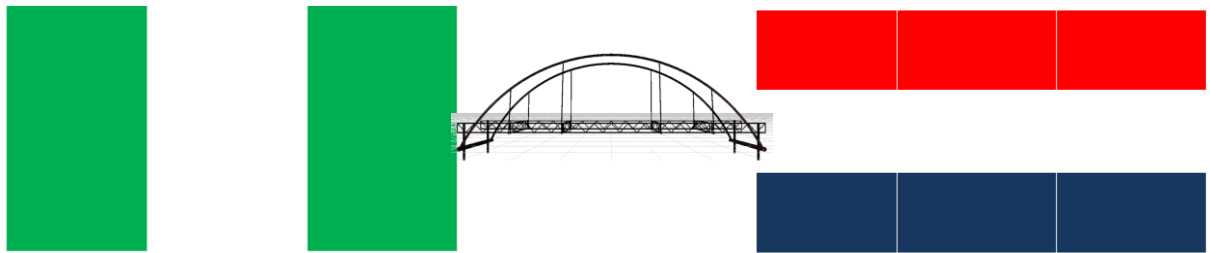


# Human Capital Of Immigrants

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**Bridging The Gap**



# Human capital of immigrants

A case study of Nigerians in Amsterdam and Tilburg

Master Thesis Human Geography

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# Foreword

Why are a considerable proportion of African immigrants in the Netherlands employed in unskilled jobs in spite of their high educational qualifications? With this question in mind, I started this study on the role of the human capital of immigrants in the Dutch labor market with Nigerians as the case study.

As a prospective migrant somewhere in Africa, one's expectations are high concerning moving to Europe or America. Maybe ignorant, but all thoughts and plans are centered on getting 'here' and getting a job, getting a house, sending remittances and in general building a better life. Migrants have admitted to having left lucrative jobs and businesses behind over 'there' for what they imagined would be improved living standards, only to get here to a different *reality*. The reality of underemployment and poor living standards which often distracts from participation in the integration process.

Having migrated to the Netherlands as a student eight years ago, I observed that African immigrants were and still are at various levels of integration and apparently a vast majority are at the bottom end of the Dutch labor market. This positioning is irrespective of prior educational qualifications and experience. In contrast, there are others, though few, who are well integrated into the Dutch labor market. The question then is, how is it that some immigrants have positive labor market outcome and others do not? Finding explanations for this contrast and means of improving their labor market participation are some of the reasons for the study. My internship project was on the activities of Nigerian migrant associations and selecting Nigeria as the case study for this research was a follow-up from that study.

Unlike the invited guest workers of the 1960s, the newcomer economic migrants are not provided jobs and other amenities by the Dutch government on arrival. Yet, these newcomers need to have (or create?) opportunities in the labor market, a necessary step to their integration into Dutch society and in involvement in development activities back home. What are the programs and policies of Dutch government and private institutes in the efforts of newcomer immigrants to integrate in the labor market? This thesis was a quest to document the experiences of Nigerian immigrants, migrant associations and reactions of Dutch institutes.

Several people contributed in different ways to the success of this work. My supervisor, Lothar Smith for his insights and instructions in the art of logical thinking and writing. It has been quite an instructive experience indeed. He was assisted by Joris Schapendonk, with whom the research actually began. Joris gave me lots of ideas and read through countless drafts followed by hours of discussion. Thank you for your help. Going back to school after several years of break made this study quite a challenge for me and there were times when I felt it was too difficult. But then I would visit Ton van Naerssen and he would share different experiences with me that reassured and encouraged me, I appreciate your words of wisdom. I am also grateful for the privilege to do my internship with Stichting Mondiale Samenleving (SMS) in Utrecht where the idea to work with Nigerians started and Centrum voor

Internationale Samenwerking (COS) Tilburg for the opportunity to get Dutch work experience.

Without the interviews there would have been no research, I am therefore grateful to all my respondents for their time and willingness to discuss their experiences. They were sometimes distressing experiences to share, and yet they willingly did. I ‘doff my hat’ to you for the courage with which you passed through (or are still passing through) these circumstances. My sister Bose, my friends, Sophie, Onome and Bridget. Professor Okuneye for his many suggestions and advice. Marianne Lapien-Dam thank you for your help with the corrections.

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# Abbreviations

CBS	Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (Central Office of Statistics)
EMO	Etnische Minderheden bij de Overheid (Ethnic Minorities in Government)
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres on Recognition and Mobility
HBO	Hoger Beroep Onderwijs (Higher Technical Education)
HND	Higher National Diploma
HOA	Hoger Opgeleid Allochtonen (Highly educated immigrants)
MPCE	Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Courses in Colleges of Education
NARICs	National Academic Recognition Information Centres
NBTE	(Nigerian) National Board for Technical Education
NECO	National Examination's Council
NNVS	Nigerian National Volunteer Service
NUFFIC	Nederlandse organisatie voor internationale samenwerking in het hoger onderwijs (Netherlands Organization for international cooperation in higher education)
NUC	(Nigerian) National Universities Commission
OND	(Nigerian) Ordinary National Diploma
ROC	Regionaal Opleidingen Centrum (Regional Training Center)
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SNV	Stichting Nieuwkomers en Vluchtelingen (Foundation for Newcomers and Refugees)
UMC	University Matriculation Examination
UWV	(het) Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen (Institute for Employee Insurance)
WAEC	West African Examination Council
WIN	Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers (In-citizenship law for Newcomers)
WRR	Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy)



## *Executive summary*

In the globalized world of the twenty first century, there is increasing mobility of people. These highly mobile people or migrants “carry” with them various stock of *human capital*, which, depending on different social, political and economic factors, have the potential to contribute to the growth of the host and home economies and the individual actor. Human capital, which includes the educational qualifications, experiences and social abilities of an individual, is a key economic resource and a source of creative power in science and technology, business, arts and culture and other activities. Thus migrants carry a huge resource from their origin country to their destination countries.

It is an established fact that mobility, whether internal or international has economics as the primary or secondary factor. The aim of the migrant is, either immediately on arrival or at a later period, to use his/her human capital to participate in the economic activities of his destination country. Either as an employee or entrepreneur, he/she expects to receive appropriate earnings. In the developed world, mobility of labor is actively promoted by countries within a continent. For example Europe and also between continents like Europe and America. The European Union promotes mobility of labor as a matter of EU policy. This legislation gives workers the right to move to a different member state, to look for work and be employed under the same conditions as nationals of that state and to benefit from the same social and tax advantages.

While the EU encourages and actively promotes free movement of its own workers, those from outside the EU face tough rules regarding entry especially when entry is for economic purpose and residence. Those from outside Europe face even stiffer conditions hence the need to examine the employment conditions of immigrants from Africa with a view to drawing a comparison between human capital from the two continents and why the certificates from Africa results in poor labor market outcome for immigrants in some European countries like the Netherlands.

NUFFIC (the Netherlands Organization for international cooperation in higher education) is the institution that accredits and recognizes foreign university certificates. By its evaluation standards, certificates from developing countries are often downgraded. Granted that the human capital of immigrants is acquired from origin countries that are contextually different from the destination countries; it should be possible, given certain conditions, to view human capital as an instrument by that individual to develop his/her intellect and abilities so s/he can perform in any society as an informed decision maker. It should be recognized as a fundamental social benefit to the individual (from his origin society) and the society in which s/he lives. The agency of the immigrant and institutional cooperation from the host society are both important for the immigrant to achieve a suitable outcome in the labor market possibly with an adaptation of his prior skills.

For migrants from the global south, the devaluation of their educational qualification often becomes a major obstacle to their effective participation in the host labor market. Those who migrated for family reunification are the main victims of ‘brain waste’ syndrome. This is because they are more often well engaged in the labor market of their origin country before migrating. However, in order to reunite with their partners, they leave their jobs and on arrival, begin the process of integration into a completely new labor market and society. An advantage for this group of immigrants is having a partner who understands the functioning of the host society and thus offers some kind of ‘head-start’. Most affected are asylum seekers

who often go through a process of de-skilling due to inactivity during the sometimes long duration of the asylum procedure.

In the Netherlands, Dutch language proficiency is one of the requirements for participation in the society. Low level language proficiency constitutes one of the hindrances for the participation of Nigerians in the Dutch labor market. For the highly skilled, poor command of the language affects the ability to utilize their pre-migration qualifications and experiences. For those who acquire educational qualification in the Netherlands, without adequate proficiency in Dutch language, this is still not sufficient for a successful labor market outcome. The tendency is to accept lower level jobs where rudimentary level of Dutch is acceptable. This begs the question of the usefulness of post-migration human capital without adequate mastery of Dutch language.

For those migrants who choose to pursue and achieve successful labor market outcomes, taking on menial jobs could be a temporary decision until they are able to enhance their human capital, including language proficiency, in order to get commensurate jobs. That is, brain waste could be temporary and so could be viewed in the context of a longitudinal time frame. In other words, agency of the immigrant is a decisive factor in the duration of the brain waste. Other influential factors are policies on migration, integration, education and labor, political persuasions of the ruling government and societal attitude. In the final analysis, the capability to achieve a successful outcome is highly influenced by what the immigrant attributes his/her labor market situation to and how he is able to work within the system to achieve his desired outcome. For example, those who attribute causality (if even partly) to the evaluation advice given for their pre-migration human capital, enhance their human capital post-migration.

This research focused on Nigerian immigrants in Tilburg and Amsterdam in order to evaluate the effect of their pre-migration human capital on their job situation. It also examines whether there are advantages to the acquisition of post-migration qualifications. The larger focus is on sub-Saharan African immigrants, a group to which Nigeria belongs and can safely be said to represent. This representation is because of the historical fact of the fairly homogenous nature of sub-Saharan Africans and the fact that as a group they seem to face similar socio-economic conditions in the Netherlands. It has been established by several researchers that sub-Saharan African immigrants are under-researched relative to the four classical immigrants groups in the Netherlands. Nigeria is therefore used as a case study of this population of 547,238 living in the Netherlands (or about 5% of the entire Dutch population) to give attention to some of the issues confronting these immigrants.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted; this provided the opportunity for respondents to speak openly and thus created an opportunity for candid discussions. This research was conducted among first generation Nigerians of working age between 23 and 51 years. Their duration of stay in the Netherlands and their residential statuses were also considered.

The results showed that

The fact that employing an undocumented immigrant in the Netherlands, whether privately or by an organization is a crime (punishable by a fine as high as €8,000), makes it difficult for them to get or keep any job. Undocumented immigrants are still able to get jobs through informal networks, though these are often unskilled jobs. These include cleaning jobs, doing dishes or in private homes, painting, gardening etc. This is a more common occurrence in a place like Amsterdam compared to Tilburg. Explanations for this include firstly, the fact that a

city like Amsterdam with a large immigrant population has a well-developed network and they inform each other of available job opportunities. Secondly, in such a city there are many small businesses that need cheap labor which immigrants often provide. For these types of jobs, the qualification of the immigrant is not a pre-condition. In other words, these jobs are often irregular, low paid and require little educational qualifications.

About 40% of my respondents migrated for family re-unification and another 40% are economic migrants. In the case of the former group, regularization is done through their family members who are already living in the Netherlands. For the latter group, regularization is often done through various means; for example, 57% of the economic migrants married Dutch citizens and got their permit to stay through such marriages. However, in spite of this status acquisition, it is still an uphill task to get commensurate jobs using pre-migration human capital.

Acquiring a post-migration education is a very expensive project for immigrants. Financing was therefore a major obstacle for all the immigrants that were interviewed. Two common means of finance was a) combining work with study and b) support from the employed partner. More than 44% abandon their quest for an education due to lack of funds. None of those who acquired an education in the Netherlands was able to access any institutional support for their education. Having lived in the Netherlands for long periods of time (more than 10 years) had a positive influence on the financial position of immigrants and the ability to invest in education.

Access to information is difficult for immigrants due to limited knowledge about Dutch establishments. There are Dutch organizations that offer various programs to help prepare immigrants for the labor market for example HOA (highly educated immigrant training) by UWV, Stage carrousel by SNV, etc. There is need for increased publicity about these programs within migrant communities.

Key recommendations from this research include:

First of all, the need for a revisit of some government policies with regards to labor market integration of immigrants so that policies and programs are designed to fit the “newcomers” who are different from the classical immigrant groups in the Netherlands.

Secondly, the process of certificate accreditation as presently conducted by NUFFIC and the result of that accreditation has not helped immigrants to integrate into the Dutch labor market. There is need for a program for skill assessment of immigrants to help employers understand and utilize the skills and expertise they bring along. Even though these qualifications and experiences are often different from what Dutch employers are familiar with, giving immigrants short courses and in-company trainings will make them more relevant to the Dutch labor market.

Thirdly, it is necessary for African immigrants in general and Nigerians in particular to organize platforms to influence integration and other policies that are relevant to them in the Netherlands. These platforms would provide basis for sincere dialogue between all the actors on ways to make participation in Dutch society beneficial to all concerned. And it would also serve as a rallying point for Nigerians as a group so that issues of interest to the community are identified and appropriate solutions are sought.

On a final note: It has been reported that the retirement of the baby boomers caused the Dutch government an increase of 6% in retirement benefit in the first half of 2011 compared to the same period in 2010; this is expected to increase steadily over the next 20 years as more of that generation will retire. This is of course, not restricted to the Netherlands but extends across Europe (and America). This leaves a major gap in the labor market and need for massive employment of workers. A major pool could be from those immigrants who already reside within the borders of Europe and their following generation; therefore identifying them, the skills they possess and structurally incorporating them in the labor market is a major way forward. Given the social ills their being employed will remove and the contribution of their skills to the gross domestic product of the Netherlands, solving the problem of adequate utilization of their human capital should be a policy issue.

***“By investing in themselves, people can enlarge the range of choices available to them. It is one way that free men can enhance their welfare.”***

***Theodore W. Schultz***

***Dedication***

***To the loving memory of my mother and father who in-printed on us the value of learning.***

## Chapter 1

# Introduction of Key developments in skill utilization of immigrants

The skills of migrants are underutilized and migrants suffer from large mismatches between the level of jobs they hold and their qualifications (Friedberg, 2000; Zeng and Xie, 2004). These authors identified devaluation of educational qualifications, experiences and training of immigrants as major factors influencing this poor labor market performance. Li, Gervais, & Duval (2006) investigating employment situation of immigrants in Canada discovered that despite their advanced university degrees and extensive work experience, more than 50% of these individuals are underemployed –working in jobs for which their education, skills, and previous work experience are underutilized. This lower valuation<sup>1</sup>, according to Chiswick (1978) coupled with (assumed lower levels of) other productivity enhancing competences like skills peculiar to the host country, result in payment of lower wages to immigrants compared to natives with the same levels of qualification. In addition to low wages, immigrants may sometimes be forced to work long hours in poor conditions and are often denied employment rights. It is also well documented that unemployment and underemployment are higher among immigrants compared to non-immigrants (Ode, 2008; Somerville & Wintour, 2005; Lowell, Findlay & Stewart, 2004). In a study, the OECD (2008) found that in almost all OECD countries, immigrants are more likely to be overqualified (*i.e.* working in jobs/occupations for which their skills are too high) than persons born in the country and that this employment gap persists and even increases in nearly all OECD countries with level of education. The structural issues explaining these differences are discussed in subsequent chapters. The following paragraphs introduce the consequences of underemployment.

Underemployment among immigrants brings losses to the economy of the host country. For instance, Blanchflower and Shadforth (2007) posited that migrants can assist economic growth and reduce inflationary pressures, either by dampening wage demands or by filling existing skill shortages. Thus by excluding migrants from full participation, the host nation may forfeit these advantages. Using figures for Canada, Watt and Bloom (2001) and Reitz (2005) calculated that immigrant underemployment costs the Canadian economy over \$2 billion annually. Demographers also argue that in most countries of the North the population is ageing and the rate of child birth is reducing which is likely to create serious labor shortages. Influencing the pattern of domestic labor supply through education and training, and attracting more people into work are suggested solutions for this shortage (Boswell, 2005). Immigrants constitute part of domestic labor in their host societies and could be part of this solution. This could also prevent the loss the immigrant suffers in terms of brain waste and low self-esteem when s/he is working at levels below his capability or not at all. Somerville and Wintour (2005) in their research argued that employment provides income, economic advancement, security and increased self-worth; this economic empowerment and independence (from social welfare for example) could help restore self-esteem. An immigrant that is underemployed is psychologically, socially and economically unable to contribute to the society in which s/he lives. They also linked employment to integration of immigrants into host societies and suggested that employment, in some cases, provides the opportunity for immigrants to make contacts with natives and therefore could be important to their integration.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, the words valuation, evaluation, accreditation and validation are used interchangeably.

For the Netherlands, the CBS (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek) reported that the unemployment rate among non-western immigrants was more than two and a half times as high as among native Dutch citizens in the third quarter of 2009. Immigrants' labor force in the Netherlands is also largely concentrated in the very lower echelons of the labor market. According to Dagevos and Bierings (2005), almost fifty percent of the non-western labor force is employed at a rather basic level, compared to little more than a quarter of employed Dutch natives while more than two in three are employed in rather unqualified jobs, notwithstanding their comparatively high levels of education (Van den Maagdenberg, 2004). This suggests that immigrants work at low level jobs in the society; which tends to affect where they live which are usually poor neighborhoods and in large numbers. They therefore create sub-cultures within the Dutch society which makes integration a prolonged process. There are societal factors and individual attributes of the immigrant that deepens this division. With the possible exception of people born rich or otherwise economically well off, being integrated in the labor market determines to considerable extent a person's integration in most, if not all, other spheres of society. The amount of income one earns determines to a large extent the housing one can afford, the quality of the schooling one's children can enjoy (which also may well be related to the part of a city or town one lives in) and also in other respects determines the quality of life and the future prospects of one's off-spring. Besides the financial aspects of being economically active, work constitutes an important element in the individual's sense of purpose and structures day-to-day life. From any government's point of view, moreover, it is costly to support people who cannot take care of themselves; under- or unemployment means a waste of human capital, and may destabilize society's social fabric (Dy-Hammar, 1998). Considering this relevance, and relating it to immigrants, their labor market integration is an issue that has been high on the policy agenda in various (western) host nations including the Netherlands for almost three decades.

