criteria. In a systematic approach, inclusion and exclusion criteria provide the basis for the researcher to make valid and reliable findings, as the research objectives remain the focus throughout the review process (Meline, 2006). Based on the research question and objectives, we formulated our search terms according to four main keyword strings, which constituted the core elements of this research (see Table 1). The first string referred to migration status, defined as migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers not originally from the study country as well as second-generation migrants who maintained close ties to their ethnic minority. The second string was related to economic integration in the form of entrepreneurship. The final string addressed our research context, focusing on multilingual countries in Europe and North America (i.e. Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, Malta, and Cyprus).

According to McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou (2021), apart from Oceania, North America and Europe were the continents hosting the most international migrants in 2020, accounting for

Table 1. Key terms used in the search

Focus/Theme	Search strings	Number of articles extracted per database
Migration	("migrant*" OR "immigrant*" OR "refugee*" OR "asylum seeker*")	
Entrepreneurship	AND ("entrepreneur*" OR "self-employ*" OR "venture*" OR "startup*" OR "business*")	
Context in search round 1 (Country specific)	AND ("Finland") AND ("Swedish-speaking region" OR "Helsinki" OR "Turku" OR "Uusimaa" OR "Ostrobothnia" OR "Aland Island" OR "Österbotten" OR "Pohjanmaa" OR "minority" OR "minority region") AND ("Denmark") AND ("Greenland" OR "Sami" OR "Faroe Island" OR "minority" OR "minority region") AND ("Belgium") AND ("French-speaking" OR "minority" OR "minority region") AND ("Switzerland") AND ("French" OR "Italian" OR "Romansh" OR "minority" OR "minority region") AND ("Canada") AND ("French" OR "French-speaking region") AND ("Malta")	<i>Web of Science:</i> 177 papers <i>Scopus:</i> 111 papers <i>EBSCO:</i> 266 papers <i>Total:</i> 554 papers
Context in search round 2 (Linguistic landscape)	AND ("language") OR ("linguistic")	<i>Web of Science:</i> 253 papers <i>Scopus:</i> 581 papers <i>EBSCO:</i> 197 papers <i>Total:</i> 1031 papers
Source(s): Authors' own creation		

15.9 and 11.61.9% of their total population, respectively. In 2021, Europe received 2.25 million migrants, and the number is steadily increasing (European Commission, 2023). Meanwhile, Canada has been a land of migrants since the 16th century, and this trend continues today. Currently, migration in Canada accounts for almost 500,000 new residents annually corresponding to one of the highest rates of any country in the world. As of 2023, there were more than 8 million migrants with permanent residence living in Canada—roughly 20% of the overall population (Statista Research Department, 2024). Both Canada and Europe remain promising destinations for migration due to multiple pull factors, from political and economic stability to border and work opportunity openness (Hager, 2021; Yu et al., 2021). Therefore, we selected these regions for our initial search round, with the presence of multiple official languages, longstanding migration patterns, and institutional multilingualism making them theoretically relevant to our inquiry.

Our search strategy was implemented in two stages. First, we conducted searches using the names of specific minority languages (e.g. Swedish in Finland, French in Canada, and Romansh in Switzerland) and associated regional identifiers where applicable. This targeted approach minimized irrelevant results dominated by majority national languages and ensured the retrieval of studies explicitly referring to our cases of interest. Second, we carried out a complementary search using broader terms such as *language* and *linguistics*. In this stage, regional identifiers were not included, which allowed us to capture studies that did not explicitly name a minority language but were still relevant to the scope of our review. Together, this approach significantly increased the precision and thematic relevance of the results.

In the case of Finland, we applied greater granularity in the search terms by specifying regions with significant Swedish-speaking populations, such as Ostrobothnia, Åland, and Uusimaa. This level of detail was supported by two factors: the presence of well-documented, officially bilingual administrative regions in Finland, which aligned closely with our research focus, and our familiarity with the linguistic and regional context, enabling us to identify highly relevant geographic and sociolinguistic markers that could otherwise have been overlooked in a broader search. This iterative approach reflected an empirically informed effort to maximize search accuracy while remaining consistent with our inclusion criteria and theoretical focus.

The publication year range was set from 1970 to 2023 to capture a period marked by significant shifts in global migration patterns, during which the estimated number of international migrants experienced a notable, threefold increase. This temporal scope was designed to ensure the retrieval of a rich array of academic outputs that would offer valuable insights into the multifaceted dimensions of migrant entrepreneurship within the context of contemporary migration trends (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021).

The publication types were set as academic peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, books, book series, book chapters, and dissertations. We searched three main databases—Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, and EBSCO—which provide access to publications in a variety of fields and support the use of complex search strings and filters, making it easy to apply advanced eligibility criteria. As many international publishers and journals index their contributions to these databases, they were deemed the most appropriate databases for conducting a literature review in a systematic manner (Kraus *et al.*, 2020).

In each database, we used Boolean search strings such as “migrant*” AND “entrepreneur*”—with the exact syntax depending on the search engine—to identify all publications at the intersection of migration, entrepreneurship, and local minority linguistic competencies. The search strings above (referred to Table 1) were employed for title, abstract, and keyword searches, with syntax adjusted according to the requirements of each database.

The initial results of the *first search round* yielded 554 publications. We imported the results directly into a Research Information Systems (RIS) database, Rayyan.ai. After checking the results for possible duplicate entries, we discarded 77 publications, leaving us with 477 publications for further review. A rigorous screening process was then undertaken to assess the suitability of each record for inclusion in the study. Decisions regarding relevance were made based on predefined criteria, ensuring the selection of publications that directly contributed to the overarching aims of the research endeavor. In this step, we removed publications that did not meet the inclusion criteria in the following ways: (1) they did not provide full text in English, (2) they did not examine migrant entrepreneurs or self-employment in countries with multiple official languages, and (3) they did not give the impression that a linguistic topic was discussed. However, we included some publications whose primary focus was not exclusively on self-employment but on broader themes, such as employment or integration, because they also addressed aspects of entrepreneurship or self-employment relevant to our research objectives. Although an English filter was applied during the literature search, we found that some non-English publications still appeared in the results. This occurred because their abstracts were written in English, but their full texts were written in other languages (e.g. French).

Consequently, we conducted a full-text assessment of 23 publications and further evaluated their suitability based on our research objectives. At this stage, we excluded publications that did not engage with official minority languages as a central theme but merely referenced them in passing alongside other languages in a general discussion of linguistic competencies. This step resulted in the removal of an additional 14 publications. Ultimately, this systematic selection process led to the inclusion of nine academic articles for deep analysis.

Because the highly targeted strategy of the first round yielded only a limited number of results, we complemented it with a *second search round*. The search parameters—such as the time period and databases—as well as the overall structure of the search strings remained the

same. However, in this round, we broadened the scope by replacing the country keywords with more general keywords, such as “language” OR “linguistic” (see Table 1). This adjustment enabled us to capture studies from non-European contexts, many of which were officially multilingual—for instance, most countries on the African continent.