The primary focus of current integration policy, particularly for recent arrivals, is essentially on language skills and not on labor market access. On the contrary, integration policies that focus on early market entry could significantly improve the employment levels of immigrants. Considering that labor market outcomes for immigrants in the Netherlands have been well below those of the native-born, and less favorable than in other OECD countries, for both genders (OECD, 2008), it is important to pursue policies that support easy labor market access. A well-integrated immigrant is better able to contribute to the development of his origin country both financially, politically and socially.

In the current public discourse, migration is being linked to development in the origin countries through remittances. *Remittances* have been described as the "new mantra" around migration and development (Kapur, 2004), a sort of cure-all. Firstly, several schools of thought seem to project remittances as a source of funding for development projects in the South. Secondly, it is seen as a means of poverty reduction since it goes directly to the poor. However, while the effects of remittances are greatest on transient poverty, the long-term effects on structural poverty are less clear, principally because the consequences for economic development in general are not well understood. It is like the proverbial chicken and egg argument. Poverty and under-development in the South are assumed causalities for migration. This is due to insufficiency of industries to create jobs for the youth and poor infrastructures for productivity. The tendency is for this highly-skilled labor to migrate to the global North (a situation often described as *brain drain*). This is the same skilled labor needed for the development of government, infrastructures and industries in the South. A third reason for the mantra belief is that this loss of human resources from the South is expected to be compensated for by reverse capital flows from the North i.e. remittances. The possibility or

ability of remittances to break the circle of underdevelopment and poverty in the South is an on-going global debate. For example, in 2010 alone, a total of US\$325 billion (MPI, 2011)<sup>2</sup> was remitted to developing countries<sup>3</sup> while the Rural poverty report of 2011,<sup>4</sup> showed that in the same year more than 1.4 billion people or 20% of the world population (most of them in the developing world) lived on less than \$1.25 per day making poverty still very present.

To put the level of brain drain in some perspective, the World Bank estimated that in 2005, between a third and a half of the science and technology personnel of the global South lived in OECD countries (Lowell et al., 2004). More specifically, Africa has lost a third of its executives over the past 40 to 50 years (Black and King, 2004) to this quest for better living standards. This search for a better life is one of the main causes of migration from the developing to the developed world but unfortunately, this goal of improved living standards is not always attainable after migration. This is due to the phenomenon of “brain waste”, which is another possibility associated with the mobility of the highly skilled; that is highly skilled migrants who are employed as domestic or manual workers in destination countries and are therefore unable to reach their potentials in the destination country.

The ability to contribute to the development of origin country by immigrants may be directly linked to the economic development of the individual immigrant in the host society. According to CBS Statline (2011) there are about 540,242 Sub-Saharan African immigrants (excluding North Africans) in the Netherlands. As of 2011, 13.8% of this population was unemployed (see Statistics Netherlands Press release PB11-005). (An even higher percentage is underemployed since immigrants tend to work at the lowest level of the Dutch labor market irrespective of qualifications). Lowell et al., (2004) posited that contributing to the development of origin country, particularly social remittances, is only feasible if there is a stock of highly qualified immigrants already functioning at those skill levels in the host country. Bearing in mind the large population size and the rapid growth rate, (the population has grown by 26% in 15 years), it is a population whose integration and societal participation requires independent policy focus.

The labor market situation of immigrants in the Netherlands has been widely studied and various policies have been designed to address some of the evolving issues. Albeit, most of these studies have focused on the four major immigrant groups, those from Morocco and Turkey (the guest worker groups and cohort) and those from Suriname and Antillean (those with colonial history with the Netherlands (Zimmermann, Voretz, Kahanec, Gataullina, Constant & Zaiceva 2008; & OECD, 2008). As Bijwaard & Veenman (2008) explain, this is because they are the more dominant and the best documented groups.

There are however, more recent arrivals made up of different types of immigrants who have come to the Netherlands as asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants or as relatives. These “newcomers” including African migrants have been relatively under-researched and their activities not well documented. According to van Heelsum (2005), there is little quantitative data available on the labor market position and the income of Africans in the Netherlands. Rather references are made to Africans based on information about and policy recommendations for the four major immigrant groups (see Mazzucato, 2010). The migration motives, the dynamics for living as migrants and the contextual factors the Africans face are

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/remittances.cfm>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/remittances.cfm>

<sup>4</sup> In 2010, US\$10,045million was remitted to Nigeria by her citizens abroad.



different from those of the four major immigrant groups. First, the latter have stayed longer and so are more embedded in the society; secondly as guest workers and citizens of former colony, these older immigrant groups had jobs, official statuses and other amenities on arrival; thirdly their large population and different socio-cultural orientations made them obvious groups that could not be ignored. Finally, in the case of the guest workers they were low skilled workers invited to do low skilled jobs, programs and policies could therefore be made to fit whole groups. Given this scenario of scarce quantitative and qualitative studies and information about the labor market integration of Africans, this thesis examines the case of Nigerian immigrants in the Netherlands. African migrants have more diverse reasons for migrating, their age distribution, their educational and skill levels are different and it is a growing population. It is also a group composed of immigrants from 45 countries (excluding North Africans). The larger focus is sub-Saharan African immigrants and Nigeria is a good representation of this community. It is noteworthy that historically, sub-Saharan Africans have a fairly homogenous nature; as an immigrant group, they seem to face similar socio-economic conditions in the Netherlands; and factually, they are under-researched relative to the four classical immigrant groups. Nigeria is therefore used as a case study of this population. Choosing to focus on the job situation of Nigerian immigrants could be the basis for recommendations and policies that will be beneficial in terms of understanding some of the difficult socio-economic conditions they face.

This research is based on 18 in-depth interviews with Nigerian immigrants in Tilburg and Amsterdam. Besides the immigrants, seven Nigerian migrant associations and two Dutch employment institutions involved in job placement of immigrants were also interviewed. The main reason for choosing Amsterdam is the large concentration of African immigrants in the city. As van Heelsum (2005) explains, this is due to the availability of specific facilities and job opportunities in Amsterdam. It is a city with a large concentration of international companies which with more employment opportunities especially because mastery of the Dutch language is not a major condition in these companies. In the special case of Nigerians, because a high percentage migrated to the Netherlands for marriage purposes, they tend to move to the Randstad (area surrounding Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and the Hague) where their partners are already living. Tilburg also houses a relatively large concentration of Africans because of its many manufacturing industries with employment opportunities. Its smaller size, population and less concentration of international companies makes comparison of the two cities both geographically and in terms of available job opportunities for non-native speakers compelling. These two cities attract immigrants of various backgrounds and are therefore representative of the research group.

## **1.1 Research goal and research questions**

As already stated, in the Dutch public and policy discourse, attention on the labor market position has been focused on the four major immigrant groups (Turks, Moroccans, Antilleans and Surinamese) and their next generation while there is little available documentation on the smaller groups. The main goal of this research is to investigate the stock of human capital possessed by Nigerian immigrants, its recognition and evaluation by Dutch institutions and how this is being used to benefit the immigrants and the Dutch society. This research examines the main obstacles to obtaining commensurate employment by these immigrants and the implications for policy makers especially ministry of interior, Foreign Affairs and Justice and the two cities. Furthermore this research investigates the effect of employment on integration. The central research question is

*What is the stock of human capital possessed by Nigerian immigrants and to what extent is this stock of pre-migration human capital recognized and utilizable in the Dutch labor market?*

The inburgering<sup>5</sup> program of the Dutch government was instituted to teach immigrants Dutch language and culture. Language acquisition, like other skills, requires resources like time, money, etc. Investing these resources, argue some leading economists and the subsequent acquisition of human capital should result in future monetary and psychic income. The concept of opportunity cost therefore becomes central to success. That is considering the costs, individuals weigh the benefits in terms of the eventual ability of such capital to generate income and choose whether to acquire the skill. The case of immigrants is particularly complex. One of the reasons is the challenge of transferring their pre-migration qualification to the host labor market. Inadequate transferability often requires additional training, an expensive venture.

On the other hand, if an immigrant plans to work at higher levels it is necessary that he enhances his human capital to fit into the host country labor market. Time spent studying is time spent away from working to earn an income. So how does the immigrant finance this quest to enhance his human capital and avoid the trap of underemployment (or even unemployment)?

This thesis evaluates underemployment in its various dimensions, its causes and its consequences in relation to Nigerian immigrants, the origin and destination countries. The perception of the immigrants on their labor market position is critical. This is because attribution tends to influence their eventual outcome in the labor market. The first sub-question is:

*To what factors do Nigerian immigrants attribute their underemployment in the Netherlands?*

The next section focuses on the stock of human capital and the country of acquisition because of the acclaimed difficulty of transferability of human capital. More emphasis was placed on the educational qualifications acquired before migration because that is what NUFFIC evaluates. A list of the educational levels of the respondents and the NUFFIC evaluation chart are given. The extent to which immigrants are able to use their pre-migration qualifications and the efforts of two Dutch institutions (UWV and SNV) to better prepare highly educated immigrants for the labor market were investigated. To this end, the next sub question is:

*How are the pre-migration qualifications and experiences of African immigrants assessed and utilized in the Dutch labor market?*

The agency of the immigrant to make choices that leads to a positive labor market outcome is an issue in focus. The factors to which immigrants attribute their success or failure in the labor market appears to be a motivation for taking necessary action. Such efforts include investing in the acquisition of human capital after migration; the concept of attribution is discussed. The resources needed to acquire human capital in the Netherlands by these immigrants are also examined. In this light, available institutional support for labor market integration of immigrants, their relevance and accessibility are highlighted. One example is

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<sup>5</sup> Han Etzinger (2004) one of the architects of the *inburgering* program refers to *inburgering* as civic integration'. It can also be referred to as 'settlement'. However the term *inburgering* is maintained in this study to retain its uniquely Dutch connotation.

the *inburgering* program and its relationship to the labor market performance of immigrants; another is availability of study financing.

In this research, the acquisition of post-migration qualifications and experiences seems to be a major point of departure between the perpetually underemployed and those immigrants who are eventually able to get commensurate employment. Of course other important factors like extent of networking (with native Dutch citizens), language proficiency, length of stay and access to information also factor into the success stories. This brings us to the next sub-question which is:

*To what extent is the acquisition of post-migration human capital relevant to the success of African immigrants in the Dutch labor market?*

## **1.2 Relevance of the study**

On a societal level, the labor market situation of African immigrants is a matter of policy concern both to Dutch and African institutions in the Netherlands. Yet, compared to the four large immigrant groups namely Antilleans, Surinamese, Turks and Moroccans, there is a paucity of information about African immigrants which makes adequate policy formulations difficult. Some of the reasons given for this lack of data include their relatively short period of stay in the Netherlands and small population size which has resulted in few research studies on these newcomers.

In the course of my internship in 2011 with Stichting Mondiale Samenleving (SMS), a non-governmental organization, various Nigerian migrant organizations were interviewed. Listed as major problem areas were the poor labor market performance of Nigerians and the access of organizations and individuals to institutional support. This inadequate access to information is due in part to poor communication abilities of the Nigerian immigrants.

Research studies found that a considerable proportion of African immigrants had some sort of formal education sometimes up to postgraduate levels and more specifically, according to van Heelsum (2005), 25% of Nigerian immigrants in the Netherlands acquired college/university education before migrating. The focus of this research is the recognition and utilization of these pre-migration qualifications and experiences which is often lost in the quest for survival. This is because these immigrants take up available jobs, often low skilled simply for economic reasons. Below is a quote from one of my respondents (Tom, 42) about his experiences in searching for a job:

I have a PhD in migration studies and for one and a half years have tried to find a suitable job without success. Based on untenable reasons like “you do not fit the team” or “your Dutch is not good enough”. In an advertisement for the position of assistant lecturer in two Dutch universities, knowledge of Dutch is included as an advantage. In trying to get a job at a lower level, then it is, “you are overqualified”. Even when you seek for cleaning job or factory job, you are told that your Dutch is not good enough but what level of Dutch does one need to clean tables or arrange boxes? These are just excuses; there is something wrong with the mentality! It is very frustrating. The Netherlands is not making use of highly qualified immigrants living in her midst. There are other countries competing for these highly qualified immigrants and eventually the Netherlands will lose these immigrants to those countries (Tilburg, 4th Oct., 2011).

It is evident that within Dutch society, there are many policies and institutions in operation to guide immigrants into the Dutch labor market. Most of these programs and policies are directed at immigrants from the former Dutch colonies and former guest workers and their dependents. For example policy on Ethnic Minorities in the Public Sector (EMO). Its

instruments were targeted recruitment, the setting of target figures, monitoring and making public the ethnic composition of the public sector labor force, evaluation of selection procedures, information, and, when equally qualified, preferential hiring (Tesser, van Dugteren & Merens 1996: 127). This however, is problematic because the “more recent” immigrants face different contextual factors both politically and socio-economically which makes old programs and policies often not applicable to their circumstances. Especially problematic is fulfilling the conditions necessary to benefit from such policies, like citizenship. It is therefore necessary on an individual and even collective level to explore the issues involved and to generate information that will be useful to both Nigerian immigrants and Dutch institutions.

By focusing on a particular group of immigrants, that is, Nigerians, in-depth analysis can be carried out that focuses on the reality of their labor market situation. This research emphasizes the importance of agency of the immigrants and the effect this could have on their labor market outcome. What is the utility of pre-migration human capital and the effect of post-migration human capital? The findings of this research will hopefully start a lively debate within the migrant community and Dutch society. Before proceeding to the issues raised above, this thesis reviews the history of migration to the Netherlands in the context of major or old immigrant groups and the more recent ones which include Nigerians.

### **1.3 History of Migration in the Netherlands**

From 1590 to 1800 the estimated foreign-born population in the Netherlands was never less than 5% (Lucassen & Penninx, 1997). Among the immigrants were many Huguenots Protestants from France and Jews from Southern and Eastern Europe. In the 19th century the foreign-born population declined, reaching about 2% in 1880. From 1870 until just after the Second World War, there were more people leaving than entering the country, despite some ongoing immigration (Ersanilli, 2007). Postwar migration was dominated by immigrants from the (former) colonies and from guest worker recruitment countries. The independence of Suriname in 1975 led to an upsurge in the number of immigrants from that country. Another flow of migration was from the Caribbean Islands of the Netherlands' Antilles and Aruba following the precarious economic situation of the 1990s. However, like many other Western European countries, the Netherlands started to recruit guest workers in the 1960s, first from Southern Europe, and later from Yugoslavia, Turkey and Morocco. While majority of those from Southern Europe returned, workers from Turkey and Morocco did not return and after the recruitment stopped in 1974, guest workers from Turkey and Morocco prolonged their stay in the Netherlands and were later joined by their families. These four groups, Surinamese, Antilleans, Turks and Moroccans, therefore form the major immigrant groups and the more researched groups in the Netherlands (Ersanilli, 2007).

This history shows that flows of migrants to the Netherlands have been from different parts of the world, both the global south and north; countries with colonial history with the Netherlands like Suriname and Indonesia and others with very few or no ties at all with the Netherlands. Some have come through legal channels, others in an undocumented fashion; while some remain undocumented, some of these have acquired their permission to stay through one legal means or the other. The characteristics that define the immigrants are also varied. Some arrive with professional and technical skills; others are unqualified; while some came as highly qualified workers under government employment schemes. Some come individually without knowing anyone in the Netherlands; others join family or friends. Most come not speaking a word of Dutch. Whatever the situation, these are ‘the new faces’ of the

Netherlands or ‘newcomers’ and very much like the general population, they share the same human needs, the need to be productive members of the society; some of them are Sub-Saharan African immigrants.

Chelpi-den Hamer (2008) points to the relatively small size of sub-Saharan Africans compared to the four major groups, as one of the reasons why they are minimally researched in the Netherlands. In comparison to the bulk of literature on Turks, Antilleans, Surinamese and Moroccans, those on sub-Saharan Africans have been few and they have therefore received the least attention and remain marginal both in number of policies and policy considerations. As different nation states, their population figures are small but when put together as Africans, it is quite sizeable. Sub-Saharan Africans can be aggregated as a group because they are historically fairly homogenous. Adepoju (2005) described most African countries as being agglomerations of peoples arbitrarily merged by colonial map drawers that traversed ethnic lines, as are the Yoruba in Nigeria and Benin; Ewes in Togo and Ghana; Vais and Kroos in Liberia and Sierra Leone; Hausa-Fulani in Niger and Nigeria, and so on, thus concretizing this aggregation of states. For this thesis, sub-Saharan Africans are identified as a group and Nigeria is the case study. In my observation, they all are confronted with the same socio-economic conditions in the Netherlands.

Considering that as of 2011, there were an estimated 547,238 Sub-Saharan African immigrants (about 16% of the legally resident immigrants) in the Netherlands, it can no longer be considered as a small population. Chelpi-den Hamer (2008) gives other rationales for studying African immigrants in the Netherlands. Some of the explanations relevant to this study include the fact that a) They are fairly recent arrivals who came under stricter migration policies and therefore exhibit different integration (including in the labor market) patterns than migrants who came four decades ago, at a time when the legislation was much more flexible than today. b) They tend to leave the Netherlands after a period of time. Thus according to van Rijn, Zorlu and Baker (2004) more than 25% of Nigerians, 22% Ghanaians and 23% of Somalis leave the Netherlands after four years to seek better opportunities elsewhere. This makes the Netherlands a sort of stepping-stone country (Smith 2012,<sup>6</sup> in a private conversation) and is probably related to the difficulties they encounter in their efforts to integrate in the Dutch labor market. For this study, Nigerian immigrants as one of the immigrant groups from Sub-Saharan Africa are the case study.