At the screening stage of this search round (see Figure 1), our primary selection criterion was whether the publication examined a host country with multiple official languages. After this step, we applied the same inclusion criteria and procedures as in the first search round (see Section 3.1)—namely, we excluded studies without full text in English, those not focused on migrant entrepreneurs in multilingualistic countries, and those without any discussion of linguistic aspects. Among the publications yielded from this search were two examining the effect of proficiency in various Chinese dialects on entrepreneurship (Chen et al., 2014; Wei et al., 2019), but we did not include them in the final selection, since Chinese language and integration policy focuses solely on standard Chinese (Mandarin) (Ning and Stephen, 2022). However, we discuss these two publications in the conclusions section in relation to suggested directions for further research. As a result, the second, supplementary search round yielded 12 additional publications (see Appendix 1 for a full list of the articles included in the literature review).

Figure 1 shows the steps taken in selecting research papers, along with the number of research papers filtered at each stage of the first and second search rounds, using PRISMA Data Flow. In Figure 1, n1 represents the number of publications filtered in each step of the first search round, while n2 represents those filtered during the second, additional round. In total,

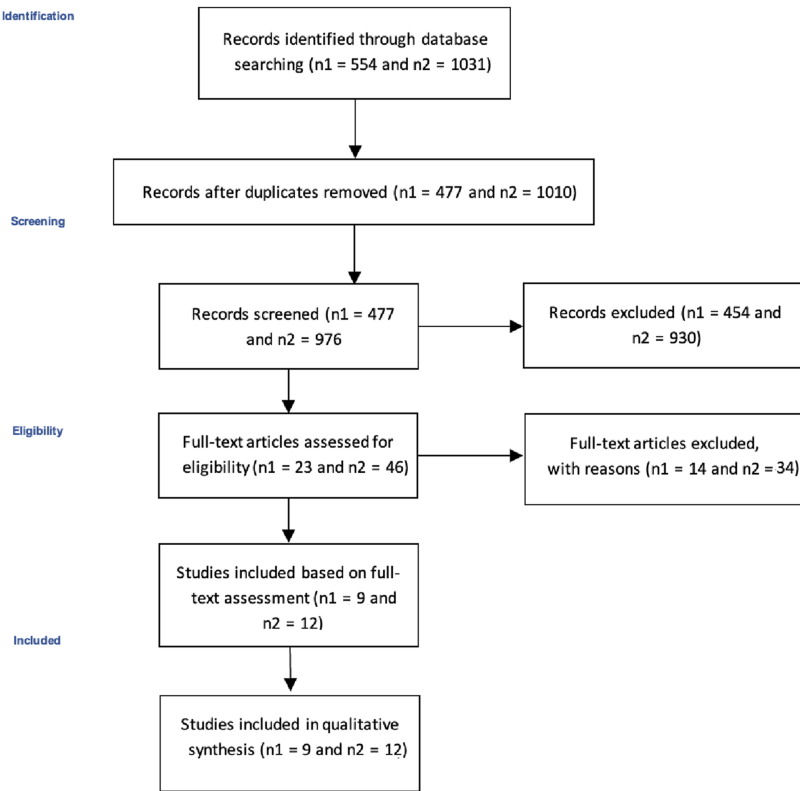


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram. Source: Authors’ own creation

22 publications from both rounds were included for in-depth analysis. These publications were downloaded and saved in a data extraction form (spreadsheet) containing the following elements: title, year, journal, citation, author information, theoretical lens, study size, and notes from the text analysis. The results of a review of these 22 relevant publications (See [Appendix](#)) are presented in the following section.

4. Results

4.1 Distribution of publications by year

No studies related to the research topic were published before 1995. The time distribution of the selected studies showed that academic interest in the subject has grown substantially since the 2010s, coinciding with a general increase in interest in migration topics ([Lång et al., 2024](#)). Among the selected publications, two were published in sequential years by the same authors about ethnic entrepreneurs in Canada ([Langlois and Razin, 1995](#); [Razin and Langlois, 1996](#)). The selected publications were scattered across years, with a notable increase in frequency observed after 2009, with 19 publications. [Figure 2](#) shows the distribution of publications by year. Despite the relatively limited—yet emerging—research at the intersection of language and entrepreneurship (e.g. [Elo et al., 2022](#); [Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2024](#); [Wei et al., 2019](#)), interest in language in the field of business research has increased over the past 20 years ([Tenzer et al., 2017](#)). Furthermore, language is one of the top challenges for migrant entrepreneurs, as indicated in the migrant entrepreneurship literature ([Sinkovics and Reuber, 2021](#)). Thus, the spike in publications on the topic in recent years was natural. It should be noted that most publications considered language to be among the topics covered and not their sole focal topic.

4.2 Distribution of publications by geographic location

As stated earlier, our search was limited to countries that were officially multilingual—meaning two or more official languages—and focused on migrant integration into official minority languages. The results yielded publications from South Africa ($n = 9$), Canada ($n = 7$), Finland ($n = 2$), Swaziland ($n = 2$), and India, Kenya, Hong Kong (China), and Switzerland ($n = 1$ each). In terms of country, South Africa and Canada had the most publications, with nine and seven, respectively (see [Table 2](#)).

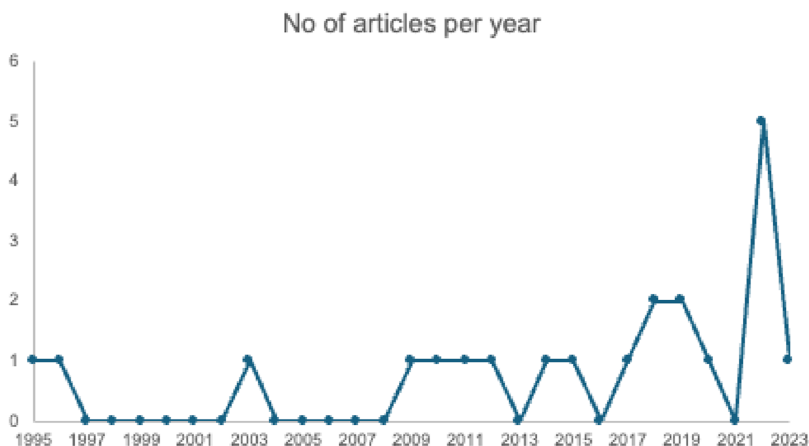


Figure 2. Distribution of publications per year (1995–2023). Source: Authors' own creation

Table 2. Countries of focus in the studies

Country of focus	Number of publications	References
South Africa	9	Gebre et al. (2011) , Khosa and Kalitanyi (2014) , Eresia-Eke and Okerue (2018) , Thompson (2019) , Liu (2020) , Eresia-Eke and Okerue (2022) , Quan-Baffour and Johnson (2022) , Cooke et al. (2022) , Wood and Cooke (2023)
Canada	7	Langlois and Razin (1995) , Razin and Langlois (1996) , Chiswick and Miller (2003) , Paré and Therasme (2010) , Arcand (2012) , Sui et al. (2015) , Chababi et al. (2017)
Finland	1	Wahlbeck and Fortelius (2019)
Swaziland	2	Eresia-Eke and Okerue (2018) , Eresia-Eke and Okerue (2022)
India	1	Mishra (2022)
Kenya	1	Muchura-Theuri and Obuya (2018)
Hong Kong (China)	1	Sun and Fong (2022)
Switzerland	1	Baycan-Levent and Kundak (2009)
Source(s): Authors' own creation		

The status and practical usage of official minority languages were found to differ from country to country. In Canada, French holds equal official status with English—similar to Swedish alongside Finnish in Finland. In both cases, these minority languages are recognized as state languages and are mandated for use in government services ([Wahlbeck and Fortelius, 2019](#)). However, in practice, both French in Canada and Swedish in Finland are restricted to a few regions, which may limit migrant opportunities within the wider scope of the whole country. Furthermore, while French–English bilingualism has been increasing in Quebec—the predominantly French-speaking province—it has been declining in primarily English-speaking regions of Canada ([Statistics Canada, 2023](#)).