## **1.4 Information about Nigeria pertaining to who migrates and why**

Nigeria, officially the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is a federal constitutional republic comprising thirty-six states and its Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The country is located in West Africa and shares land borders with the Republic of Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the north. Its coast in the south lies on the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean. With a population of 152 million, population mobility is a recurrent event both internally and internationally (Afolayan, Ikwuyatum and Abejide, 2008). With a relatively high growth rate, estimated to be 2.8% in 2006, a youthful population, with 43 per cent of its total population being under 15 years old, it is a large source of potential immigrants (PRB, 2010). The fact that migration is a selective phenomenon, especially in favor of the active and young, makes this relevant. The large porous nature of the borders of Nigeria which Adepoju (2005) describes as virtually uncontrolled, and in fact un-police-able

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<sup>6</sup> Lothar Smith is an assistant professor at Radboud University, Nijmegen and the supervisor of this research

by national governments, provides easy and attractive migration routes especially for the young to migrate, often through the Sahara desert.

Majority of migrants to the Netherlands are from the South of Nigeria, while migrants from the North tend to move to the Gulf and Arab states because of the similarity in religion (i.e. Islam). Despite the fact that it is an oil-rich country and one of the biggest oil producers in the world, more than half of its citizens still live in poverty. The gross national income per capita of Nigeria is only 640 dollars while 52% of its citizens are living on less than \$1.25 per day (BBC & Foreign & commonwealth office).

## **1.5 Contextualizing Nigerian migration to the Netherlands**

Documented history of migration in the territory that is now Nigeria dates back to four simultaneous slave trades in Africa between 1400 and 1900, the largest being the transatlantic in which 12 million slaves were exported from west, west-central, and eastern Africa to the European colonies in the Americas beginning in the 15th century. The three other slave trades — the trans-Saharan, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean — which began before the transatlantic one, involved another 6 million people. Estimates indicate that Nigeria lost about 2 million people during the 500-year period, out of which about 1.4 million slaves were shipped to the Americas (Dunn, 2008).

The arrival of the British in the mid-19th century provided a framework for large-scale migration as the British needed a large labor force for mines, plantations, and public administration (Adepoju, 1996). The resulting rural-rural migration moved people to work as migrant tenant farmers, farm labor, and/or migrant traders. In addition, migrant laborers from different parts of the country, especially from rural areas, moved into Nigeria's regional headquarters and administrative and market centers in search of trade and gainful employment; destination cities included Lagos, Kano, Zaria, Enugu, Ibadan, Sokoto, and Kaduna, among many others. Of particular importance to rural-urban migration was the creation of mining towns for coal and the linking of seaports in Lagos and Port Harcourt to rural areas via railways (Mberu, 2010).

On emigration, an estimated 6,500 Nigerians moved to the then Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Cotonou-Parakou in Dahomey (now Benin) to work on rail lines and in gold mines between 1900 and 1902. After the railway was completed, some of the migrants became traders, and many left for Côte d'Ivoire after World War I. According to Ghana's 1948 census, there were about 46,800 Nigerians, a number that later rose to approximately 100,000 in 1959 following Ghana's economic development and the country's vigorous Pan-African movement after independence. Though estimates vary depending on the source, Ghana's alien expulsion order of 1969 expelled about 140,000 Nigerians between December 1969 and early June 1970 (Mberu, 2010).

Flows from Nigeria to countries beyond the African region started on a large scale after independence in 1960. The emerging elites migrated to the United Kingdom and the United States for educational pursuits. The intention was that these students would return to offer their acquired skills for nation building and they did return. This flow of emigrants (for the purpose of skill acquisition) continued even after independence but with political tension and the stagnating economy that followed in the 1970s and 1980s, the stream of emigrants increased. Unlike previous emigrants, these Nigerians tended to stay abroad for longer periods after graduating, and some never returned. In addition to the poor economy, Nigerian-based professionals left because of the austerity processes of the Structural Adjustment Program

(SAP), which the government agreed to as a condition of loans from the International Monetary Fund in the mid-1980s. “Conditionality” for SAP (the policy strings that the Brenton Woods Institutions attach to SAP loans given to developing nations) included devaluing the national currency which led to wages for professional becoming lower and working conditions worsening (Nwagbara, 2011). As desperation in the country continued, many less-educated and the youth became a significant part of the emigration stream. By the early 2000s, an increasing number of Nigerians had migrated to countries such as Spain, Italy, Ireland Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. As at 2000, about 260,000 Nigerians were living within OECD countries (OECD, 2008:24) and according to the same report, more than 50% of them had tertiary education. Thus unlike the earlier migration flows from Nigeria, the present ones include both the skilled and unskilled. There is therefore an overlap of the two waves which makes the stream heterogeneous in nature and emphasizes the need for integration policies that is tailored to fit the different types of immigrant.

The Central Office of Statistics in the Netherlands gives a figure of 10,676 as number of documented Nigerians living in the Netherlands in 2011. This is made up of 5,889 (55.2%) and 4,787 (44.8%) first and second generation Nigerians respectively. Compared to a figure of 3,136 in 1996, the population has tripled in a space of 15 years. This population is made up of Nigerians from different ethnic groups, mostly from the southern part of Nigeria and of the Christian faith; The advantage of this faith is the ability it gives to “merge”, in my opinion, into Dutch society, creates a situation where they seem to “disappear” within the society and are therefore not often subjects of policy considerations. In the cities where they live, churches constitute major gathering points for Nigerian immigrants. This was a relevant factor in locating some of the respondents for this research.

Exact statistical figures about the spatial spread of Africans across Dutch cities are difficult to get because they are mostly grouped under “others” in the ‘Facts and Figures’ section. However their spread across the Netherlands relates to their reasons for migrating, for example while asylum seekers and refugees are officially dispatched across the nation, economic migrants and those for family formation tend to settle in the Randstad where their partners already live and where they expect to have better job opportunities.

## **1.6 Structure of the thesis**

Having asked the preceding central and sub-questions, this research continues in chapter two by reviewing the concepts of human capital and attribution, the process of deskilling, and the effect of migration on the labor market participation of immigrants. Chapter three highlights the activities of Nigerians in various sectors of the Dutch labor market and reviews reasons for the relatively poor labor market outcome of African immigrants with special focus on Nigerians. Statistical figures are presented to show the large population of Africans in the Netherlands. In chapter four, research methods and methodology are presented, while chapter five presents the empirical findings of the research. Chapter six discusses the research findings and makes some recommendations.

## Chapter 2

# Theoretical Framework

## 2.1 Introduction

Many African intellectuals and professionals are becoming increasingly mobile due to economic and political failures in their countries. Their major destinations are the developed world including the Netherlands. On arrival in the West, many of these immigrants are underemployed, doing low-skilled jobs even though they “carry” with them a large stock of human capital which can contribute to the development of home and host countries. These are some of the best educated and skilled citizens of their countries. Therefore, this research focuses on the human capital of African immigrants in the Netherlands and the extent of its utilization for employment purposes.

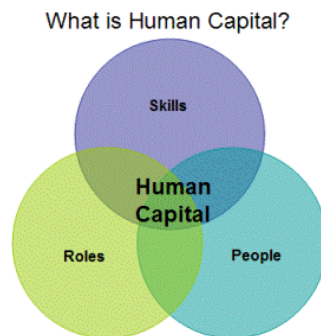
In this chapter, the focus is on some concepts used for the explanation of the labor market situation of Nigerian immigrants. Following from the central question, the main theme is the human capital of immigrants (as measured by their educational qualifications) and employability. This raises issues such as level of qualification, country of acquisition and the evaluation and utilization of these qualifications within Dutch institutions. These issues are reviewed using the relevant theoretical concepts

The concept of human capital is discussed. In section 2.2, this concept is used to explain the relationship between educational qualifications (pre-and post-migration) and employment. The meaning and various dimensions of underemployment, its causes and consequences are explored. The perception of the immigrant about his labor market outcome is given attention and his attribution for his labor market situation leads to a highlight of the concept of attribution. I examine if the two concepts compliment or clash with each other. Deskilling of immigrants during migration also affects the level of competence of immigrants considering their long period of inactivity. This chapter ends with a look at migration, integration and development and how these concepts are intertwined in relation to the immigrant.

## 2.2 Concept of human capital and employment

For this research, the concept of human capital is considered useful in exploring workers' vulnerability to underemployment as a consequence of level of their qualifications. This is because skill is often measured by level of educational qualification of a job seeker which tends to determine the entry point in the labor market. Schultz (1962) emphasized the importance of qualifications and experience by stating that: “By investing in their human capital, people can enlarge the range of choices available to them”. This belabors the fact that acquisition of human capital should be the choice of the individual concerned.

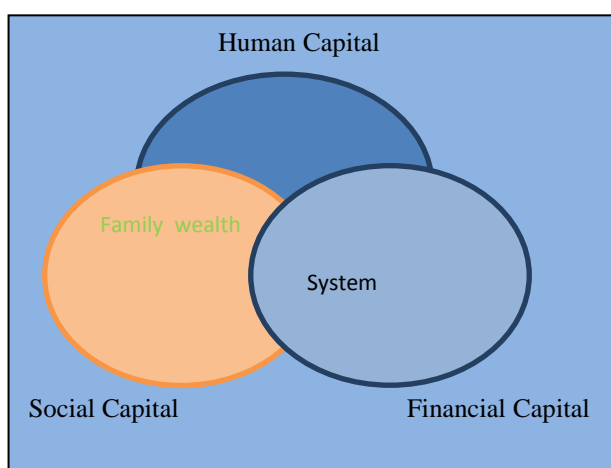




*Fig 2.1 Defining human capital*  
*Source: Google images 2012<sup>7</sup>*

Human capital refers to the stock of competences, knowledge and personality attributes embodied in the ability to perform labor so as to produce economic value. Therefore, the rational for an increase in income, within the human capital model is that education, if properly conceived and imparted, must increase the marginal productivity of labor. Human capital is conceptualized with the individual as the unit of analysis. That is, each individual, acting in his/her own self-interest invests in his/her education. As a result, their human capital is enhanced and the total outcome of all individuals acting in this manner is that society as a whole is made better off materially and a better workforce emerges with multiplier effects and positive spill-over benefits.

These individuals with enhanced human capital are better positioned for highly skilled jobs through which economic benefits is provided. Some of these benefits according to Collett and Zuleeg (2008) are realized through payment of high taxes and spending of their income thereby effectively contributing to their host economy. They are also less likely to use social security systems. Furthermore, the skills that immigrants bring with them and those they acquire through enhancement of their human capital are capable of contributing to future growth, whether through innovation and research or entrepreneurship and building businesses in their host society. Highly skilled migrants raise fewer concerns about the impact on native workers because candidates from this pool are less likely to have the required skills and abilities to fill the positions of the highly skilled.



*Figure 2.2 Linking human, social and financial capital*  
*Source: Google images 2012<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.com/RankImages.aspx?topicid=66471>

Human capital advocates the treatment of labor as a factor of production in which one can invest just as one would in physical or natural capital (Schultz, 1962). The consequence of this is that one can also experience depreciation in human capital through ill health and the erosion or obsolescence of skills, a condition, which can be mitigated through skills maintenance or lifelong learning, retraining and maintaining good health. There is a positive relationship between levels of investment in human capital and wages, income and occupational mobility and labor force participation rates. Mincer (1993) argued that at the individual level it would seem that there are economic benefits to be derived from better schooling, training, experience and mobility in the labor market. An argument which Bartel and Lichtenberg (1991) agree with additional explanation that the more education individuals acquire, the better they are able to absorb new information, acquire new skills, and familiarize themselves with new technologies. Mincer (1993: 132) summarizes that despite other factors, various studies have shown that “differences in earning levels among individuals and the differences in human capital endowment are invariably the most significant factor in explaining variability in earnings.” By increasing their human capital therefore, workers enhance the productivity of their labor and of the other capital they use at work and invariably their earning levels. The choice and the ability to enhance one’s human capital is employed by this thesis as the theoretical reason why the dynamics of underemployment unfold as they do for immigrants.

An important scenario in the case of immigrants is that the human capital acquired in their country of origin is usually de-valued in their destination country because of its hypothetical lower quality (see Friedberg, 2000; Chiswick, 1978). In the explanation of Caponi (2006) and Zeng and Zie (2004) however, the country-specific nature of human capital means that not all the capital (educational qualifications, experiences and other abilities) accumulated in the origin country can be used by immigrants to generate earnings in the destination country. Caponi (2006) asserts that there is an inverse relationship between the value of human capital (in host country) and the location of acquisition (usually from origin country) and how this may lead to underemployment, economic dependence and feelings of reduced self-worth. Underemployment is one result of the undervaluation of immigrants’ qualifications and experience; a further insight into this topic, its various dimensions and consequences follows.

### **2.2.1 The meaning and dimensions of underemployment**

Underemployment is, in general, defined as an inferior, lesser, or lower quality type of employment. Commonly, underemployment is defined relative to some standard for example, relative to the employment experiences of others with the same education or work history or relative to the person's own past education or work history. Economists and sociologists have defined underemployment in terms of reduced wages, erratic employment or in terms of employment mismatched with education and training, or being over-educated for one’s job (Zvonkovic, 1988; Rosen, 1987; Tipps and Gordon, 1985). Of importance are economic and emotional problems of those who are underemployed in jobs requiring significantly less education and work experience than they possess, often in positions offering much lower wages, fewer benefits, fewer working hours, and less job security than in their last jobs (Newman, 1988).

Feldman (1996) gives five dimensions of underemployment, these are:

- Person possesses more formal education than the job requires.
- Person involuntarily employed in field outside area of formal education.

- Person possesses higher-level work skills and more extensive work experience than the job requires.
- Person involuntarily engaged in part-time, temporary, or intermittent employment. While this may have been historically true, many workers are voluntarily part-time or temporary workers especially in the field of nursing, consulting and management. Feldman (1996) thus suggests that underemployment occurs with intermittent employment only when individuals want full-time, permanent jobs and cannot find them.
- Person earning wages 20% or less than in the previous job (For new graduates, wages 20% or less than average of graduating cohort in same major or occupational track).

10 out of the 18 respondents in this research are underemployed; 80% of them have more formal education and possess higher level work skills and experiences than the job requires albeit the education, skills and experiences were acquired from country of origin.

There are several aspects of this conceptualization of underemployment which should be noted. In all dimensions, underemployment is viewed as some type of discrepancy or deviation. In the first instance, the standard of comparison is the person's past achievements; second is the work and educational histories of coworkers; and the third standard of comparison is the person's own expectations and desires. In each case, however, underemployment is conceptualized as a discrepancy between "satisfactory employment" (Kaufman, 1982) and current employment.

In relation to the respondents in this research, all have been underemployed at various times and therefore have their perception of the concept. Even though a clear cut division seems simplistic, the standard of comparison for majority (55%) of the immigrants is their professional capacity before migrating. For example, one of the immigrants was a practicing medical doctor before migrating but had to do low-skilled jobs initially on arrival in the Netherlands. Another 28% perceive underemployment from the point of view of inability to meet pre-migration expectations and plans. The remaining 17% (who also have skilled jobs) explicitly measure underemployment in comparison to the work and educational achievements of their Dutch colleagues. These immigrants already work at the level of project leaders but feel that they should be at the level of directors since those who occupy those positions are not better qualified than them. In general, there are elements of all three dimensions in the perception of the concept by the respondents.

### **2.2.2 Consequences of underemployment**

Some of the consequences of underemployment are, among others, poorer job attitudes. For example, Burris (1983) established a negative link between underemployment and job satisfaction, job involvement, relationships with coworkers, future job aspirations, and feelings of control. It has also been consistently linked to lower levels of psychological well-being and general mental health (Feather & O'Brien, 1986b; Winefield & Tiggemann, 1989b). Furthermore, difficulties in finding satisfactory employment and prolonged underemployment may lead to "learned helplessness" (Seligman, 1975), which results in lower self-esteem, increased depression, and decreased feelings of control. Underemployment may also be associated with lower investment in and more negative attitudes towards one's career (Feldman, 1996).

Politically, because the majority of underemployed immigrants are minorities, underemployment could increase the level of prejudice and intergroup conflict (Reitz, 2005). For example, if a prospective employer fails to recognize an individual's foreign credentials, the individual might believe that he/she was a target of discrimination, a feeling that could foster intergroup tension. Research also suggests that the psychological and health consequences associated with underemployment can spill over to the underemployed individual's family members (Dean & Wilson, 2009).

The prevalent responses among my respondents who are currently under-employed include feelings of lower self-esteem, helplessness and depression. Feeling of being trapped and inability to get out of the trap. It also seems to reduce interest in building relationships with coworkers and in integration in general. In a seemingly contradictory view, 50% of the underemployed respondents continue to search for opportunities to invest in building better careers.

## **2.3 The concept of attribution**

In operationalizing attribution, underemployment is first defined in terms of unstable employment and being over-qualified for one's job (Zvonkovic, 1988); then self-assessment is used to measure if the immigrant feels underemployed and finally the reason for the state of underemployment. Depending on the causality, the enhancement (or not) of human capital becomes relevant. Borgen, Amundson & Harder (1988) have found that more highly educated workers made the attribution that structural labor market conditions were responsible for their underemployment, and hence were more hopeful about their abilities to locate better jobs in the not too distant future. In contrast, poorer educated workers made internal attributions about the reasons for their underemployment and expressed greater despair about exiting the culture of poverty.

In the context of underemployment therefore, the attribution theory may be useful in helping us understand the different types of attributions underemployed workers make about their circumstances, and subsequently, why they react and cope as they do (Feldman, 1996). For example, individuals who attribute their underemployment to economic conditions or their demographic characteristics may perceive their underemployment as being externally caused and irreversible; as a result, they may blame themselves less for their predicament but also engage in fewer coping behaviors to find satisfactory employment. In contrast, individuals who attribute their underemployment to the characteristics of their jobs or their own job search strategies may take more personal responsibility for their circumstances and invest more energy in finding a reasonable exit. The causal attributions that people make are important because, in addition to helping them make sense of their reality, they influence emotions and behavior. Indeed, research supports the association between causal attributions and emotions (see Weiner 1986).