In Finland, the Swedish-speaking minority accounts for only approximately 5% of the population ([Statistics Finland, 2024](#)), and the use of Swedish is contested due to its postcolonial legacy ([Hult and Pietikäinen, 2014](#)). Although Swedish is taught in schools and is compulsory for the Finnish-speaking population, overall proficiency in Swedish among Finnish speakers remains inadequate ([Vaara et al., 2005](#)) and has little impact on access to influential positions. In contrast, members of the Swedish-speaking population often face limited opportunities unless they are proficient in Finnish ([Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2024](#)).

Some African countries—such as South Africa—boast a wide array of languages. South Africa has 11 official languages and even more unofficial ones ([Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2018, 2022](#)), with the most common being Zulu, Afrikaans, Xhosa, and English. Despite English being an official minority language (10% of speakers), it has an “elite” status and is the dominant language in business, government, and education ([Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2018, 2022](#); [Quan-Baffour and Johnson, 2022](#)). While Kenya and Swaziland do not have the same diversity of official languages—using only Swahili and English and Siswati and English, respectively—English holds a special status, particularly in business contexts ([Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2018, 2022](#); [Muchura-Theuri and Obuya, 2018](#)), and facilitates intercountry and cross-country communication. A similar pattern could be observed in other postcolonial regions, such as India and Hong Kong. Nevertheless, language use varies significantly across different regions and cities within African countries, which can pose challenges even for migrant entrepreneurs who are proficient in English (see [Section 4](#)). Furthermore, in African countries and India, a country-specific accent when speaking English may further complicate communication with local customers and businesses ([Mishra, 2022](#); [Muchura-Theuri and Obuya, 2018](#)).

4.3 Types of publication

The 21 journal articles were published across 21 different journals, as shown in Table 3. According to their stated aims and scope, these journals contribute to the body of literature within which this research topic is situated, with a focus on economic and societal development from the perspectives of entrepreneurialism (e.g. *Journal of Enterprising Culture*, *Journal of International Entrepreneurship*, *Journal of Enterprising Communities*), organizational and human capital (e.g. *Innovation Journal*, *Economics of Education Review*, and *Social Inclusion*), and migratory movement (e.g. *The International Migration Review* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*). However, only five of the 22 selected publications were published in entrepreneurship journals (i.e. Arcand, 2012; Chababi *et al.*, 2017; Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2022; Paré and Theriasme, 2010; Sun and Fong, 2022), with most appearing in non-business journals. While this indicates a specific gap in the literature, it also shows a positive trend given that the topic of language is limited in the entrepreneurship field in general.

While some publications were published in renowned journals, such as the *Journal of World Business* (impact factor [IF] 8.9) and the *Journal of International Management* (IF 5.9), others appeared in more regionally focused and less widely recognized outlets, making it harder to disseminate knowledge more widely. Furthermore, the scattered distribution of journals featuring publications on the topic suggests a lack of dedicated scholarly platforms or journals prioritizing the integration of minority language issues within their editorial agendas. This fragmented representation underscores the lack of a cohesive scholarly field, or a publication venue specifically dedicated to foregrounding the intersection of minority languages and migration-related concerns. At the same time, the multidisciplinary nature of the publications highlights the role of migrant entrepreneurship not merely in economic integration but as a multifaceted process contributing to broader social, cultural, and civic

Table 3. Distribution of publications by journal

Journal	Reference	Impact factor (2023)
<i>Journal of Enterprising Culture</i>	Chababi <i>et al.</i> (2017)	0.8
<i>Journal of International Entrepreneurship</i>	Paré and Theriasme (2010)	3.2
<i>Journal of Enterprising Communities</i>	Arcand (2012)	2.92
<i>Journal of World Business</i>	Sui <i>et al.</i> (2015)	8.9
<i>Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research</i>	Baycan-Levent and Kundak (2009)	1.6
<i>International Migration Review</i>	Razin and Langlois (1996)	2.3
<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>	Langlois and Razin (1995)	2.1
<i>Economics of Education Review</i>	Chiswick and Miller (2003)	1.8
<i>Social Inclusion</i>	Wahlbeck and Fortelius (2019)	1.4
<i>Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship</i>	Eresia-Eke and Okerue (2022)	1.3
<i>Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship</i>	Sun and Fong (2022)	N/A
<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	Cooke <i>et al.</i> (2022)	4.9
<i>Problems and Perspectives in Management</i>	Eresia-Eke and Okerue (2018)	N/A
<i>Urban Forum</i>	Gebre <i>et al.</i> (2011)	1.2
<i>Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences</i>	Khosa and Kalitanyi (2014)	N/A
<i>Studies in Social Justice</i>	Liu (2020)	N/A
<i>International Journal of Multilingualism</i>	Mishra (2022)	2.0
<i>Journal of International Communication</i>	Muchura-Theuri and Obuya (2018)	N/A
<i>Journal of the Literacy Association of South Africa</i>	Quan-Baffour and Johnson (2022)	N/A
<i>Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus</i>	Thompson (2019)	N/A
<i>Journal of International Management</i>	Wood and Cooke (2023)	5.9
Source(s): Authors' own creation		

inclusion within host societies (Lång *et al.*, 2024; Steyaert and Katz, 2004). These findings reinforce the long-recognized need to incorporate broader multidisciplinary into business studies (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) and acknowledge that a full understanding of migrant entrepreneurship requires insights from sociology, linguistics, cultural studies, and beyond.

4.4 Distribution of publications by research method

The research methods used in the publications were identified and classified (see Table 4). Notably, most of the publications used qualitative methods, with interviews dominating data collection. This corresponds with similar studies on refugee entrepreneurship (see Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2026). Similar to refugees, gaining access may represent a challenge among broader migrant populations; thus, obtaining large quantitative samples may be problematic. At the same time, a qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding of migrants’ experiences and perspectives, which is essential for capturing the individual-level nuances of migrant entrepreneurship and can ultimately support the development of more tailored and effective policies. Additionally, a combination of several qualitative methods was used in some publications; for example, interviews and archives provided the foundation for data collection in Liu (2020), while interviews and observations were used in Cooke *et al.* (2022). This approach enriches findings and lends greater credibility to results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Secondary data—such as census or register data—were used in six (approximately 20%) of the studies. Only three publications used original survey data in their analyses. Statistical data or original survey-based data were rarely used in migrant or refugee entrepreneurship research due to challenges such as local restrictions, cultural issues, or the circumstances of migrants (Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2026; Lång *et al.*, 2024) However, research conducted in South Africa (Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2018, 2022; Khosa and Kalitanyi, 2014) accessed data from larger populations. Overall, data collection in the context of migrants and refugee entrepreneurship can be challenging, and obtaining frank and detailed information may be limited due to factors such as residential status (legal vs. illegal) (Zehra and Usmani, 2023) or the researcher’s “outsider” position relative to migrants and their culture (Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2026).