To further theorize underemployment, Burris (1983) theorized that how underemployed individuals react and cope with their predicaments is influenced by the attributions those individuals make about the reasons for their underemployment. Concerning the concept of attribution, the basic premise is that people constantly strive to understand the world around them by making causal attributions about events and circumstances, including their successes and failures (Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest & Rosenbaum 1971). There are three dimensions to these causes according to Weiner, (2010); namely *locus* which includes internal (factors within the person or external (factors within the environment); *stability*, that is

whether the cause is stable or unstable and thirdly *controllability* which explains whether the cause is subject to volitional control or it is fixed and therefore uncontrollable.

Of interest to this study is the issue of controllability. Research suggests that attributing failure to uncontrollable causes may be associated with dissatisfaction with performance. In a laboratory study in which participants were asked to imagine how a student would feel after failing an exam, attributing failure to uncontrollable causes was associated with greater perceived dissatisfaction with performance (Meyer, 1980). In sum, past research has found that, when it comes to making attributions for situations or circumstances that can be perceived as failures (e.g., feeling underemployed), controllable (vs. uncontrollable) attributions are associated with positive effects: controllable attributions for failure are associated with lower perceived dissatisfaction with failure and positive behavior change. Therefore, how people socially construct their reality to explain why underemployment occurred may be a major determinant of whether they find a constructive exit out or not.

### **2.3.1 The clash of human capital and attribution concepts**

It is relevant to explain the dynamics of these two concepts in a longitudinal time frame. Brain waste is not, or at least should not, be an event that is static. Based on attribution, the period of time during which the brain is “wasted” is highly influenced by the perception of the concerned individual. For those who interpret their situation as temporary and see the possibility of improvement for a better outcome, retraining to enhance their human capital is a foreseeable option. Findings by Education Action International’s Report Resource (2004)<sup>8</sup> support this assertion. They found that migrants generally agree that it is necessary to adapt or upgrade their knowledge and skills to the working standards and culture in the receiving society. There is therefore a time span between conceptualization and achievement of skill acquisition during which an individual remains underemployed.

In the particular case of Nigerian immigrants, while 50% of the underemployed attribute their labor market situation to controllable factors and are working to improve their position, the other half feel the situation is beyond their control, are doing little to enhance their capital and stay underemployed. For example, the latter group perceives the problem of Dutch proficiency as insurmountable and the cost of enhancing their human capital as unaffordable, they therefore continue in the circle of underemployment. As already stated, enhancing one’s human capital is usually for a period of time, a period during which the immigrant remains underemployed, i.e. the brain waste is expected to end with the acquisition of host-country specific skills which enhances the possibility to get high skilled, better paying jobs. Often immigrants use income from the low-paying jobs to finance the acquisition of new skills in the host country. Of the 18 Nigerians interviewed, seven have completed various academic studies while one is currently in school; Immigrants have to combine studying with working in order to finance the studies. About 75% paid their tuition through this means with additional support from their (equally) working partners.

Insufficient financial capacity is one of the reasons that a high percentage of immigrants, about 50% judging from this research, remain underemployed with no positive behavioral change. They attribute their labor market situation to their environment and feel powerless to seek for solutions as independent actors. They therefore continue in their low-cadre, low-

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<sup>8</sup> See Education Action International’s Report Resource Project – Refugees’ Contribution to Europe, February 2004.

paying jobs with little security and temporary contracts; jobs which are quickly lost (especially in times of economic crises). The need for government support in terms of social welfare often becomes a possibility. This high percentage of immigrants on social benefits is an on-going public debate especially in the face of government cut-backs due to the budget deficits (Zorlu, 2011). In this research, about 60% of those who attribute their underemployment to uncontrollable causes are social welfare recipients.

## 2.4 Deskillling in the process of migration

The basic unit of analysis for representing individual acting, thinking and feeling is the concept of *skill*. A skill refers to an individual's capacity to control elements of behavior, thinking, and feeling within specified contexts and within particular task domains and refers to the organization of action that an individual can bring under his/her own control within a given context and is therefore a property of an individual in a social context. Even though qualifications are central to defining skill levels, experiences and other social abilities play very important roles. While all countries see tertiary education as key, European countries differ greatly as to how and which qualifications are recognized. However, given the importance employers place on university degrees and professional accreditations, it is not surprising that governments also rate them highly. Thus, while one country might recognize a particular engineering qualification from Morocco, another might not. It is important therefore to re-emphasize the importance of adequate recognition and use of the skills of migrants at points of destination early in the migration process.

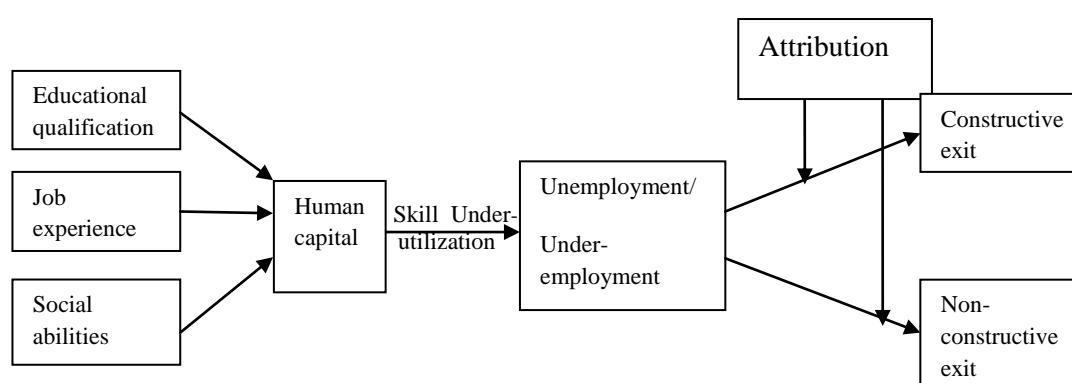


Figure 2.3 Linkage between skills and attribution.

Viewed in the context of deskilling, Zorlu (2011) referring to previous studies suggest that because foreign education and experience have little value for new immigrants in the beginning, they usually start with low qualified jobs. This initial poor starting position can generate skill depreciation or deskilling if immigrants should keep the low skilled jobs for long periods. With increased duration of residence however, they are expected to improve their position through correct attitude and human capital enhancement. Improvement of labor market position requires a steady adjustment to the demands of the host country labor markets for example proficiency in the language and acquisition of other host country specific capital, etc. Zorlu (2011) further notes that the efficiency of obtaining these capital strongly decreases with the duration of residence. This is due to factors like age which affects learning ability, delayed gratification. Therefore, policies designed to provide immigrants upon arrival with home country specific capital are expected to reduce level of deskilling.

In conclusion, underemployment leads to de-skilling and overall dissatisfaction of immigrants with their employment situation as well as having an adverse impact on local economies by under-utilization of available skills (Glossop and Shaheen 2009; Schneider and Holman 2010, p.18). Previous studies suggest that this loss to local economies is high and in the current economic climate, finding ways to avoid such a waste of human talent and resources, deserve close attention. The challenge with migrant communities of ensuring that their pre-existing qualifications are acknowledged, built-on and developed is a problem that was the focus of a study by Mackenzie and Forde (2007), who point to the mismatch in terms of the work experience of migrants in relation to their countries of origin and the UK and this is also the focus of this research in relation to the Netherlands. Are the skills possessed by migrants economically empowering them so that they are independent of the state welfare system and thus become productive members of their host society? Or are they “deskilled” as demonstrated by the UK study? When immigrants are able to participate at commensurate skill levels, they are more willing and able to contribute socially and economically to their host societies. The labor market participation of immigrants is therefore seen as one of the major determinants of the extent of their participation in the integration process. The question here is what is the relationship between labor market participation and immigrant integration or are they both parts of the same process?

## **2.5 Integration and Employment**

The labor market integration of immigrants is an issue that has been high on the policy agenda in the Netherlands for almost three decades. The primary focus of current integration policy, particularly for recent arrivals, is essentially on language skills and not on labor market access. There is, however, evidence that employment levels for immigrants could be significantly raised if integration efforts were targeted at supporting *early* labor market entry. Considering that labor market outcomes for immigrants in the Netherlands have been well below those of the native-born, and less favorable than in other OECD countries, for both genders (OECD, 2008), it is important to pursue policies that support their easy labor market access.

A brief look at the labor market policies of the Netherlands shows that Affirmative Action type policies have played an important role until recently. In 1990, an agreement on “more work for minorities” was reached between employers and trade unions, with government participation, to lower unemployment of immigrants. There was another policy, a 1994 Act targeted at immigrants and their children called “Promotion of proportional labor market opportunities for foreigners”. This was replaced by the “Wet Samen” of 1998 which obliged employers to monitor their employees’ immigration background on a yearly basis to ensure proportional representation. Major complaint by employers was the administrative costs involved and the effectiveness of the Act in terms of improving the labor market situation of immigrants. This according to employers is because there were too few immigrants who needed employment and so there was a very low rate of participation. In 2004, policies for specific groups were abandoned and employment problems were handled through general policies which often had indirect targeting as migrants and their children still form a large part of this group (OECD, 2008). For the period 2007-2011, government has formulated broad-based labor market participation as a prime objective, with the target of bringing an additional 200,000 unemployed people (a group in which immigrants are over-represented) into employment.

This report (of the OECD) confirms that the Netherlands is a country with a relatively developed and long standing integration infrastructure and it appears that many of these efforts have been beneficial. Unfortunately, the improvement in the integration process has not been sustained during the more recent period, especially since around 2002. Following an all-time peak in immigration in 2001, essentially driven by asylum seeking, the election campaign was focused around immigration and integration policy. A negative public discourse was reinforced by the murder of the Dutch filmmaker van Gogh in 2004.



Figure 2.4 Cartoon depicting reaction to immigrant integration  
Source Google images 2012<sup>9</sup>

In parallel, a range of targeted policies had ended in 2003, and increasing emphasis was placed on immigrants' obligation to integrate (or assimilate as shown in fig 2.4) with a focus on civic integration, rather than employment. In addition, the labor market situation worsened in 2003 and 2004. It would be desirable to redesign the civic integration program so that participation in it serves to promote labor market integration, and not pose an obstacle on it, as it can lead to "lock-in" effects (*i.e.* immigrants having no time to look for jobs while participating in the course or preparing for the tests). According to the report of OECD (2008), there is evidence that employment levels for immigrants could be significantly raised if integration efforts were targeted at supporting *early* labor market entry. There is therefore need to create incentives for language course providers to introduce vocational elements in their language training.

First steps in that direction are now being taken by the introduction of so-called "dual trajectories" which combine language training with labor market integration programs (OECD, 2008). In many cases, the Regional Education Centers (ROC) organizes these dual trajectories, combining language training and labor-market orientation. To promote this combination, part-time (language training) courses are offered to newcomers who are employed but are still obliged to follow the integration course. More specific integration programs offer language and vocational training for employees in the company or institution where they work. For example, TPG Post (Post Office Company) worked in close cooperation with the municipality of Rotterdam and one of the two ROCs to provide for integrated trajectories for immigrants working in the organization. The project was meant for newly arrived immigrants, and provided an integration course including language and vocational training, with the prospect of a work agreement on a permanent base. Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM) in Amsterdam has also followed the same program for settled immigrants. Again, this

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.google.nl/imgres?>



project resulted from a contract between the company, the municipality and a course supplier; both projects have been quite successful (ICMPD, 2005).

There are also in other OECD countries, a range of complementary services in place to overcome migrant-specific employment obstacles. These include mentoring programs, company fairs, and “trial traineeships”. While such measures also exist in the Netherlands, their current scale and scope is relatively limited. With respect to educational qualification, this report (of OECD, 2008) argues that labor market integration is relatively favorable in international comparison for immigrants with high education than low-educated immigrants whom the report describes as “particularly difficult to integrate”. The report states that procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications appear to be relatively developed and transparent compared to other OECD countries and the incidence of “over-qualification” is not higher than elsewhere. It however finds that in comparison to this formal recognition, the more general accreditation of prior learning (APL) may be more beneficial for immigrants as this helps to overcome information asymmetries which are more pronounced in their case. Since the APL is limited and not targeted at immigrants a broader based APL should be considered.

This OECD report focused only on guest worker immigrants from Turkey and Morocco, immigrants from former Dutch colonies of Suriname, Antilles and Aruba and humanitarian migrants from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. The applicability of the results of the findings of this report to the newcomers which is a more heterogeneous group in terms of human capital is questionable and makes the case for the creation of a suitable standard of accreditation of their prior professional experiences.

## **2.6 Migration and development**

In current discourse, migration is being linked to development in sending countries through remittances. Sending countries, while attempting to prevent ‘brain- drain’, increasingly try to encourage particular forms of migration because the associated remittances and a potential ‘brain gain’ through a counter movement of skills and knowledge are supposed to be beneficial to national development. In the case of Nigeria, until recently, there was no remittance-led development strategy. However a study by de Haas (2006) established that a certain level of (re) appreciation of the potentially positive contributions of international migration and remittances to national development is being shown by the Nigerian government.

This interest in the potential contribution of the Diaspora to national development is being demonstrated through some initiatives instituted by the Nigerian government. For example, the NNVS (Nigeria National Volunteer Services) an agency established to reinforce bonds with the Nigerian Diaspora. NNVS mobilizes Nigerian professionals living abroad for capacity building, through encouraging temporary visits, technical missions and sabbaticals to Nigerian institutions or through giving summer courses. To contribute to development through such initiatives, an immigrant should be professionally and financially able. That is, exploited and marginalized migrants are unlikely and less able to contribute to the development of their countries of origin. There is therefore need for the immigrants to first be productively engaged in their host society, before both the receiving and sending governments can generate any positive result in the linkage between immigrants and the development of their origin countries. The next section proffers one explanation for the positioning of immigrants at the bottom of the labor ladder in advanced economies.

### **2.6.1 Why immigrants are often at the bottom of the labor market**

Several studies have shown the prevalence of immigrants at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy and this is explained with the *segmented labor market theory*. This theory argues that international migration stems from the intrinsic labor demands of modern industrial societies thus linking migration to the structural requirements of modern industrial economies (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino & Taylor 2005).

Priore (1979) explains that international migration is caused by a permanent demand for immigrant labor that is inherent to the economic structure of developed nations. According to Priore (1979), one of the basic characteristics of this theory is structural inflation. That is, to attract workers for unskilled jobs at the bottom of an occupational hierarchy, employers cannot simply raise wages. Raising wages at the bottom would upset socially defined relationships between status and remuneration and may therefore create pressure for wage increase at other hierarchical levels. Consequently, employers seek easier and cheaper solutions such as the employment of migrant workers who will accept low wages. Even highly skilled migrants accept these low wages and are therefore under-employed.

Another characteristic of this theory is hierarchical constraints on motivation. Since bottom level jobs cannot be eliminated, employers seek workers who view these jobs simply as a means to an end, and for whom employment is reduced solely to income; with no implications for status or prestige. Immigrants seem to satisfy this need.

A third characteristic identified by Massey et al., (2005) is the difference in living standards between developed and developing societies. These authors argued that even low wages abroad appear to be generous by the standards of the home community and the immigrant may identify himself/herself more with his/her home society where foreign labor and the resulting remittances are very prestigious.

The dual nature of the labor market in advanced industrial economies (into capital-intensive primary sector and labor intensive secondary sector) is also an important reason why immigrants fit low level jobs. While jobs in the primary sector require expensive firm specific human capital, those in the secondary sector offer unstable and unskilled jobs which require little qualification.

The distribution of workers into primary and secondary jobs is not random. The demography of the natives who took these secondary jobs in the past was spread among women, teenagers and rural-to urban migrants (Massey et al., 1994). However Kubursi (2005) argues that the insecure, low paying, hazardous and unpleasant nature of these jobs (in the secondary sector) make host-country nationals “shun” them which makes immigrants more desirable and sought-after to take them up. Kubursi (2005) also points to immigration policies of developed nations as substantiating segmented labor markets for example whether migrants are positively or negatively selected for human capital can influence the labor market sector where they fit. The dual nature of markets as explained by the segmented theory could be an indication of the inequalities in employment levels and wages/income between immigrants and natives.

## 2.7 Summary

In this chapter, some concepts relevant to the issue of human capital of African immigrants have been outlined. Human capital concept espouses the possibility of returns when an individual invests in enhancing his own skill level. This return is measured in terms of employment commensurate with the skill level which in turn results in appropriate wages and income.

Attribution explained the effect of immigrants' perception of their situation on their labor market outcome while deskilling highlighted the effect of late entry of immigrants into the labor market in the host country. Underemployment has different dimensions and the way the underemployed perceives his situation depends on whether he compares his present situation to his past achievements, his co-worker or his/her personal expectations or desires. On a theoretical level, the segmentation of markets in industrial economies explains how immigrants who migrate in search of "better lives" end up at the bottom of the labor ladder in their host society. Based on this theory, this is often the position where natives do not want to work and are therefore frequently populated by immigrants. Even though the wages are low, immigrants still view these wages as useful and even prestigious when related to their origin country situation. These concepts will be useful in explaining the empirical data resulting from this research in the empirical chapter.

Chapter three discusses the participation of Nigerian immigrants in the Dutch labor market.

# The labor market situation of Nigerians

## 3.1 Reviewing the labor market participation of African immigrants

Nigerian immigrants have been introduced as a case to study the labor market situation of African immigrants in general. As a backdrop to the empirical data, this chapter reviews literature on the situation of African immigrants in host country labor markets and some of the reasons for this state of affairs. It then goes further to explore the specific situation of Nigerian immigrants in the Dutch labor market.

It is well documented that (African) immigrants in host countries in the west have dramatically low labor market participation and high unemployment rates compared to native citizens (Zorlu & Hartog, 2008; van Heelsum, 2006). Several reasons have been given for these inequalities; some of the reasons are discussed below.