Table 4. Methods used in the publications

Main methodology used	No. of publications	References
Interviews	13	Gebre <i>et al.</i> (2011), Khosa and Kalitanyi (2014), Liu (2020), Mishra (2022), Muchura-Theuri and Obuya (2018), Quan-Baffour and Johnson (2022), Wood and Cooke (2023), Cooke <i>et al.</i> (2022), Baycan-Levent and Kundak (2009), Arcand (2012), Sui <i>et al.</i> (2015), Wahlbeck and Fortelius (2019)
Observation	5	Liu (2020), Mishra (2022), Quan-Baffour and Johnson (2022), Thompson (2019), Cooke <i>et al.</i> (2022)
Focus groups	1	Quan-Baffour and Johnson (2022)
Archival data	1	Liu (2020)
Census data/register data/ external survey data	6	Sun and Fong (2022), Langlois and Razin (1995), Razin and Langlois (1996), Chiswick and Miller (2003), Paré and Therasme (2010), Sui <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Original survey data	3	Eresia-Eke and Okerue (2018), Khosa and Kalitanyi (2014), Eresia-Eke and Okerue (2022)
Source(s): Authors’ own creation		

4.5 Distribution of publications by topic

In this section, we summarize the publications based on their theoretical lenses, key findings, and discussions. For further analysis, the publications are categorized into three main themes based on their core focus in relation to our research question, specifically how they addressed the role of language—particularly minority languages—in migrant entrepreneurship. The three main themes were (1) migrant embeddedness, (2) the role of linguistic competences, and (3) migrant entrepreneurial motivation. The classification of the papers into these distinct thematic categories was based on a rigorous examination of their keywords and a comprehensive assessment of the primary discussions presented in each study. Categorizing the publications in this way enabled a systematic analysis and synthesis of studies focusing on these specific themes, thereby enhancing the accessibility and comprehensibility of the scholarly discourse on migrant entrepreneurship.

4.5.1 Theme 1. Migrant embeddedness. Four publications contributed to understanding the embeddedness of migrants in host economies through entrepreneurship. The scholarly discourse articulated within these publications underscores the pivotal role of proficiency in minority languages in facilitating migrants' integration into the societal fabric of their host countries. Within this theme, various theories regarding the role of regional economic structures, along with socioeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics, were discussed. Social networks and social capital were also key foundational concepts in migrant entrepreneurship (Baycan-Levent and Kundak, 2009; Wahlbeck and Fortelius, 2019), adapted to explore how migrants turn their disadvantaged external environments and their ethnic backgrounds to their advantage. On the one hand, opportunity structures are crucial for the creation and development of migrant entrepreneurs, since larger ethnic communities can provide large co-ethnic clientele, well-developed community-based resources, and healthy competition. On the other hand, cultural values and migrants' origins are factors that influence the development of migrant entrepreneurs (Chrysostome, 2010). As in the context of geographic isolation and ethnic segregation, entrepreneurs grasp their business opportunities to serve ethnic or minority communities (Paré and Therasme, 2010). Migrant entrepreneurs focus on activities that allow them to strategically capitalize on the comparative advantages of belonging to a specific minority group while expanding their businesses by applying business approaches similar to those of indigenous entrepreneurs. For instance, Gebre *et al.* (2011) examined Ethiopian migrants in South Africa and their embeddedness within their own ethnic enclave, which most did not perceive as an impediment to social interaction due to its size and the generally positive attitudes of locals—particularly compared to their attitudes toward other migrant groups. Most of these migrants did not speak English or other South African languages. However, in terms of entrepreneurship, they identified advantages in speaking the languages predominantly used where their businesses were located, such as Zulu. Nevertheless, knowledge of local languages in South Africa is not a core factor in providing entrepreneurial opportunities. The migrant landscape is deeply racialized, resulting in complex internal hierarchies and divisions. Thus, Liu (2020) showed that migrants from Zimbabwe struggled with being paid below the minimum wage despite having higher proficiency in local languages. In comparison, Chinese migrant entrepreneurs, who often lacked proficiency in local languages, including English, were able to ascend to the middle class by employing migrants from lower classes (e.g. Zimbabweans), who served as boundary spanners between them and their customers (see Theme 2 for more details on language practices).

Other studies on this theme were conducted in the Quebec region of Canada. Razin and Langlois (1996) revealed that self-employment among entrepreneurial and nonmainstream groups in Quebec is not a function of opportunities offered by local economies but is influenced by contextual factors—namely, disadvantageous access to salaried jobs and the class and ethnic resources of the group. Their findings indicate that migrants and minorities in peripheral or rural areas are often structurally constrained to self-employment, not by opportunity or entrepreneurial pull factors but by the absence of viable employment

alternatives. Rather than being drawn to promising business fields, their entrepreneurial activity is shaped by limited local demand, weak institutional support, and a lack of robust co-ethnic networks. The small size of ethnic communities in these areas further undermines access to informal resources and peer support, making business sustainability particularly challenging. Earlier research by [Langlois and Razin \(1995\)](#) highlighted the language barrier faced by non-French speakers in conducting business activities, especially in retail and wholesale within small, homogenous French-speaking communities. However, French speakers did not distinguish their business practices from those of English speakers. In this region, people prioritized the preservation of an autonomous national linguistic identity—namely, French—which became a primary goal that extended beyond economic promotion. [Langlois and Razin \(1995\)](#) also found that migrant women of French origin were more likely to become entrepreneurs than women in other groups and tended to lead knowledge-based enterprises in the new economy. Interestingly, despite the relative advantages of women of French origin, this group was underrepresented in the business landscape of the Montreal metropolitan area, whereas migrants of other origins appeared to be overrepresented ([Paré and Therasme, 2010](#)).

Regarding the situation of Swedish migrants around the Finnish capital, Helsinki, [Wahlbeck and Fortelius \(2019\)](#) highlighted a positive response in terms of their economic integration, both through entrepreneurship and employment. However, unlike peripheral and rural areas, where local languages are crucial for business and self-employment, the Helsinki area is metropolitan, with communication in English widespread across public services and other domains ([Yle News, 2021](#)), which may facilitate conducting business without proficiency in the majority language, Finnish. Furthermore, the Swedish-speaking minority's social networks are crucial for migrants from Sweden in Finland because through these networks, they can identify fields that value proficiency in Swedish ([Wahlbeck and Fortelius, 2019](#)). It should be noted that most of the interviewees in [Wahlbeck and Fortelius's \(2019\)](#) article had a Finnish spouse, which may have considerably facilitated their joining of these networks. These advantages may stem from the historically “elite” status of the Swedish language in Finland, as well as the tight connections between the Finnish and Swedish societies. For instance, [Ivanova-Gongne et al. \(2024\)](#) found that the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland has more advantages than other large migrant minorities—namely, Russian-speaking migrants—who are more stigmatized in Finnish society. Thus, the case of Swedish migrants is unique, and opportunities may be different for other migrants in Finland. It is noteworthy that Swedish-speaking minorities still face certain challenges in terms of entrepreneurship and conducting business in Finnish-speaking areas of Finland ([Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2024](#)).

4.5.2 Theme 2. The role of language practice. The main discussions on this theme referred to the influence of language practice—namely, linguistic competence and the use of language—on migrants' economic integration through entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activities. One interesting insight derived from this theme is the limited power of minor languages and the rise of unofficial third languages, e.g. English, in society ([Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2024](#)). Compared to the dominance of Finnish and English, the official role of Swedish has been questioned, as it is rarely required. This finding further reinforces the assumption that a language does not need legal or administrative recognition to demonstrate its importance for integration in a given setting and resonates with the prevailing linguistic ideology of “English as the language of globalization” ([Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2024](#), p. 2) which aligns with cosmopolitan principles by emphasizing language's fundamental role as a means of fostering effective communication and societal integration across diverse cultural and linguistic boundaries. This underscores that the significance of language transcends mere legal or administrative recognition, embodying instead a cosmopolitan ethos that promotes interconnectedness and mutual understanding among individuals and communities ([Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2024](#)).

In contrast, other findings revealed the significance of proficiency in the destination language for migrant entrepreneurship and economic integration. [Chiswick and Miller \(2003\)](#) found that language practice had a direct impact on earnings among adult male migrants in Canada. Linguistic competences were a significant determinant of earnings among migrants in Canada. Migrants who could not conduct conversations in an official language, or those who usually spoke a non-official language at home, earned much less than those who typically used the local language both at work and at home. For a region with a minority language—namely, Quebec—lower incomes were identified for all groups compared to the rest of the country. In addition, [Sui et al. \(2015\)](#) highlighted the influence of SME owners' native language on their international ambition and orientation. They showed that SMEs owned by French-speaking migrants were less likely to pursue regional internationalization but instead pursued global internationalization. This suggests that the language mismatch between French-speaking and Anglophone migrants and the regional markets undermines business owners' ability to leverage their potential advantages in regional markets. They addressed language barriers by avoiding the markets in which they were linguistically mismatched and embracing those in which they were matched. This corresponds with findings from the migrant entrepreneurship literature about migrants being more likely to establish internationally oriented or transnational businesses ([Lång et al., 2024](#)).

Knowledge of a minority language was also discussed in relation to general entrepreneurial challenges. In South Africa, [Cooke et al. \(2022\)](#) examined the relations between Chinese migrant business owners and their local employees, who often acted as boundary spanners between owners and customers. Although English is a minority language in South Africa, it is widely used in business, education, and government. Thus, a lack of English language proficiency led Chinese migrant business owners to lose authority, which was transferred to their South African employees ([Cooke et al., 2022](#)). A subsequent article by two authors from the [Cooke et al. \(2022\)](#) team—using similar data—confirmed these findings ([Wood and Cooke, 2023](#)), which align with those of [Ivanova-Gongne et al. \(2023\)](#) regarding the role of language in self-perceived power within business relationships. However, English—as a lingua franca in South Africa and other African countries—may provide migrants with opportunities ([Thompson, 2019](#)) without requiring knowledge of many other local languages.

Studies by [Eresia-Eke and Okerue \(2018, 2022\)](#) also highlighted that proficiency in the majority official language is not necessarily beneficial for entrepreneurial opportunities; rather, proficiency in the languages predominantly used in business—such as English in South Africa or Swaziland, despite being a minority language—may benefit migrant business owners. At the same time, business owners proficient in the language predominantly spoken by local customers tend to create fewer jobs because they do not need to employ workers to act as boundary spanners with customers ([Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2022](#)). [Sun and Fong \(2022\)](#) showed similar findings in their quantitative study in Hong Kong. While proficiency in both Cantonese and English was found to benefit migrant entrepreneurship, knowledge of English—a minority language in terms of population size—was “twice as important for affecting one's likelihood of entrepreneurship” ([Sun and Fong, 2022](#), p. 387). In summary, the findings of these articles reflect both the dominance of postcolonial languages and the importance of local languages in certain regions and cities within host countries.

Furthermore, [Xhosa and Kalitanyi \(2014\)](#) and [Quan-Baffour and Johnson \(2022\)](#) highlighted the importance and advantages of speaking the many local languages used in certain cities or regions of South Africa for business (e.g. Xhosa and Afrikaans in Cape Town or Zulu and other local languages in Pretoria). Furthermore, while languages such as Swahili are widely spoken across several African countries, [Muchura-Theuri and Obuya \(2018\)](#) found that Tanzanian migrant entrepreneurs in Kenya faced challenges using Swahili due to their accent and the use of an informal language—a mix of Swahili, English, and local languages—by the local population. In addition, multilingualism is necessary for conducting business in countries such as India. [Mishra \(2022\)](#), who investigated communication between local entrepreneurs and their customers in Vellore, found that Tamil, Indian English, and languages

from other states of India were used in the marketplace, leading to communication in (1) the same language, (2) a mix of languages or code-switching, and (3) nonverbal communication. Thus, as stated by [Eresia-Eke and Okerue \(2022\)](#), official national languages in such country contexts “may not reflect language proficiency requirements at the local level where the immigrant-owned small business is situated” (p. 7).

4.5.3 Theme 3. Migrant entrepreneurial motivation/spirit. The discussions on this theme addressed the influence of different factors—structural, cultural, and their nexus—on migrants and the next generation, shaping their entrepreneurial motivation/spirit and ultimately their engagement in entrepreneurship. Social factors refer to social exclusion, discrimination, poor market access, and high unemployment. Cultural factors refer to specific values, skills, and cultural features, including internal solidarity and loyalty, flexibility, personal motivation, work ethics, social networks, and financial arrangements ([Baycan-Levent and Kundak, 2009](#)). The theory of blocked mobility, or disadvantage theory, is used to study generational differences in the motivation to follow an entrepreneurial path ([Chababi et al., 2017](#)). In the Quebec context, focusing on Montreal, [Chababi et al. \(2017\)](#) identified linguistic obstacles for first-generation entrepreneurs, such as dealing with business partners (i.e. suppliers or customers), while the next generation reported experiencing discrimination while conducting business. In Quebec, the dominance of French causes unnecessary discrimination in business and social relationships. Even when migrant entrepreneurs speak French with a Quebecois accent, Quebec natives still prefer to work with and give priority to people originally from Quebec. However, [Arcand \(2012\)](#) highlighted that an open business environment inspires migrants’ offspring to join the entrepreneurial path. Montreal was found to favor cultural encounters between minorities, whose lack of personal contact with the Francophone community did not negatively affect their view of society. Instead, the environment enabled them to view their ethnic identity as an opportunity rather than as a source of discrimination, and their entrepreneurial paths were based on diversity rather than on ethnic communities. However, in their study of the push and pull factors on Turkish migrants’ entrepreneurial motivation in Switzerland, [Baycan-Levent and Kundak \(2009\)](#) identified that personal characteristics play a crucial role in entrepreneurial behavior, with the level and place of education shaping migrants’ attitudes toward entrepreneurship. To illustrate this, entrepreneurs who had studied in Switzerland, had an entrepreneur in the family, and received support from their social networks were more likely to be successful in their ventures. Local language competence increased Turkish migrants’ motivation for entrepreneurship, facilitating the establishment and expansion of their social networks as well as access to knowledge and information. No positive impact was found either for proficiency in other languages in providing advantages for Turkish migrants in entrepreneurship or for knowledge of other official minority languages—namely, German and Italian—in facilitating their entrepreneurial paths.