Firstly, there is a lot of research showing that the country from which an immigrant's education and labor market experience is acquired matters, leading to the suggestion that the migrant's human capital may not be fully valued in the host country (Akresh 2007). As Dell'Aringa & Pagani (2009) established, employers value schooling obtained abroad less than domestic schooling thus, for a given job, they require higher education levels from immigrants than from native workers. This may be due either to discrimination or to a school of thought that believes that human capital acquired outside the host country could provide less country-specific skills, which boost productivity. This often leads to the erroneous conclusion that this foreign human capital is inferior. Or it may be due simply to what is termed imperfect transferability. In a sense, the national origin of migrants' education and experience may be an important determinant of their labor market performance. The respondents spoken to did not agree that qualifications from Nigeria are of inferior quality; rather they see it as different educational systems. This requires an understanding of the concept of Nigerian educational system on the part of Dutch employers. Albeit, Mike (47) a computer engineer believes that as an immigrant, it is more important that you enhance your human capital post-migration, be proficient at your chosen profession, stay updated about new developments and stay professionally at par with your Dutch colleagues.

Secondly, knowledge of the host country language or language proficiency. This is mostly reflected in or measured by the speaking ability of the individual concerned. In fact language proficiency is defined as the ability to speak, read and write a language in a businesslike manner (Houghton and Proscio, 2001). African immigrants, due to several reasons including advanced age at migration (see Jasso and Rosenzweig, 1990), limited exposure to the Dutch language and society (Esser, 2006a&b) and the different language groups to which Dutch and most African languages belong, hardly acquire that ability to "speak Dutch in a businesslike manner". They are therefore unable to meet the level of spoken Dutch required by employers (especially in comparison to native speakers).

An interesting observation in the course of my interviews is that for certain high skilled jobs, mastery of Dutch language may not be the most important criterion and the relevance of the language varies between professions. Examples are jobs in the international communication technology (ICT) sector; the international nature of these jobs not only creates the opportunity

to get jobs with international conglomerates, more often English is the language of communication. Interestingly though, even for unskilled jobs, working knowledge of Dutch language is often a requirement. Employers claim that this is necessary to enable employees communicate effectively with each other since they work together as teams and also to understand and follow work instructions on the work floor.

It should be stressed that lack of knowledge of the host language, although it might be (one of) the most important barrier(s), is not the only barrier. A good example to illustrate this is provided in a study done in Germany. It showed that the language problem affected the first generation of migrants but the fact that the second generation possessed very good language skills, did not improve their labor market performance (Buiskool, Broek, van Lakerveld, Zarifis & Osborne 2010).

In general, Nigerians understand the necessity for proficiency in Dutch language and some are willing to learn but fear that the accent of Nigerian native languages is an obstacle. Especially for high skilled jobs, employers often require flawless spoken Dutch. The fact that English is the medium of communication in Nigeria also pushes highly skilled Nigerian immigrants to apply for work in international companies where English is commonly one of the working languages. Leo (32) is an accountant working with an international firm in Amsterdam who told me that on his floor there are about 23 workers and only 3 are Dutch the rest are foreigners so English is the language of communication. Probably one of the explanations for the concentration of immigrants in major cities like Amsterdam where these international business organizations are often located.

A third explanation is soft skills, a part of the so called host-country specific skills that immigrants need to possess, skills that Capelli (1995) identified as the most important hiring criterion for entry level jobs both in their own right and in facilitating the learning and exercise of hard skills. These are described by Collett and Zuleeg (2008) as the non-technical skills, abilities, and traits that workers need to function in a specific employment environment. They include interpersonal skills, the ability to create networks and work in teams, problem solving, research and analytical skills, time management and communication, and the ability to learn and adapt. As part of host-country specific skills, immigrants often need to also acquire knowledge of working in high-tech environments with unfamiliar equipments.

While technical skills and professional qualifications are important, translating proficiency into economic output requires soft skills. Success is essentially driven entirely by soft skills, despite attempts to create “hard” qualifications to capture them. One obvious set-back according to Collett and Zuleeg (2008) is that there is no agreed-upon way of measuring or certifying proficiency in them, which makes its assessment subjective. Most companies therefore rely on proxy measure and personalized assessment. One-on-one interview, the most practical method of selection poses an ethical dilemma; First can potential immigrants be denied because of a perceived lack of interpersonal skills or because they failed to impress during an interview? Such a system would lack transparency and remain vulnerable to charges of discrimination. Secondly, soft skills are country specific and can even sometimes be job specific which means that because immigrants have different soft skills from their origin country, they have to acquire destination country specific skills. According to one of the respondents, it is not difficult for a highly skilled individual to learn new skills but since it can only be acquired through practice, the immigrant needs the opportunity of the work place to learn.

Finally, the social capital that immigrants possess also influences their level of participation in the host-country labor market. Kanas, Chiswick, v.d. Lippe & van Tubergen (2011) working with male immigrants from the German Socio-Economic Panel, found evidence that immigrants who had a German partner and who volunteered during the previous year have marginally higher occupational status than do those who were single and who did not participate in volunteering. They found positive effects of social contacts with native Germans on immigrant occupational status and, in particular, significant increase on annual income. Kanas et al (2011), suggest that the benefits from contact with native Germans that immigrants enjoy may be due to the information and influence natives provide.

However, social contacts with co-ethnics were also found to be beneficial especially for recent migrants. As previous literature also suggests, social contacts with co-ethnics are most critical for immigrants upon arrival to the host-country, when they lack host-country language skills and credentials (Sanders, Nee & Sernau, 2002). Nevertheless, the building of wider social contacts becomes more important with increase in time spent in the host-country, when immigrants need better and more resourceful contact with co-ethnics and natives (Hagan 1998). What then is the job situation of Nigerians in the Netherlands? This is the subject of the next section.

### 3.2 Nigerians in the Dutch labor market

A high percentage of Nigerians migrate to the Netherlands for economic reasons, to study or family reunion/formation rather than asylum purposes (see table 1). In fact, Nigerians were recorded as asylum seekers for the first time in 1987 and in 1990 were just 5% of total asylum seekers in the Netherlands (Doornhein and Dijkhof, 1995), this has reduced further to 2% in the following years. They are also highly educated with nearly 95% having secondary education while more than 70% of them have university or polytechnic (equivalent to Dutch “hogeschool”) education. This is probably because the first nine years (primary education) is free and is compulsory till age 15 (junior secondary).

*Table 3.1 Migration motives of Nigerians between 1995 and 2003*

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Work	20	44	56	53	66	68	59	68	87
Studies	8	21	38	46	44	33	47	37	39
Family reunion	30	78	48	64	87	35	37	43	45
Family member e.g. child, parent, etc.	10	46	67	37	32	42	50	64	23
Family formation	105	202	249	292	138	110	136	161	171
Asylum	8	21	38	46	44	33	47	37	39
Others	2	6	20	22	24	14	20	24	19
Total	197	443	529	562	450	390	421	488	514

*Source: CBS (2005) adapted from central register of foreigners (absolute numbers)*

Those who come as economic migrants and for family re-unification tend to seek employment immediately on arrival and according to van Rijn et al., (2004), Nigerians have the highest labor market participation rates second only to the Ghanaians even though these are often low-level jobs. One main reason for this early labor market entry is the tradition of communal

responsibility which makes it imperative to take care of family members back “home” through remittances.

Findings from the research of van Heelsum (2006) shows that a considerable number of Nigerians are also entrepreneurs with their own small businesses. They are often involved in import/export businesses, or owners of cyber cafes, restaurants, shops, etc. While some thrive in the Dutch business terrain, for others the complex business regulations and inaccessibility of institutional financial support constitute major set-backs. In spite of the hurdles, Nigerian immigrants can be found working in various sectors of the Dutch labor market for example as I.T. specialists, nurses, doctors, entertainers, entrepreneurs, cleaners, care workers, etc. The range of professions in which Nigerians are involved is further articulated in the empirical chapter.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Even though Nigerians in the Netherlands are employed at high levels in various spheres in the Netherlands, the larger majority still work at the lowest stratum of the Dutch labor market. This chapter sets the stage for the results of this research. It catalogs the often stated reasons for the relatively poor performance of immigrants in host labor markets. Some of the explanations include effect of foreign nature of immigrants’ qualifications and experiences, socio/cultural differences such as language and the so-called host country specific skills. The social capital that an immigrant is able to build also plays a major role in their ability to integrate in host labor markets.

Since majority of Nigerians in the Netherlands migrated for family re-union and economic reasons, getting adequate jobs is often an immediate priority on arrival. Inability to achieve this objective often leaves Nigerian (and other) immigrants frustrated. The findings of this research concerning the job situation of Nigerians in the Netherlands are presented in the empirical chapter while chapter six draws some conclusions and makes recommendations on ways forward. Meanwhile, in chapter four, the methods and methodology used to conduct the research and collect the data are presented.

## Chapter 4

# Research methods and methodology

Chapter 4 delves into the research methods and methodology and their interrelatedness. Qualitative method is discussed and the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data from the field is explained. Strategic snowball sampling was used to gain access to the research population thus some facts about the sampling are discussed. The insider versus outsider debate is also introduced in relation to the researcher in this research. Finally, my experiences on the field of research are highlighted while the limitations of are listed.

### 4.1 Conceptual point of departure

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve a research problem or a study of how research is done scientifically. In it the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them are outlined. Through the methodology, the assumptions underlying various techniques may be better understood while research methods are the methods or techniques that are used for conducting a research. These refer to the tools used in performing research operations such as making observations, recording data, processing data, etc. (Kothari, 2009). In summary, research methodology has many dimensions and methods constitute a part of the methodology. Therefore research methodology not only looks at methods but also considers the logic behind the methods used in the context of the research study and explains why a particular method or technique is used and not another so that research results are capable of being evaluated either by the researcher or by others.

### 4.2 Qualitative method

The methodology used in this research is qualitative. The study uses field research as a method of gathering qualitative data which helps to achieve a deep understanding of the issues and gives some interpretations from the results. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive and material practices that make the world visible. These practices turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. It involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials such as case study, personal experience, life story, interview etc. that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Case study qualitative data is used. My belief is that this is a more useful method in getting the perspectives of Nigerian immigrants. In collecting this data, in-depth interviews were conducted. The in-depth nature of the interviews helped to probe their experiences about the Dutch labor market and to give detailed information about their *realities*.

As related to this research, the question is how is the reality of the labor market situation of Nigerian immigrants constructed by the actors themselves, what interpretations are given to this reality in the Dutch social context and what is true with regards to this study? Schwandt



(2007) posits that qualitative research aims to understand actors' subjective meanings and interpretations to explain their behavior. Whether or not this is possible in a positivistic or post-positivistic (interpretive or constructive) manner is the subject of several debates. Post-positivism states that the appropriate methodology is required to enable the social researcher appreciate the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman and Bell, 2003) and that the researcher cannot maintain a detached, objective position. The insider outsider argument is discussed later in this chapter.

### **4.3 Research population**

The broad aim of this research is to highlight the position of African immigrants in the Dutch labor market in relation to their pre-migration stock of human capital with Nigerian immigrants as the case study. To achieve this, three groups of participants were interviewed. First 18 Nigerian immigrants, both females and males aged between 23 and 52 years were selected from Amsterdam and Tilburg as respondents. (See the section on Facts about sampling).

Next were two Dutch organizations, Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen (UWV) and Stichting Nieuwkomers en Vluchtelingen (SNV) which are involved in the labor market participation of immigrants. The purpose of the interviews was to give an institutional perspective to this issue of immigrant employability and to identify the programs available for immigrants' integration in the Dutch labor market.

The third group included Nigerian migrant associations. This is from an earlier research done with Stichting Mondiale Samenleving (SMS) as part of my internship for this master study. Below is a summary of my internship experience at SMS:

#### *My internship with Stichting Mondiale Samenleving (SMS)*

SMS is an organization which aims to contribute to the integration and socio-economic participation of refugees and migrants in all sectors of Dutch society. To achieve this goal, it organizes a variety of trainings and workshops on capacity building, development partnerships, etc. for migrant organizations. In this way it helps to meet the need of immigrants to contribute to home development and reconstruction while simultaneously participating in Dutch society. SMS had a network of about 150 migrant organizations from different countries and wanted to include Nigerians in that network. As a result, SMS proposed a survey of Nigerian migrant organizations in the Netherlands, a survey that was done as my internship assignment. The aim was to identify existing Nigerian organizations, their activities especially in the areas of integration and development, project involvement, funding, capacity and possible areas of collaboration.

For that report, ten associations with an average of 27 members each were identified. This brought me in contact with the Nigerian community in different parts of the Netherlands. At the end of the survey, a lot of information was collected from these associations but there were a lot more questions about personal experiences and perception of Nigerians about their integration into Dutch society. The need to go further to conduct a research on the socio-economic status of Nigerian immigrants thus arose from this survey. Working with SMS also gave me insights into collection and collation of data, its analysis and the subsequent writing of research reports.

## 4.4 Facts about sampling

All available information about Nigerian immigrants in the Netherlands are general information since for all relevant Dutch institutes, there is no register of data on Africans (they are mostly categorized under ‘others’). Thus strategic snowball sampling method was used. That is a researcher has one or two known contacts that participate in the research and then introduce others as participants. This is a particularly useful choice of sampling when the population of interest is hidden or hard-to-reach as is the case with Nigerian immigrants. This made it vital to strategically though randomly select research participants and thus achieve the sample size. Being an insider did not give automatic access to the research population as initially expected especially the undocumented immigrants. It was also especially difficult to find participants in Amsterdam because of my relative lack of familiarity with the Nigerian community there. I therefore had to visit one Nigerian church where an old contact introduced me to others.

First the variables were defined. Since the residential status of an immigrant is the single most relevant criteria for the possibility to participate officially in the Dutch labor market, three quarters of the respondents were documented Nigerians while the undocumented were included for the purpose of comparison. The duration of stay also has an influence on the extent of immigrant integration; for example language proficiency, cultural and social interactions, etc. are often impacted by how long an immigrant has lived in the host nation. The strategy was to use three different duration span (less than 5 years, 5-10 years and more than 10 years). The tendency of immigrants to concentrate in major cities made geographical location another important variable. Due to the general belief within migrant communities that there are better job opportunities in major cities, Amsterdam was selected. Does the cosmopolitan nature of a city like Amsterdam affect the labor market opportunities of immigrants The fact that immigrants also live in smaller towns made Tilburg the other location thus comparisons could be made. Nigerians of various educational levels were included in the sample. All the interviews were conducted by me personally in English.

Time and monetary constraints led to the decision to restrict the sample size to less than twenty. Based on the three duration span, three participants were selected for each period span making nine per location and a total of 18 in-depth interviews in the two locations. Another data source was interviews with (two) Dutch institutes which are involved in labor market integration of immigrants. The added value was an insight into Dutch institutional perspective on the problem of immigrant employability. A third source was the report of an earlier survey of Nigerian migrant associations. The information from the migrant associations helped to put the experiences of immigrants in some perspective.

*Table 4.1 Population sample*

<b>Duration of stay</b>	<b>Tilburg</b>	<b>Amsterdam</b>
<5 years	3	2
5-10years	2	3
>10 years	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>

## 4.5 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In collecting this data, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. The in-depth nature of the interviews helped to probe their experiences about the Dutch labor market and to

give detailed information about their *realities*. A semi-structured interview is a method of research with flexible questions allowing a free flow of questions which are brought up in the course of the interview as a result of a response from the respondent. The interviewer in a semi-structured interview generally has a framework of themes to be explored. The limited sample size, the relatively limited duration of the research, the rather individualistic context of the topic and often personal experiences of the integration process make semi-structured interview appropriate for this research.

Since it is semi-structured, a list of questions was prepared along a framework of themes but with flexibility so that follow-up questions and participants' statements or observations could be accommodated, i.e. open-ended questions. Respondents were thus permitted to express their perspectives within the framework. Some respondents were willing to share information while others were more hesitant. Some expected that expressing their views will bring some improvements in their level of integration. As one respondent Tobi (36) asked,

*Will this research help me find a way to study tourism and be able to work in that profession instead of this care work that I am being forced to study?(Tilburg 17 Oct., 2011)*

In all the cases, there was at least one meeting with each respondent to get acquainted with each other, to explain the purpose of the research and to set appointment dates for the interviews. These interviews were conducted at sites comfortable for the respondents and in English language. The duration ranged from 30 minutes to two hours and in some cases, there were follow-up discussions for clarification of earlier comments. For those who did not have any objection, the interviews were recorded for ease of analysis. Table 4.2 presents an overview of the data.

*Table 4.2 An overview of respondents' data 05-12-2011*

No	Age	gender	Res. status	Length of stay	Educ. qual. (pre-migration)	Educ. Qual. (post-migration)	Work level (NL)	Level of Dutch proficiency
1	47	M	documented	22 years	Secondary education (LBO)	B. sc Computing	Skilled	low
2	44	F	documented	16 years	OND/MBO	None	Unskilled	average
3	51	M	documented	22 years	OND/MBO	Tech. educ. (Sound Engr.)	Semi-skilled	low
4	42	M	documented	2 years	Master's degree	PhD Migration studies	Unskilled	low
5	42	M	documented	13 years	Dr. of Medicine (Obs&Gyn)	Dr. of Medicine	Skilled	above-average
6	37	F	documented	3 years	B.A English	M SC computer science	Skilled	low
7	32	M	documented	5 years	HND Bus. Admin	PgD Accounting	skilled	low
8	38	F	documented	13 years	HND Banking & Finance	HBO Psychiatry nursing	Skilled	above-average
9	46	M	documented	10 years	B.A English	None	Unskilled	Average
10	50	M	documented	16 years	B.sc Civil Eng.	None	Unskilled	average
11	30	M	documented	5 years	B.sc Data processing	None	Unskilled	low
12	33	F	documented	3 years	OND Accounting	None	unemployed	low
13	42	M	documented	10 years	HND Banking & Finance	HBO Int bus & mgmt.	skilled	above-average
14	36	F	documented	12 years	LBO	Studying for an MBO	None	average
15	50	M	documented	17 years	B.A Education	None	Entrepreneur	low
16	23	M	Undocumented	3 years	LBO	1 year HBO Int business*	None	average
17	28	M	undocumented	5 years	OND statistics	None	None	low
18	32	F	Undocumented	4 months	B.A Sociology	None	None	low

Source: author's in-depth interviews, 2011.