5. Discussion

Migrant entrepreneurs operating within the complicated entrepreneurial landscapes of host countries often face challenges in navigating available resources to maximize their entrepreneurial endeavors. However, their embeddedness in communities that speak official minority languages provides a distinct advantage by granting access to unique benefits derived from cultural and linguistic networks and support systems ([Arcand, 2012](#); [Sui et al., 2015](#); [Wahlbeck and Fortelius, 2019](#)). When migrant entrepreneurs strategically leverage these community connections and effectively utilize resources, they can enhance their competitive positioning and improve their ventures ([Sui et al., 2015](#)). Drawing upon the insights obtained from the reviewed publications, we synthesized a comprehensive overview delineating several advantages and disadvantages inherent in the experiences of migrant entrepreneurs. Inspired by [Chliova et al.’s \(2018\)](#) framework for exploring the challenges of refugee entrepreneurs,

our framework extends across multiple dimensions, encompassing regional characteristics as well as institutional, market, and minority community levels, as presented in [Figure 3](#).

At the institutional level, speaking a minority official language enhances access to public services—although they are often limited in scope—by facilitating the navigation of legal systems and enabling partial participation in civic life. Migrant entrepreneurs benefit from governmental initiatives dedicated to promoting the learning and use of minority languages, such as language programs, grants, and scholarships ([Langlois and Razin, 1995](#)). Additionally, tailored support—such as specialized job training and community-based services—helps minority language speakers integrate more smoothly into society while preserving their linguistic and cultural identities ([Wahlbeck and Fortelius, 2019](#)). Despite these efforts, this group may face obstacles related to resource constraints due to the limited availability of funding and financial assistance programs available for minority linguistic communities in general and for migrant groups within these communities specifically ([Razin and Langlois, 1996](#)). They may also face linguistic barriers to accessing the subsidized or low-cost business support services—such as mentorship, workshops, training, and consulting—provided by government or nonprofit organizations. These services are often utilized by and readily accessible to primarily the dominant linguistic demographic of the host nation. The inconsistency and absence of dedicated platforms or initiatives addressing the unique needs of this migrant group exacerbate their underrepresentation within the support ecosystem ([Paré and Therasme, 2010](#)).

Regarding the market level, the businesses of migrant entrepreneurs who integrate into official minority languages have a smaller customer base due to language differences from the native majority. These entrepreneurs are also restricted to the specific areas where the acquired language is spoken due to the regional concentration of minority languages (e.g. [Khosha and Kalitanyi, 2014](#); [Quan-Baffour and Johnson, 2022](#)). Language preferences may limit their ability to effectively market their products or services to the dominant market, where customers may communicate primarily in the main national language or other minority

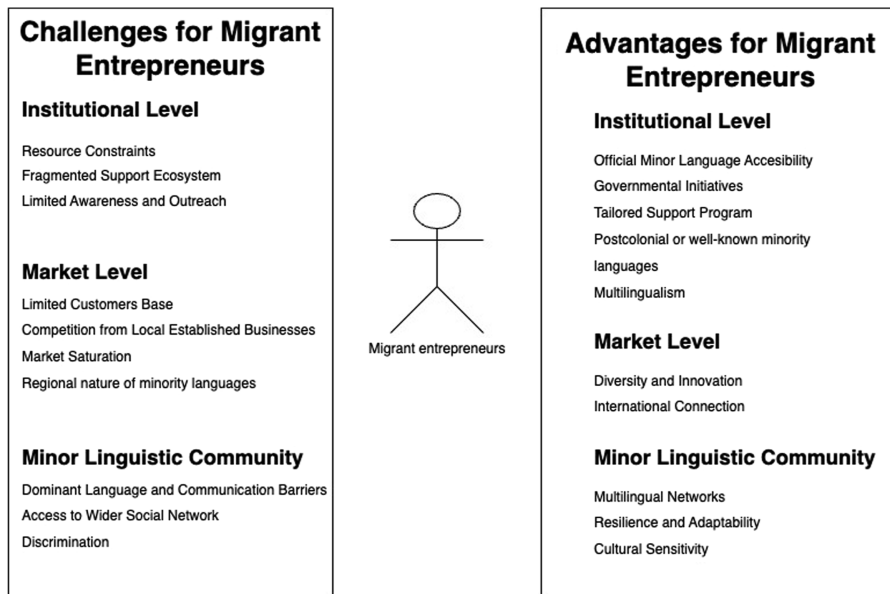


Figure 3. Challenges and opportunities for migrant entrepreneurs in minority linguistic communities. Source: Authors' own creation

languages (Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2022; Langlois and Razin, 1995). Additionally, residing in multilingual settings also poses challenges for them in understanding and tailoring their businesses and communication to accommodate the diverse preferences and needs of potential customers (Chababi *et al.*, 2017; Khosa and Kalitanyi, 2014; Mishra, 2022; Quan-Baffour and Johnson, 2022). As members of a smaller community, migrant entrepreneurs often face stiff competition (Razin and Langlois, 1996), and their competitors tend to be local enterprises that have solidified their presence in the market. These businesses often have stronger networks, a well-established brand reputation, ample financial resources, and a loyal customer base stemming from shared community affiliations (Chababi *et al.*, 2017). However, these market disadvantages can serve as a push factor for entrepreneurs to develop novel products, services, and business models that match the needs and preferences of not only the majority community but also the minority one. These entrepreneurs often bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas based on their unique insights and cross-cultural backgrounds and experiences (Arcand, 2012). Their insights and adaptability can provide a competitive edge in navigating global business environments and accessing international markets, thereby mitigating the risks associated with dependence on a single market or economy (Sui *et al.*, 2015).

At the minority community level, these entrepreneurs can encounter communication barriers that hinder their effective interaction with potential customers and suppliers, limiting their ability to conduct business transactions and access vital information (Chababi *et al.*, 2017; Langlois and Razin, 1995; Sui *et al.*, 2015). The constraints imposed by limited communication, compounded by isolation within a small community, inevitably impede migrant entrepreneurs in their efforts to establish robust social networks and cultivate trust within both majority and minority communities. This impediment hampers their ability to forge meaningful connections and garner support, hindering their integration and acceptance within the social fabric. Moreover, migrant entrepreneurs may face discrimination rooted in factors such as nationality, ethnicity, and language proficiency, including dialectal differences, intensifying their feelings of isolation and marginalization (Chababi *et al.*, 2017; Liu, 2020; Muchura-Theur and Obuya, 2018). On the other hand, migrant entrepreneurs who speak both the minority language—acquired through initial integration—and other languages of a multilingual country may gain the invaluable advantage of navigating and building connections across multilingual networks, including their own ethnic community, the linguistic minority community, and the dominant linguistic community (Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2022; Mishra, 2022; Wahlbeck and Fortelius, 2019). Their ability to communicate in multiple languages facilitates interaction with diverse communities, thus expanding their network base across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Mishra, 2022). Migrants can also benefit in countries where English or other postcolonial languages are minority languages (Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2018, 2022; Sun and Fong, 2022). Despite its contested history, English is widely used in business in African countries and India, providing an advantage for migrants who are proficient in it.