\*This respondent had to stop his education after one year because his asylum request was denied and the procedure was discontinued. Undocumented immigrants are not permitted to get an education in the Netherlands.  
M-male F-female

HBO =>HND; MBO =>OND; LBO => secondary education

The summary of this table is that lengths of stay, acquisition of post-migration human capital and possession of residential permits have positive effects on the labor market outcome of the respondents. All the undocumented immigrants are unable to work officially. However, unofficially by 'borrowing' documents of other immigrants or working for private employees who do not request for documentation, they are able to get different sorts of unskilled jobs.

#### *Added value of information from Migrant and Dutch institutes*

In the course of this research, Dutch and Nigerian institutes involved in the labor market participation of immigrants were interviewed.

Two Dutch organizations, UWV and SNV were involved. The UWV serves as a link between employers and public and private parties at local, regional and national level. It is a center to connect job seekers and employers. The UWV offers information and services to employers to find qualified staff and vice-versa. The UWV has various programs through which job seekers are introduced to the job market. Of special interest to this research is a program set up specifically to integrate highly qualified immigrants into the Dutch labor market. Named HOA, this program was developed because highly educated immigrants often face what is termed the "primacy effect". This means that an employer judges an applicant by the first impression and compares him with his image of the ideal candidate. Immigrants frequently fall short of this ideal and are therefore often refused employment. HOA's purpose is to train the immigrants on manners of presentation to create the right first impressions and this is done through a series of workshops organized for the highly skilled.

The SNV on the other hand has asylum seekers and refugees as its target audience though it newly introduced a program "stage carrousel" (still a pilot project) to integrate the highly skilled. The main objective is to help them build new lives for themselves in the Dutch society including employment. The interviews with these organizations were very helpful in understanding the types of institutional support that are available to immigrants.

As earlier mentioned, some Nigerian migrant associations were interviewed and they include:

- 1) Esan community
- 2) Oduduwa descendant association
- 3) Nigerian women association
- 4) The Nigerian Foundation
- 5) Vital Aid Foundation
- 6) Goodwill heritage foundation

The first two are associations of indigenes of specific ethnic groups from Nigeria, while the Nigerian women association is an association for Nigerian women living in the Netherlands. The Nigerian foundation is the only establishment that claims to represent Nigerians in the Netherlands, irrespective of ethnic background. These associations provided information about their members' job situations and the type of assistance offered to help improve their work situations. They are essentially funded through membership contributions. With few members contributing small amounts, the income of these associations are meager. Another common observation is their weak organizational structure, lack of coherence and the rather

restricted nature of their activities (to social gatherings). These factors, in conjunction with their limited financial capacity narrow their span of influence within Dutch system.

The last two, Vital Aid and Goodwill Heritage foundations, are more formal organizations that work in cooperation with Dutch establishments and have access to some Dutch institutional support. They offer training programs to immigrants to improve their chances on the labor market.

#### **4.6 Insider/outsider or the space between?**

Events that occurred while collecting data make the insider outsider debate relevant to this study. First I will discuss the topic factually and my experiences of the effect of being a member of the research population or not on the research. That is the insider outsider position of a researcher in conducting his research and analyzing the results. Insider research refers to when researchers conduct research with populations of which they are also members so that the researcher shares an identity, language and/or experiential base with respondents (Kanuha, 2000; Asselin, 2003). The outsider researcher on the other hand shares no common identity with the research population. Although both have advantages and disadvantages for the research, to present these concepts in a dualistic manner is overly simplistic.

According to Dwyer & Buckle (2009), it is restrictive to lock into a notion that emphasizes either/or, one or the other, you are in or out. Rather a dialectical approach allows the preservation of the complexity of differences and similarities. Mullings (1999) describes qualitative researchers as having an appreciation for the fluidity and multilayered complexity of human experience even though positionality is of utmost relevance. The notion of the space between challenges the dichotomy of the insider versus outsider status. Aoki (1996) describes insider and outsider as a binary of two separate preexisting entities, which can be bridged or brought together with a hyphen, this hyphen can be viewed not as a path but as a dwelling place for people. It acts as a third space, a space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity and ambivalence. Hall (1990) points out that identities are the names that individuals give to the different ways they are positioned by, and positioned themselves within. Certainly there are complexities inherent in occupying the space between. Dwyer & Buckler (2009) assert that the space between is probably the only space researchers will ever occupy. As a researcher, one may be closer to the insider or outsider position, but the perspective of the researcher is shaped by his/her position (including reading much literature on the topic) in such a way that it is difficult to fully occupy either of the two positions.

Holding membership in a group therefore, does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise not being a member of that group does not denote complete difference. Dwyer & Buckler (2009) contended that whether the researcher is an insider, sharing the characteristics, roles or experiences under study with the respondents, or an outsider to the commonality shared by respondents, the personhood of the researcher, including his or her membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation. It is therefore essential that both the researcher and the subject should be actively involved in the meaning making process.

As a Nigerian immigrant researching other Nigerian immigrants, I was viewed both as an insider, one of 'us' and at other times as an outsider, a researcher and one of 'them' by my respondents. According to Dwyer & Buckler (2009), some of the benefits to being an insider include access, entry and a common ground from which to begin the research. These were

benefits I experienced with the highly skilled immigrants who were well integrated into the Dutch labor markets. They were accessible, willing to give information and were not presumptuous about my Nigerian background or my experiences as a fellow immigrant. The underemployed and undocumented immigrants, who also tended to view me as an outsider, were not easily accessible and less communicative. They were more inclined to make assumptions and withhold information. An example is Frank (46). Asked why he left his teaching job to travel to Europe, he said,

you are asking me as if you are not a Nigerian...of course you know what teachers earn in Nigeria, ... (Amsterdam 25 Nov., 2011).

As Kanuha (2000, p 444) explains, for each of the ways that being an insider enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to an outsider, questions about neutrality and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied.

Conducting this research brought me in contact with a wide range of Nigerian immigrants and gave me insight to and an understanding of their experiences and their perspectives. My interactions with Dutch institutes gave me an exposure to the 'working' of Dutch institutions. Put together, both have assisted me personally to attain some sort of balance and to view the problems and solutions relatively objectively. The space between. To be considered the same or different requires reference to another person or group. As Fay (1996) noted, each requires the other. "There is no self-understanding without other-understanding" (p. 241). Accepting this notion requires that noting the ways we are different from others necessitates that we also note the ways in which we are similar. In my analysis, I appreciated that there were times I shared experiences, opinions and perspectives with my respondents and at other times I did not. Having worked so closely with my respondents it was difficult to distance myself from the persons behind the story, yet it was also important as a researcher to collect and present the data from the field.

## **4.7 Research reflections**

In reflecting on this study, it is important to discuss, firstly, the sample size. I realize that the limited sample size may place some limitations on the applicability of the research findings since it can be argued that eighteen (respondents) may not necessarily be representative of 10,676 Nigerian immigrants in the Netherlands. However, in selecting respondents, attempts were made to include Nigerians representing diverse backgrounds and experiences. Secondly the effect of being an insider/outsider. As earlier stated being an insider enables access and entry to the respondents. This was true in some cases and not in others. As for the group that perceived me as an academic and therefore an outsider, there was some level of distrust and secrecy. For example, a couple had two households and was collecting state allowances for both instead of living together as one family. The woman was my respondent and needed extra assurance that I was not a spy from the tax office. In spite of this different perceptions it was still possible to collect all the necessary information to enable me write an objective report, presenting insider information and still maintaining a research perspective.

The research and conclusions presented is thus still informative. The informants represent a range of backgrounds and experiences. These include the documented and undocumented immigrants and those with high and intermediate educational levels. Information on duration of stay and extent of their social network in the Netherlands was also included in the analysis. Some of them could communicate very well in Dutch, some not so well and others not at all. This is especially common among the recently arrived migrants (for family purposes) and the

undocumented migrants. The range of the respondents' background, experiences and perspectives make this research useful and informative.

This chapter has explained the methods and methodology used to conduct this research. It has given some general information about the interviewees and discussed the experiences of the researcher in conducting the interviews. In the following chapter, the results are presented and discussed, the analysis of the stories of the respondents, conclusions and recommendations are also presented.

## Economic involvement of Nigerians in the Netherlands

### *Introduction*

Underemployment is a recurring problem among the African migrant community in the Netherlands. It is being accepted within this community as de facto situation, an acceptance which makes it easy to do nothing to change the situation but to continue doing the unskilled jobs often described as dirty, dangerous and demeaning (3D jobs) irrespective of their high qualifications. It became apparent from this study that some immigrants have been able to make choices that enabled them improve their level of participation in the Dutch labor market. How were they able to achieve this? What roles did their agency play and how were they able to overcome various socio-cultural and economic obstacles within the system?

What role does human capital play? To evaluate the concept of human capital, the first section discusses certification; the purpose, the methods and effects from the perspective of the Dutch evaluation institutes and immigrants. It sets the agenda for the empirical analysis. It delves into pre-migration human capital, essentially measured by educational qualifications. Do Nigerian immigrants evaluate their certificates? If not, why and if they do, what effect does this evaluation have on their employability? Section 5.2 discusses the effect of language proficiency on labor market access and the need for immigrants to realize that language is human capital that needs to be acquired. It therefore needs an investment of time and money and it eventually brings rewards, in the labor market in particular and in integration in general. Having a high educational qualification, (pre-migration), is insufficient for an immigrant to get an equally high-skilled job in the Netherlands. Other factors like language proficiency and downgrading of pre-migration human capital play significant roles in the employability of immigrants. The last section discusses the importance of social capital on immigrant integration. How do factors like length of stay, residential status, available Dutch and Nigerian institutes influence the amount of the social capital that immigrants are able to build?

There are, of course, no simple explanations for the level of underemployment of Nigerians; rather the factors affecting the employability and employment levels of this vulnerable group of immigrants in the Netherlands are multifaceted and interwoven. In this empirical chapter, some of these factors as established from this research are discussed. The empirics are related to the concepts discussed in chapter two.

### **5.1 Policy on credential evaluation**

According to a joint report by European Network of Information Centres on Recognition and Mobility/National Academic Recognition Centres (ENIC/NARIC), in the 1950s and up until the mid-1970s, the purpose of credential evaluation was to establish *equivalence*, which is, matching the components of the foreign program with that of the host country. In the 1980s, this was replaced with the concept of recognition: the *recognition* of a diploma, qualification or course of study for a specific purpose if it fits that purpose. A foreign degree therefore needs not be identical or even almost identical in order to be recognized. Furthermore, within the concept of recognition, the phenomenon of *acceptance* has gained some ground in Europe in the past decade. Acceptance means that a foreign qualification that is (pre-judged) of a



slightly *inferior* level, content and/or function to the nearest comparable degree in the host country, will be accepted at that level if the differences are small enough to be overlooked. What is the basis for judging a qualification as inferior or superior? This was a point of discussion by most respondents. Dare insists that

the educational level in Nigeria is definitely equal to the one here (in the Netherlands) but the way the education is organized in Nigeria is different (Tilburg 31 Oct., 2011)

The Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention of Lisbon 1997 which adopts the principle of acceptance lays the burden of proof on the host country. This supports the respondents' position that there is very little the immigrant can do about these evaluations.

### 5.1.1 Method of recognition of diplomas

In the ERIC/NARIC report, there are two types of international recognition of diplomas and qualifications, which require two types of credential evaluation: academic recognition and professional recognition.

- a) *Academic recognition* refers to recognition decisions that allow a person to pursue or continue a course of study or confer the right to use a national title or degree from the host country on the basis of a title or degree acquired in the country of origin.
- b) *Professional recognition* relates to the methodologies and procedures for evaluating credentials for work purposes and is a more intricate matter. Recognition of professional qualifications reflects both the national system of education and the organization of professions, industries and professionals themselves.

Table 5.1 Evaluation Chart

Degree or qualification	Dutch equivalent	NLQF level	EQF level
Senior School Cert. (WAEC, at least 6 subjects with A, B or C or 1-6)	HAVO diploma	4	4
SSC (NECO) at least 6 subjects with A or B or 1-4)	HAVO diploma	4	4
National Technical Cert./National Commercial Certificate	MBO diploma (Qualification level 3)	3	3
Advanced National Commercial Cert./Advanced National Tech cert	MBO diploma (qual. Level 3)	3/4	3/4
(Ordinary) National diploma (OND)	MBO diploma (qual. Level 4)	4	4
Higher National diploma (HND)	2 years of HBO	5	5
Advanced diploma (State University)	2 years of HBO	5	5
Nigerian Cert in Education (NCE)	1 year HBO in education (teaching)	5	5
Bachelor of Education	HBO bachelor's degree in education (teaching)	6	6
Postgraduate diploma in Education	At least HBO bachelor's degree in education (teaching)	6	6
Bachelor (four years)	HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of WO	6	6
Master (two years)	HBO master's degree or WO bachelor's or master's degree	7	7

Source: International recognition department 2011, NUFFIC The Hague.

NLQF: Netherlands Qualifications Framework. EQF: European Qualification Framework.

MBO: Middelbaar Beroep Onderwijs (literally senior secondary vocational education)

HAVO: Hoger Algemeen Vormend Onderwijs (senior general secondary education)

HBO: Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs (or higher professional or technical education)

WO: Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs (Scientific education)

The Recognition of diplomas, whether for academic or professional purposes may require different approaches and instruments. One thing they do share in common is the evaluation of

the educational component of the credential or qualification. NUFFIC is the accreditation agency which evaluates academic qualifications. It has a standard for comparing certificates from Nigeria to equivalents in the Netherlands. (The information regarding international study programs at VMBO and MBO level is issued by COLO, the association of centers of expertise on vocational education, training and the labor market). Table 5.1 shows a list of the equivalents between Nigerian and Dutch educational qualifications:

Following this chart and the concept of acceptance, qualifications from Nigerian universities are judged to be inferior to those obtained in the Netherlands by NUFFIC. Empirical results from this research showed that some of the Nigerian immigrants who chose to return to study spent longer periods of time studying than they would have liked to due to this perceived inferiority of their Nigerian diplomas.

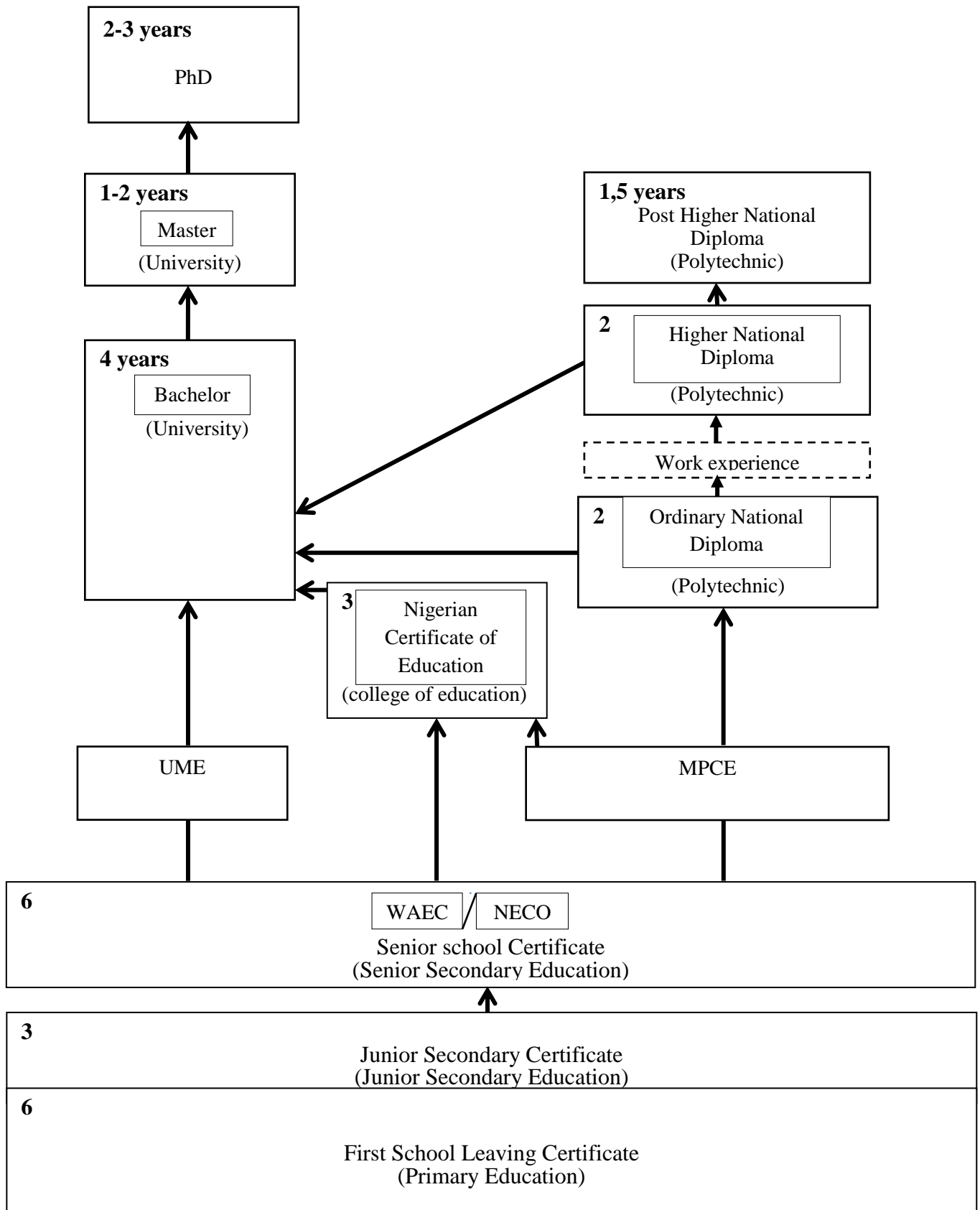
## **5.2 Pre-migration human capital**

For highly qualified immigrants from Africa, downgrading of their pre-migration educational qualification is a reality. With particular respect to Nigerian qualifications, results from this study showed that they are judged inferior and downgraded by the Dutch evaluation board. The prolonged nature of the exercise and the uncertain benefits serve to reduce the number of Nigerians that actually evaluate their diplomas. Concerning this research, only five of the eighteen respondents had their diplomas evaluated. Of these, four were downgraded whilst the fifth being from a Spanish university, was rated as equivalent to Dutch diploma. Thus signifying the difference in value given to certificates from within Europe as opposed to those from outside Europe.