6. Conclusion

Research on language in international business has increased in recent decades (Tenzer *et al.*, 2017; Piekkari *et al.*, 2022). However, the focus of this research has mostly been on large multinational corporations and the role of language in their internal operations (e.g. Aichhorn and Puck, 2017; Brannen *et al.*, 2014; Michailova *et al.*, 2023; Piekkari *et al.*, 2015). Studies on language in business in relation to migrants have mostly focused on their employment in companies (e.g. Farashah *et al.*, 2023; Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2020; Hajro *et al.*, 2021). Fewer studies have focused on language in entrepreneurship, including migrant entrepreneurship (e.g. Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2023, 2024), even though language is considered a major factor in migrants' entrepreneurship success (e.g. Sinkovics and Reuber, 2021). While most migrants integrate into native majority languages, numerous countries facilitate integration into official minority languages, which is crucial to consider both in scholarly research and in practice. This

integration of migrants plays a crucial role in supporting the sustainability of minority populations, which is essential for preserving minority cultures, fostering social cohesion, promoting cultural diversity within the host country, and upholding social justice and minority rights (Williams, 2013). From a scholarly perspective, integrating migrants into minority languages offers new insights into the role of multilingualism in both business and society.

6.1 Future research directions

This study is among the few to explore the intersection of official minority languages and business opportunities in international and migrant entrepreneurship. Moreover, it contributes to the literature on the importance of multilingualism (Gaibrois, 2023) and language ideologies in business and management (Barner-Rasmussen *et al.*, 2024) while addressing the gap in research on migrants' integration into minority languages. This highlights the need for more research on the topic if we are to forge an equal and multicultural global society. Based on this literature review, we provide several further research streams that may advance both theoretical and practical discussions about the topic in focus.

6.1.1 Stream 1. Integration through minority languages. Social integration in terms of developing local social capital has been discussed as a benefit for newly arrived migrants (Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2024). In terms of linguistic minorities, this social capital may be tighter, potentially leading to stronger support networks. However, in the case of integration into an official minority language, migrants become a minority within a minority, which may lead to certain challenges. Native linguistic and ethnic minorities may represent socially disadvantaged populations in their societies and face discrimination. Furthermore, integration into a minority language has a highly regional character, with the choice to integrate largely dictated by the areas where migrants reside, underscoring the importance of local, municipal level linguascapes (Steyaert *et al.*, 2011). The regional nature of certain minority languages can lead to lock-in effects associated with language learning, further restricting migrants' mobility within the host country. While this research focused solely on official minority languages, several countries have widely spoken minority languages that are not official (e.g. Russian in Estonia and Latvia and Turkish in Germany). While integration into nonofficial minority languages is not governed by policies, migrants who speak these languages upon arrival may benefit both in terms of social integration into that minority as well as for doing business. Further research in this stream should focus on the following questions: How do informal networks in official and nonofficial minority-language communities support or exclude migrant entrepreneurs, and how does this affect opportunities for migrant entrepreneurship? What are the long-term effects of acquiring a minority language on migrants' socioeconomic mobility? How do migrants who integrate through a minority language access entrepreneurial opportunities in the majority-language business market? How are the institutional structures for integration adjusted to the needs of migrant entrepreneurs integrating into an official minority language? How could knowledge of a nonofficial language be beneficial or detrimental for migrant entrepreneurship despite integration into the language not being governed by policies?

6.1.2 Stream 2. Postcolonial legacy and multilingualism. The multilingual nature of countries often stems from a history of colonialism, cross-country conflicts, and shifting borders. In postcolonial countries, minority languages such as English, Portuguese, French, and Russian can serve as gateways to government institutions and organizations, either through their official status or the gained advantages from adopting them, as in the case of businesses or chambers of commerce. The extent of businesses speaking postcolonial languages may vary from country to country and from region to region (see, e.g. Elo and Ivanova-Gongne, 2020; Eresia-Eke and Okerue, 2018). For social integration, proficiency in local titular languages may be crucial, but knowledge of postcolonial languages that function as minority languages in these countries may provide opportunities for conducting business with other countries where the same languages are spoken (Dana *et al.*, 2019; Eresia-Eke and

Okerue, 2022). In this sense, migrants integrated into a minority official language that is postcolonial can act as boundary spanners for their companies (Barner-Rasmussen *et al.*, 2024; Cooke *et al.*, 2022). This may also provide an advantage for transnational entrepreneurship. Integration into postcolonial languages in postcolonial countries, due to their complex and often contentious histories, can result in the marginalization of migrants' identities and, consequently, their businesses. Further research in this area can focus on the following questions: How do migrant entrepreneurs in multilingual countries navigate identity and belonging through their use of postcolonial, heritage, or titular languages? What are the advantages and challenges of postcolonial language proficiency in multilingual countries? How can migrants' integration into official minority languages result in boundary spanning at work, in business, and beyond? How should institutions consider the potential boundary-spanning nature of official minority languages in their policymaking?

6.1.3 Stream 3. Never fully the local? Inequalities related to accent and dialect differences. While migrants can learn local minority languages and become integrated into local minority communities to some extent, their opportunities can be further hampered by their accents or inability to speak the local dialect (see, e.g. Chababi *et al.*, 2017; Ivanova-Gongne *et al.*, 2023, 2024). Furthermore, while discrimination and inequalities related to visible minorities are well documented (e.g. Khattab *et al.*, 2020; Sethi and Williams, 2015), the challenges that audible divergence may bring for migrant entrepreneurship has been less researched. Further research on this topic could be tailored to the following research questions: How do accents and the acquisition of minority-language dialects affect migrant entrepreneurs' interactions with local partners and/or employment in host-country companies? What differences exist in native populations' attitudes toward migrants' accents, depending on whether they belong to the native majority or minority population, and what are the consequences for employment? The study of dialects and their effects on migrant entrepreneurship can be valuable in its own right. Although this literature review did not specifically focus on dialects—given that integration at the dialect level is not typically shaped by migration policies—our search still identified some relevant studies. For example, articles highlighted the role of dialects in contexts such as migrant entrepreneurship in China (Wei *et al.*, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2014). While migrant language integration in China is conducted in the country's lingua franca, Mandarin, Wei *et al.* (2019) and Chen *et al.* (2014) found that integration into local dialects is crucial for successful migrant entrepreneurship. Fluency in local dialects aids in expanding social capital and increasing entrepreneurial propensity (Wei *et al.*, 2019). It can also be crucial for business in linguistically diverse countries, such as India and African countries.

To summarize, official minority languages can provide meaningful advantages for migrant entrepreneurs by supporting access to resources, enhancing participation, and enabling connections with diverse networks across local and transnational contexts. As both a cultural and strategic asset, language skills contribute to entrepreneurial adaptability and innovation. However, these benefits coexist with challenges related to linguistic exclusion, limited institutional recognition, and market constraints, including inequalities tied to accent and dialect differences. Further research is needed to uncover the roots of these barriers and to develop effective strategies to better support linguistically diverse entrepreneurs.

6.1.4 Practical implications. This study has several practical implications for policymakers. Official minorities form a crucial yet often overlooked component of any country's society. Migrant integration into minority communities is as crucial as integration into majority communities. Minority communities often play a critical role in preserving cultural and linguistic diversity, and integrating migrants into them not only strengthens societal cohesion but also provides them with unique opportunities that differ from those available within the majority group. For instance, the Finnish government has recognized the importance of this approach, aiming to integrate 5–10% of newly arrived migrants into the Swedish-speaking minority community (Finnish Government, 2023). However, challenges arise when migrants face difficulties in establishing businesses after learning a minority language. Entrepreneurship in minority language communities may provide fewer

opportunities or may need to be more specialized, and the limited availability of opportunities can discourage migrants from fully integrating. Without clear career pathways or business opportunities, migrants may feel that the effort to learn a minority language does not offer strategically tangible rewards. Given the highly regional nature of many minority languages, this may lead to heightened internal mobility within countries, with migrants relocating to majority-language regions or more metropolitan, cosmopolitan areas. This will contribute to the ongoing challenges faced by rural and peripheral areas, including population decline, aging demographics, and low economic potential, further increasing their socioeconomic vulnerability (e.g. Seifollahi-Aghmiuni *et al.*, 2022). Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies that ensure migrants are not only encouraged to learn minority languages but also supported with access to business opportunities, entrepreneurship support, vocational training, and business development programs within these communities.