Downgrading has two implications for immigrants; on one hand are those who would like to return to study; the lower advice increases the duration of their study. A downgraded qualification often means an immigrant has to redo the study he already did in his origin country. An example is Dare (42) who had a Higher National Diploma (HND, see figure 5.1) in banking and finance before leaving Nigeria where he worked as a banker. When he got to the Netherlands, his four year study was downgraded to three years. No school in the Netherlands was willing to accept him for one year so he had to study for another three years for a HBO. Dare disagrees with these evaluations, he insists that the educational content is the same (see fig. 5.2) but the immigrant is powerless and cannot do anything about it.

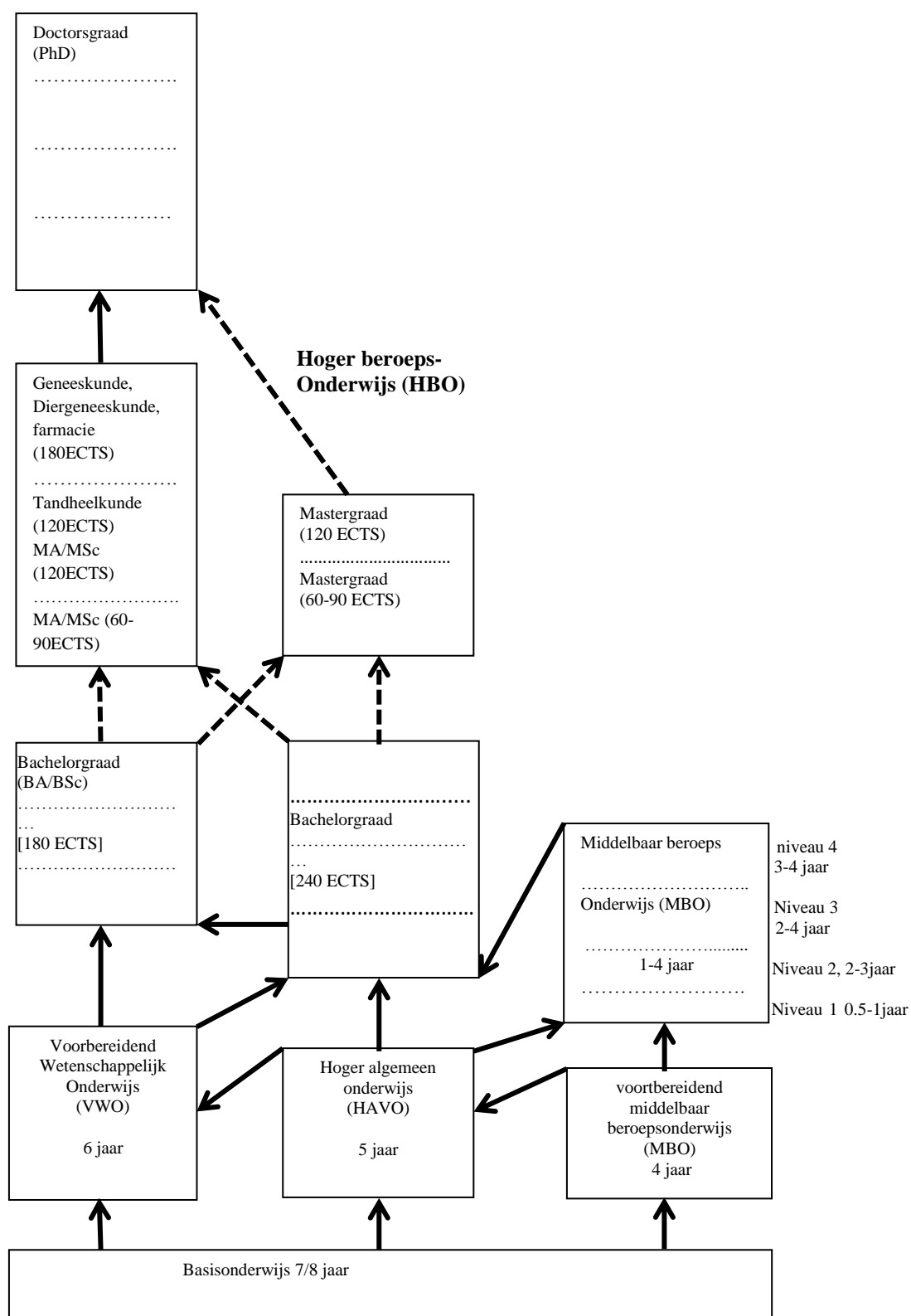
Our educational level in Nigeria is definitely equal to the one here (in the Netherlands) but the way the educational system is organized in Nigeria is different. I had to start again from the beginning because no institution was willing to admit me for just one year to achieve my HBO. This can discourage a less motivated and determined immigrant (Tilburg 31 Oct., 2011).

For him, the choice was between returning to school to start from the beginning or continuing with unskilled jobs. He chose the former in spite of the high investment in time and money since he saw it as his only ticket to better job opportunities.



Source: NUFFIC | 1st edition September 2009 | Version 4, December 2011

Figure 5.1 Education System- Federal Republic of Nigeria



Source: NUFFIC | 1st edition September 2009 | Version 4, December 2011

Fig 5.2 The education system of the Netherlands (Schema Nederlands Onderwijssysteem)

ECTS= European Credit Transfer Accumulation System

An arrow (→) means right to

A striped arrow (→) means right to selection or a joint program)

Jaye, a general medical practitioner in the Amsterdam area even adduces a political explanation. He believes that

These evaluations are politically motivated, they are protectively motivated evaluations. I think they are designed to exclude instead of include, they are designed not to encourage you to stay, but if you decide to stay then you have to dance to the music that “they” play. You send your certificates to NUFFIC with loads of paper work and “they” do a set of evaluations and come out with an advice and often “they” give you a lower advice. In my case, they said we’ve seen what you’ve done and it is equivalent to four years medical training in the Netherlands and you have to go and re-qualify. This means you have to go back to the university but you can’t do that until you have passed the intake exams and you can’t do that until you have learnt how to speak Dutch (Amsterdam 14 July, 2011) .

Immigrants like Dare and Jaye who chose to retrain often consider acquisition of a Dutch education as a gateway to the Dutch labor market and they therefore follow the route of education irrespective of the limitations. In this study, seven out of eight respondents who chose to retrain were able to integrate into the Dutch labor market using their post-migration human capital.

On the other hand, those who would like to seek employment using their pre-migration human capital often encounter difficulties with prospective employers. In fact, it is almost impossible. Dutch employers claim that it is difficult to ascertain the quality of their Nigerian qualifications and especially the work experiences; they are therefore unsure of their ability to perform in the Dutch work place and are unwilling to employ them. According to Mike, who obtained his post-migration education from a British University (in the Netherlands), some of the advantages to having your educational qualifications in Europe include the fact that

your qualification is hardly down-graded and your competence is not in doubt (Tilburg 25 August, 2011).

This then leads to the question of utilization of pre-migration human capital of Nigerian immigrants. How can highly educated Nigerian immigrants gain commensurate employment in the Dutch labor market using qualifications and experiences acquired from Nigeria?

### **5.2.1 Utilization of Pre-migration human capital**

The respondents generally perceive the possibility for utilization as a matter of recognition of both the educational qualification and experiences by appropriate Dutch institutes and the possibility to receive practical training in a structured manner so that they are able to adapt to the Dutch work environment. Tom (42), Mike (47) both agree that it is a matter of training immigrants so that they are able to fit into the Dutch labor market using their pre-migration skills. Tom states that

wherever any worker finds himself, no matter where he comes from, once he is trained he will be able to meet up; no organization or culture should assume that an individual will know, nobody can know anything if he is not trained (Tilburg 4 Oct., 2011).

While Mike insists that it is not difficult to learn different social attitudes and acquire host country specific work skills.

As an immigrant you need to adapt yourself to new environments and different methods of doing things (Tilburg 25 Aug., 2011)

He differentiates between lazy and hard-working immigrants, insisting that employers should not deal with immigrants as a group but as individuals with different characters and learning abilities.

Hard working Nigerian immigrants when given the opportunity can quickly and easily integrate in the Dutch work environment (Tilburg 25 Aug., 2011).

The ENIC/NARIC report describes the Netherlands as one of the countries where academic qualifications also serve as professional qualifications without additional requirements. The report states further that in other countries, like the UK, professional qualifications are usually acquired upon completion of specific professional training that takes place outside and after university. This is contrary to the findings of this research. The case of Jaye is a good example:

A day before I boarded the plane in Nigeria I still had a job as a doctor so it was difficult to get to the Netherlands and be jobless. I thought it is Europe, and since my training in Nigeria is carved out of the British system, my university degree from Nigeria is recognized by the general medical council of the UK, the Netherlands should not be different. As a foreign medical graduate to the UK all one needs to do is an accessory examination called the PLAB (professional and linguistic assessments board), and when successful the individual gets a temporary registration and is allowed to specialize in any specialty of one's choice". I actually left, wrote the exam in the UK and Ireland and did go to Ireland to work for a while. I needed to do that, psychologically and financially it was good for me. I decided I needed a break so I applied to various hospitals and eventually got a place to do six months rotation in obstetrics and gynecology. By the time I came back (to the Netherlands) I was ready, knowing that I could leave if I wanted to (Amsterdam 14 July, 2011).

While Jaye was able to practice medicine after a short period of professional examination in the UK, it took him 6 years to re-qualify in the Netherlands as a medical doctor.

That is why I said earlier that the evaluation (of qualification) in the Netherlands is designed to exclude (Amsterdam 14 July, 2011).

Dare was a top banker in Nigeria before he migrated with his Dutch partner to live in the Netherlands. As an immigrant he started to work as a factory hand because he had no knowledge of Dutch language. Tom has been unable to use his PhD qualifications to find work in the Netherlands even though he studied in a Spanish university.

I have been told by job agencies that irrespective of my qualification, I have to do cleaning work (Tilburg 4 Oct., 2011)

None of the respondents was able to utilize his/her pre-migration qualification to obtain commensurate employment in the Dutch labor market.

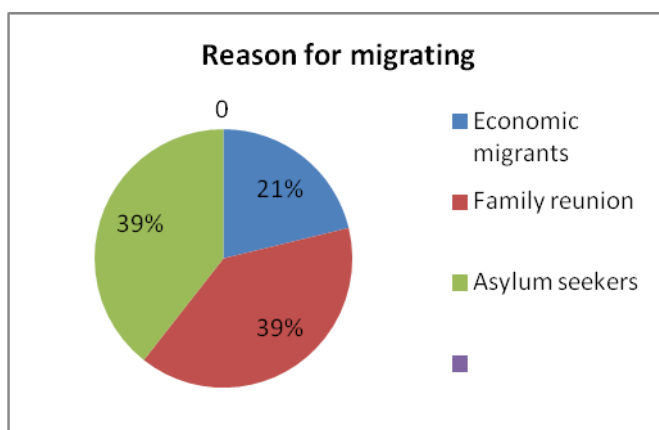


Figure 5.3 Reasons Nigerians migrated to the Netherlands.  
Source: author's in-depth interviews 2011

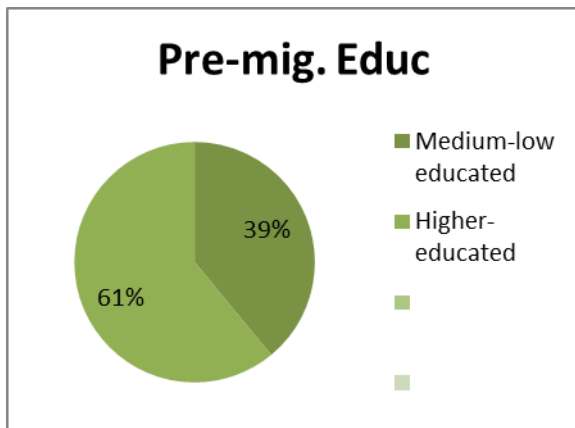


Figure 5.4 Level of pre-migration qualification of Nigerians  
Source: author's in-depth interviews 2011

Jaye had another perspective on this argument. He argues that the fact that Dutch is spoken should prepare an immigrant from Nigeria (an English speaking country) that it will require some hard work to transit from the system in Nigeria to that of the Netherlands. In spite of this insight, he still expected finding a job to be much easier than what he found when he got to the Netherlands. The fact that his medical degree is recognized in the United Kingdom made him expect that it would be functional in the Netherlands. The reality was different and he found that the journey to working as a medical doctor in the Netherlands was going to be a long one. He decided from the start that he was not going to clean toilets or wash dishes though at some point he worked as a post-man. Jaye later left and went to work as a medical doctor in Ireland

because at some point I needed a break from rotating in the system, tired of not working and just sitting at home, you can really run crazy (Amsterdam 14 July, 2011).

He did choose after a while to return to the Netherlands because of his family, to learn Dutch and to retrain. It is always about choices. Jaye explains it clearly below:

You (the immigrant) may decide one of two things, you can decide to leave and go to a place of confidence or you can decide to do what you are asked to do. The choice is yours and in every aspect of life the choice is yours, events come your way but you either leave or stay and face the consequences. If you decide to stay then you have to fight and adapt and forge ahead. The issue is whether you have the necessary back-up, emotionally and socially to focus on the challenge that you have and whether you see the possibility of surviving it or not. If you think you do not, then there is no point wasting your time on it you need to look for a viable alternative otherwise the journey might be too painful and too traumatic. At the end of the day you may not really enjoy doing what you have done. In my case I chose to follow the language lessons, to re-qualify and get a second medical degree in a specialty that will make it easy for me to get into main line practice (Amsterdam 14 July, 2011).

The majority of the respondents were not convinced of the usefulness of certificate evaluation to their job search. John sums up this feeling:

First is the cost of evaluation in terms of money and length of time. Then with the result (which is mostly lower than the qualification from Nigeria) you need to return to school to upgrade your qualification. Apart from the expense of schooling, there is the issue of language of study and getting a job after the study. If you do the study in English, you still have to work in a Dutch speaking environment and to do the study in Dutch you have to first study Dutch language to a specific level. The cost of returning to school to study whether Dutch language or a professional study is often high and the immigrant needs to count the costs and decide if the returns are worth it or if it is better to just stay doing menial jobs (Amsterdam 25 Nov., 2011).

Five of the respondents evaluated their certificates while the majority concluded that it was an exercise in futility since evaluation would not necessarily take them further along in the

journey to finding commensurate employment. For this group of immigrants, the workable option is to transit from the Netherlands to a final destination where they expect to find better opportunities. Frank (46) is one of those planning to transit, he said

I am just waiting for my wife to complete her documentation and we will move to England where there is at least no language barrier. I also plan to go back to school as soon as I get to England (Amsterdam 25 Nov., 2011).

There appears to be a change in this attitude of Nigerians towards certificate evaluation. In a recent release from NUFFIC, Nigeria was listed as one of the ten countries with an increase in request for evaluation<sup>10</sup>. The reason being the recently introduced program of faster service delivery of certificate evaluation by NUFFIC. (*‘sneller advies door kort advies’*) In fact between 2008 and the first quarter of this year, a total of 856 Nigerians<sup>11</sup> had their certificates evaluated. It is however not possible to know whether this increase is from immigrants who are already living in the Netherlands or from new Nigerian students applying for certificate evaluation through their prospective universities.

In summary, all the respondents identify the devaluation of their educational qualification as incorrect; they do not agree that the educational standards in the Netherlands are higher than in Nigeria (figure 5.1) but only that the educational systems are different. They are however realistic about the situation and understand that the solution, for those who choose to stay, is to retrain post-migration to enhance their stock of human capital.

### 5.3 Post-migration human capital

All the respondents started with menial jobs but eight (44%) acquired post-migration human capital (table 5.2), seven of which currently have equally high skilled jobs. As at the time of the interview, only one (Tom, a 42 year old PhD holder) still had unskilled job while the ninth, Ayo has established a business enterprise without possession of any post-migration education.

Table 5.2 effect of post-migration human capital on job status

Do you have post-Migration HC?	No of respondents	Job level	
		Skilled job or entrepreneur	Unskilled job
Yes	8	7	1
No\No	10	1	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>

An observation is that brain waste is dynamic and should not be perceived as an event but as a process that could be for a short or long period depending on several factors. For my respondents, it lasted until their positions improved due to acquisition of Dutch-specific skills. There is a time frame to brain waste and retraining could improve labor market chances of Nigerian immigrants.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.nuffic.nl/nederlandse-organisaties/nieuws-evenementen/nieuws-archief/2012/maart/recordaantal-diplomawaarderingen>

<sup>11</sup> This figure was obtained from NUFFIC in a personal email message



### 5.3.1 Efficacy of post-migration human capital

Acquisition of post-migration skills alone is not enough to propel immigrants to a successful labor market position. There are some factors identified as giving value to the post-migration human capital and they include:

#### (a) *Choice of specialization*

The type of profession an immigrant specializes in plays a major role in that individual's employability. Three older Nigerian immigrants, Ayo (51) an entrepreneur, Peter (51) a musician and Mike (47) a computer programmer, who have lived in the Netherlands for more than 15 years insist that this could in fact be more important than level of Dutch proficiency. According to these respondents, it is important for immigrants to search for those areas in the Dutch labor market where there are gaps and retrain to fill those gaps. Mike argues that immigrants should focus on the job that is in demand. He believes that immigrants should do thorough studies of the labor market to find out where there are gaps because in spite of economic downturns there will always be areas where skilled labor is needed. With a qualification in any of the scarce professions, finding a job may not be so problematic. It is interesting that all three, in spite of how long they have lived in the Netherlands, are poor speakers but all have skilled jobs. 57% of those with high skilled jobs confess to having poor level of spoken Dutch. Peter is a musician and with his African music he earns adequate income. He says,

in my work nobody cares if I speak Dutch...,they just love my music (Tilburg 9 Aug., 2011)

Due to the international nature of Ayo's import/export enterprise, he conducts his business in English thus high level Dutch proficiency is not a priority but when the need arises for example for business administration, he employs the services of Dutch professionals.