Importantly, these programs should be widely advertised to targeted audiences—namely, migrant populations—and should highlight the personal and professional advantages of learning official minority languages. Additionally, they could showcase success stories of migrants who have integrated into minority communities and succeeded in business, motivating others to engage in language learning. For integration into minority languages, it is important to promote opportunities for their strategic use—for example, leveraging their boundary-spanning and international potential when a minority language is widely spoken in other countries. This could encourage migrant entrepreneurs to establish more international businesses, thereby contributing to the internationalization of regions with minority languages. Local municipal governments should promote international business in minority-language areas by developing support programs in collaboration with international NGOs and initiatives. This could help create hubs for international businesses, effectively reducing the lock-in effect that may arise from integrating into minority languages. From a strategic and economic perspective, integration into a minority language can benefit the job market by incorporating multilingual talent into the development of the international business environment. In the case of Finland, integrating and learning Swedish—the minority language—could provide benefits for international organizations by strengthening their connections with other Nordic countries. Companies stand to benefit from having multilingual employees whose cross-cultural understanding and multilingual skills enable them to gain a deeper understanding of markets and strategic approaches to entering international markets. Naturally, such a solution would be viable only for minority languages that are spoken beyond the host country.

For minority languages that are less widely spoken internationally, policies should emphasize the close-knit nature of their communities and the importance of maintaining them. Despite the challenges that such closed communities may bring, municipal governments can promote and support digital entrepreneurship in such areas while simultaneously improving family integration. If migrants can thrive in these areas—through opportunities for both economic participation and family well-being—they will be more likely to remain and contribute to the local community. To conclude, fostering integration into minority language communities could drive economic growth while supporting the development of an inclusive business environment.

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(The Appendix follows overleaf)

Table A1. Included publications – Literature review results.

Title	Authors	Year	Country of origin	Keywords
Self-employment among French-Canadians: The role of regional milieu	Langlois, A. and Razin, E	1995	Canada	self-employment; immigrant groups; economic niches; French-Canadians; regional milieu; correspondence analysis
Metropolitan Characteristics and Entrepreneurship among Immigrants and Ethnic Groups in Canada	Razin, E. and Langlois, A	1996	Canada	–
The complementarity of language and other human capital: immigrant earnings in Canada	Chiswick, B. R. and Miller, P. W	2003	Canada	immigrants; human capital; language skills; schooling; earnings; Canada
Motivation and driving forces of Turkish entrepreneurs in Switzerland	Baycan-Levent, T. and Kundak, S	2009	Switzerland	entrepreneurship and innovation; migrant entrepreneurship; Turkish immigrants; Turkish entrepreneurs; Switzerland
Entrepreneurs in the new economy: Immigration and sex effects in the Montreal metropolitan area	Paré, S. and Therasme, K	2010	Canada	new economy; entrepreneurs; sex; Montreal metropolitan area, female entrepreneurs
Transmission of entrepreneurial spirit from first to second generation ethnic minorities in Montreal: Opening paths for further research	Arcand, S	2012	Canada	Canada; entrepreneurialism; immigrants; family; entrepreneurship; ethno-cultural minorities; entrepreneurial spirit
Internationalization of immigrant-owned SMEs: The role of language	Sui, S., Morgan, H. M and Baum, M	2015	Canada	Immigrants; internationalization; international trade; liability of outsidership; language; small and medium-sized enterprises
Are They Really Different: The Entrepreneurial Process from the Perspective of First- and Second-Generation Immigrant Entrepreneurs	Chababi, M., Chreim, S. and Spence, M	2017	Canada	first generation immigrant entrepreneurs; second generation immigrant entrepreneurs; entrepreneurial experiences; entrepreneurial process; embeddedness
The Utilisation of Migrant Capital to Access the Labour Market: The Case of Swedish Migrants in Helsinki	Wahlbeck, Ö. and Fortelius, S	2019	Finland	Bourdieu; employment; Finland; labour market; migrant capital; social networks; Swedish language
The Experiences of Immigrants in South Africa: a Case Study of Ethiopians in Durban, South Africa	Gebre, L.T, Maharaj, P. and PillayN.K.	2011	South Africa	Experiences. Immigrants. Durban
Challenges in Operating Micro-Enterprises by African Foreign Entrepreneurs in Cape Town, South Africa	Khosa, R.M. and Kalitany, V	2014	South Africa	African immigrants; entrepreneurship challenges; SMME; Immigrant entrepreneurship; Cape Town

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Title	Authors	Year	Country of origin	Keywords
The nexus of social capital, coping ability, and employment creation in African immigrant-owned small businesses	Eresia-Eke, C. and Okerue, C	2018	South Africa, Swaziland, Mozambique	language, networking, coping, African immigrants entrepreneurship
They wouldn't allow me in their conversations Communication experiences of immigrant traders in a Kenyan informal market	Muchura-Theuri, A.W. and Obuya, J	2018	Kenya	Intercultural communication, immigrant traders, informal markets, cross-cultural adaptation, experiences
China Town as a multilingual workplace	Thompson, M	2019	South Africa	China Town, shopkeepers, shop assistants, multilingualism, Linguistic Ethnography, Conversation Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis
Unequal Interdependency: Chinese Petty Entrepreneurs and Zimbabwean Migrant Labourers	Liu, Y-Y, T	2020	South Africa	Migrant entrepreneurship; labour migration; petty capitalism; Chinese diaspora; Zimbabwean diaspora; South Africa
Forms of capital and the creation of jobs by immigrant-owned businesses in southern Africa	Eresia-Eke, C. and Okerue, C	2022	South Africa, Swaziland, Mozambique	Human capital; economic capital; social capital; African immigrants; job creation; entrepreneurship; small business
Multilingualism in urban Vellore	Mishra, S	2022	India	Multilingualism; urban Vellore; communication accommodation theory. verbal repertoire; duallinguism
Literacy matters in sustainable livelihood development among refugee adults in South Africa	Quan-Baffour, K.P. and Johnson, L.R	2022	South Africa	functional literacy; sustainable livelihood; communication skills; refugee adults entrepreneurship; economic use; social use
Migrants working for migrants: dependence and discourse in Chinese-owned small commercial businesses in South Africa	Cooke, F.L., Wood, G. and Saunders, S	2022	South Africa	Chinese migrant businesses; migrants; power and resistance. Responsible autonomy; South Africa
The role of human capital, race, gender, and culture on immigrant entrepreneurship in Hong Kong	Sun, S.B. and Fong, E	2022	Hong-Kong	Entrepreneurship; immigrant; Hong Kong; integration; cohort
Transient entrepreneurs?: Chinese migrant small commercial businesses in South Africa	Wood, G. and Cooke, L.C	2023	South Africa	Chinese small business Embeddedness Regulatory environment Migrant entrepreneur South Africa Transience

Source(s): Authors' own creation

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Further reading

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