#### (b) *Geographical location*

Seven of the eight with high skilled jobs are employed by international companies/organizations located in the Amsterdam/Utrecht area. This supports the hypothesis that immigrants have the tendency to be concentrated in the *randstad* because of the availability of jobs where high level Dutch proficiency is not always a pre-requisite. On the contrary, it appears that for some types of job like nursing for example which demands frequent interaction with the general public, high level Dutch proficiency is obligatory, irrespective of where the immigrant lives. The respondents with such professions (like medical and banking sectors) have above-average level of spoken Dutch and understand the importance of learning Dutch. Marilyn (37) is a nurse, she knows that learning Dutch is necessary for her to be able to practice her profession and she works hard at improving her level of spoken Dutch.

In my job we (both immigrants and Dutch natives) must work together, we must communicate with one another; this is important for the patients (Amsterdam 13 Oct., 2011).

*Table 5.3 Relating geographical location and occupation*

Where is your job located?	Number of respondents	occupation
Amsterdam	6	Medical doctor Nurse Banker ICT consultant Entrepreneur Accountant
Tilburg	1	Sound tech/musician
Utrecht	1	Project manager ICT

Source: author's in-depth interview, 2011

(c) *Dutch language proficiency*

As part of the integration policy, immigrants undergo the Dutch *inburgering* program and are expected to complete extensive language and social skills training. After a minimum of 18 months, an immigrant would only have completed the basics which are more focused on acculturation than the labor market. For high level proficiency which is often required for high skilled jobs, an immigrant needs to study Dutch at a much more intensive level which could take much longer periods to complete. In self-reporting question, thirteen (72%) of the respondents judge their level of spoken Dutch as poor while only five had average or above-average (see fig. 5.3).

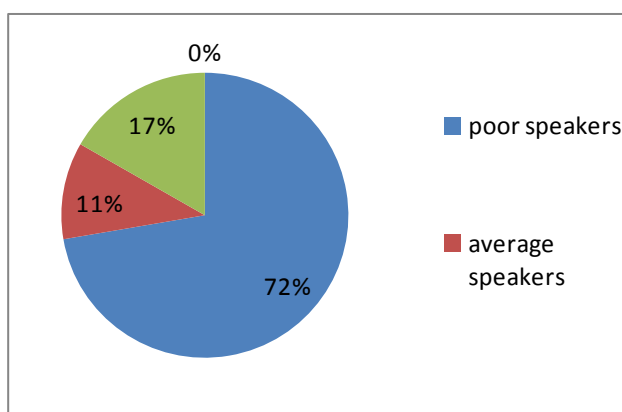


Fig 5.5 self-reporting language proficiency

Source: author's in-depth interview

For example, Marilyn (37) was a banker before migrating but retrained as a nurse in the Netherlands. She judges herself as an above-average speaker. It took her four years to bring her Dutch to this level and she is still learning. After successfully completing her *inburgering* examination (*Nederlands als tweede taal*, NT2), she still could not 'dare' to communicate in Dutch.

It was not easy. But you have to say to yourself this is what I want and I'm ready to go for it no matter what it costs me. I did a lot of extra courses privately through the internet to upgrade myself and four years on, the level of my Dutch has improved tremendously ((Amsterdam 13 Oct., 2011)

Mary explained that to be a nurse in the Netherlands, high level Dutch proficiency is required because as a nurse one has to work and communicate with Dutch patients. Jaye (42) a practicing medical practitioner before leaving Nigeria, had to retrain. To do this he not only had to succeed in the basic civic integration classes, he had to go further to learn Dutch designed for medical practice. As a medical doctor, he has to attend to Dutch speaking patients of all social classes so he must be very fluent in Dutch to practice his profession effectively. On the other hand, Mike (47) a computer programmer judges his level of Dutch proficiency as very low but does not see it as a requirement to effectively practice his profession; after all according to him,

computer language is universal, you only need to be sufficiently competent and then language becomes less important (Tilburg 25 Aug., 2011).

He suspects, however, that his poor command of Dutch affects how "high up" in the management cadre he can get. Thus language proficiency is a requirement, though at varying levels depending on job specialization.

The Challenges of learning Dutch

Mike (47), a computer programmer who admits to being a poor Dutch speaker himself agrees that the first problem immigrants are likely to face in Dutch society is fluency in the language, he therefore advises that immigrants should learn it. Indeed it seems like the most apparent solution but for immigrants, learning Dutch is not that simple. According to Jaye,

Dutch is not something you learn in six months. It is a complex language, it is Anglo-Saxon, but it is complex (Amsterdam 14 July, 2011).

For some respondents it is difficult to devote the time needed to learn the language. For example, Tom (42), an underemployed PhD holder feels that learning Dutch is

a waste of time for me because then I don't have time to work (Tilburg 4 Oct., 2011).

He explains that his family in Nigeria needs money but he is under obligation to learn Dutch.

Frank (46) expresses the same sentiments. Hear him:

...speaking the language properly involves going to school full time which for me is not possible because of the "load" that is on my shoulder back home. If you go into full time learning (of language), what about those you left behind (in Nigeria), what excuse are you going to give them for not sending money? (Amsterdam 2 Nov., 2011)

For others it is a difficult language to learn, first because of their advanced age. This is in agreement with many authors including Chiswick & Miller (2000) who found that the younger the age at migration the easier it is to achieve high level proficiency in destination language. They found that the impressive language acquisition ability observed among pre-teenage children is diminished at older ages of immigration. A related reason to age is the biological or physical maturation developments (with age) that influence the brain function regarding learning language skills particularly speaking and accents. Marilyn speaks of her struggle while learning Dutch and emphasizes the effect of the native accent of Nigerian immigrants:

I'm not so good in speaking other languages, and at the end of the civic courses, I understood what people were saying, I could write Dutch, I could read it but speaking was difficult ... and even the intonation of Nigerians affects the way they speak. Dutch is not an easy language to speak for Nigerians (Amsterdam 13 Oct., 2011).

Tom echoes a similar belief saying that

as long as a language is not your first language, you will never speak it well (Tilburg 4 Oct., 2011).

Studies on immigrant adjustment have indicated that an immigrant's native language may play an important role in the process of acquiring proficiency in the destination language (Chiswick & Miller, 2005).

However, all the respondents agree that mastery of Dutch is a prerequisite for living and working in the Netherlands and any immigrant who plans to integrate into Dutch society has to learn the language. But a policy that promotes and supports investments in language skills after migration, with the intention of these skills being used in the Dutch labor market is more likely to enhance their interest in learning the language which in turn raises the value of their pre-migration skills and economic well-being. The argument is the manner of organization of the entire *inburgering* program and its content; the way it is presently organized to limits the extent of participation of Nigerian immigrants. For example, even though it is no longer mandatory to attend the classes, passing the basic language test is a precondition for extension of residence permit. The immigrants therefore attend long enough to pass their tests. Tom is one such immigrant.

You go to language school because it is conditional on your citizenship status, everyone is forced to learn the language, in fact everybody feels forced against their will. I am not interested in Dutch; I am learning this language because I am in this system, because I find myself in Holland (the Netherlands) and because I expect to get some benefits from the system. For example welfare, status, citizenship etc. are some of the things making me to learn this language. Also to help you find a job, but outside of this place I don't need it. Sometimes it is easier to learn on the street and in the work place especially with your work colleagues (Tilburg 4 Oct., 2011).

One other observation is that some respondents in spite of having lived in the Netherlands for periods ranging from 5 to more than 15 years still have poor level of spoken Dutch (fig 5.2)

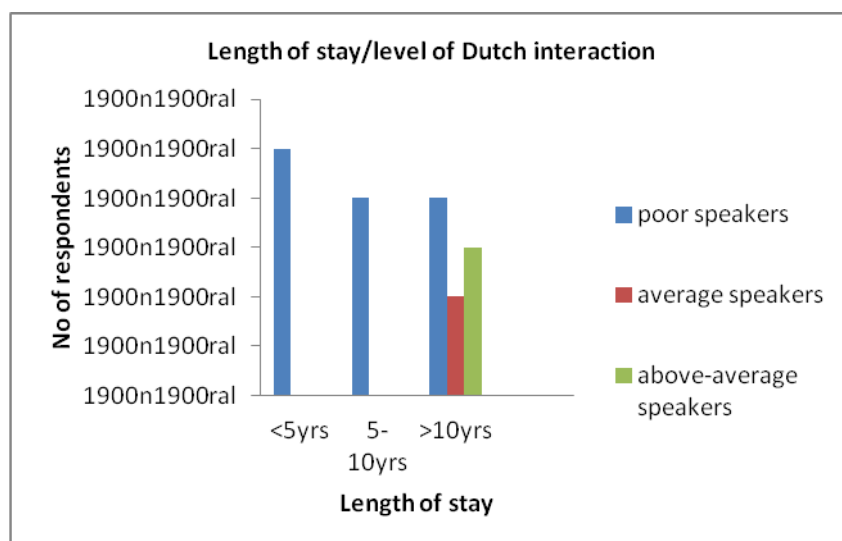


Figure 5.6 Relationship between length of stay and level of spoken Dutch  
Source: author's in-depth interview, 2011

(d) Duration of stay

Seven of the eight respondents with high skilled jobs have lived in the Netherlands for between 10 and 22 years (table 5.4). Their long periods of stay according to the interview gave them the resources needed, (in terms of time and money) to retrain, get better jobs and fully integrate into Dutch society. But their individual attributes played an important role. In comparison, of the ten with unskilled jobs, six have lived in the Netherlands for long periods of time, as long as 17 years in some cases, and yet were unable to improve their skills in that period. This is due to a combination of factors including social, political, economic, but also personal attributes, thus emphasizing that immigrants could live for long periods of time in a host country without integrating. Two examples are; John (51), a graduate of civil engineering who migrated to the Netherlands 16 years ago but has always worked as unskilled laborer in the agricultural sector because he was convinced from the start that his Dutch would never be good enough and it would be a barrier to finding a good job. He neither evaluated his certificate nor sought any high skilled job. John claims he has too many responsibilities back home to be able to make out the time from his job to study and enhance his human capital and his point of view is

why go to school when you will not even be able to utilize your certificates (Amsterdam 2 Nov., 2011)?

Table 5.4 duration of stay and acquisition of post-migration qualification

Num ber	Respondent	Length of stay	Post-migration qualification	Occupation
1	Mike	22 years	BA	Computer programmer
2	Peter	22 years	Tech education	Musician
3	Jaye	13 years	Dr medicine	Medical doctor
4	Joy	3 years	Master	IT consultant
5	Leo	5 years	PgD	Accountant
6	Marilyn	13 years	HBO	Nurse
7	Dare	10 years	HBO	Banker
8	Tom	2 years	PhD	Unskilled work
9	Tobi	12 years	Studying for an MBO	Welfare recipient
10	Juliet	17 years	-	Factory laborer
11	Ayo	17 years	-	Entrepreneur
12	Frank	10 years	-	Cleaner
13	John	16 years	-	Welfare recipient
14	Harold	5 years	-	Factory laborer
15	Lily	3 years	-	Welfare recipient
16	Daniel	3 years	-	Unemployed
17	Isibor	5 years	-	Unemployed
18	Sheila	4 months	-	Unemployed

Source: author's in-depth interviews, 2011

#### (e) Residential status

Having the correct residential documents is probably the single most important requirement for immigrants in the Netherlands. An undocumented immigrant is not allowed to work and if discovered may be deported. Businesses which employ them are liable to sanctions (see v.d. Leun, 2003) and could pay as high as 8,000 Euros in fines if apprehended. Even people who privately hire them as cleaners or painters have to pay 4,000 euros if they are caught.

As an undocumented immigrant for 12 years, Tobi (36) cleaned private homes to earn an income to take care of her two children. Once she got the pardon, her situation changed. Though de-skilled due to the long period of inactivity (due to the asylum procedure), she has started the process of re-skilling. After completing the compulsory language course, she is now following an MBO level study. My undocumented respondents are in the position that Tobi was, though they sometimes find loopholes that allow them to work. For example 'borrowing' the work permit of a documented immigrant and presenting it to an employer who hopefully is unable to differentiate between the appearance of one individual and the other.

*Table 5.5 Effect of resident permit on level of underemployment*

Are you legally resident in the Netherlands?	No of respondents	Job level			
		Skilled job Entrepreneur	Unskilled	welfare	unemployed
Yes	15	8	4	3	-
No	3	-	-	-	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

#### (b) *Social network*

Results from the interviews show that Nigerian immigrants have restricted contacts with Dutch natives and institutes and more with each other. This is more prevalent among the unskilled and semi-skilled who are unable to communicate in Dutch. The highly educated immigrants have understandably broader networks of both Nigerians and Dutch natives. This is also due to the reality of few available opportunities for contact. John (51) said

when I worked on the farm, there was contact with Dutch people but not anymore especially now that I live and work in a black neighborhood (Amsterdam 2 Nov., 2011)

Contact with Dutch institutes is even more problematic. Sorting through the diverse information available from various Dutch agencies is problematic. After receiving permit to stay Tobi (36) wanted to follow a study in tourism so she could work in a travel agency, she enquired at the ROC, but

I was told that as a mother of three children it would be difficult to come for lectures daily and I was advised to check with the travel agencies. At the agency, I was directed to apply through the internet and see if I would be admitted. I was also made aware of the fact that I need to bring my certificates from Nigeria (which I have been unable to get due to the fact that I left Nigeria in a hurry) or to improve my level of Dutch before it will be possible to even consider me. That discouraged me and I didn't bother to search further. Now I have agreed to follow a course in care-work because that is what the city council is willing to pay for (Tilburg, 17 Oct 2011)<sup>12</sup>

One striking difference is that respondents with skilled jobs tend to have more contact with Dutch natives and institutes. Of note is the fact that seven of the eight (87.5%) have (or once had) Dutch partners, a fact which broadened their social network. Having Dutch contacts and broadened networks occasionally made access to information and services easier. However this process of broadening one's social network usually begins with attending a Dutch higher educational institute. Immigrants thus learn about how the Dutch system operates.

## 5.4 Dutch institutes/Nigerian migrant associations

Some Dutch organizations and Nigerian migrant associations involved in the labor market integration process of immigrants were also interviewed to investigate their added value.

### 5.4.1 Dutch institutes

<sup>12</sup> Tobi has since been linked to one of the programs of SNV (Stage-carrousel) which she is now following. At the end of the training she will be able to work in a travel agency and eventually study as a professional in the tourism industry. This demonstrates the effect of access to relevant information. Before she was informed by me, she had never heard of such a program.

UWV and SNV are two Dutch institutes with programs designed to guide highly skilled immigrants into the Dutch labor market. The UWV has a program called HOA which is designed for highly educated immigrants. In an interview, Danny one of the coordinators of the program, explained that

HOA started five years ago because in our (UWV) database there were a lot of highly qualified immigrants who didn't have jobs and so the government gave a subsidy to start a program to help them. According to him, immigrants have difficulties finding jobs probably because the firms have their own channels for looking for workers and immigrants don't have the correct channels to find the jobs. Immigrants are different, their qualifications are different and a lot of firms don't understand these qualifications (Rotterdam 19 Sept., 2011).

The mode of operation of HOA is to train immigrants on how to present themselves to potential recruiters, write CVs, letter of application, etc. Danny explains further,

this is because a lot of immigrants have their own values and ways of presentation, and in the Netherlands, a recruiter expects someone who is sure of himself and is very assertive. As a matter of fact, there should be no modesty in the approach of an immigrant to a recruiter and in most cases this is a very strange attitude for immigrants (Rotterdam 19 Sept., 2011).

The highly skilled immigrants undergo six weeks training on ways of communication, presentation, etc. After the training, recruiters are advised about these immigrants and as part of the program, immigrants are matched to prospective employers. In the first two years, about 850 highly skilled immigrants were matched with employers while as at the time of this interview in 2011; there were more than 1000 immigrants in the program throughout the nation.

Although HOA is open to all immigrants, less than 5% of its participants are Africans. It is not promoted or advertised rather interested immigrants are expected to visit the website of UWV. This begs the question of knowing exactly what one is searching for and where to search. All my respondents have had some form of contact with UWV in the past but none of them had heard of the HOA project before this interview.

The second program is that of the SNV (stage-carrousel). This is also designed to equip immigrants with skills specific to the Dutch work place though on a broader scope and longer time frame. The program is called stage-carrousel and its aim is to prepare immigrants so that they are employable. Essentially it helps them get work experience in Dutch companies most immigrants do not get jobs from Dutch employers because these employers claim that they do not have Dutch work experience. It is a program sponsored by the European integration funds and it is targeted at newcomers who have migrated for family reunification or as students and are unable to integrate in the labor market.

Participants attend a series of workshops for three months which is organized by the SNV. During the workshops, they are trained on Dutch work ethics and attitudes like flexibility, planning and organizing, communication, working together, Dutch language, etc. At the end of the workshops, internships positions relevant to their pre-migration qualification and experiences are found by SNV. This is also for a period of three months. At the end of the six month period, the immigrant is expected to have acquired Dutch work skills and be ready to seek skilled employment or return to school to retrain. Due to the importance of Dutch language skills in the Dutch work place, SNV visits schools where the citizenship (*inburgering*) courses are taught, to recruit newcomers for stage-carrousel. This is also a program that is not well known to immigrants and needs some publicity. The project is still in the pilot stage and is planned for operation throughout the Netherlands in the future.

### 5.4.2 Nigerian associations

There are various Nigerian migrant associations in the Netherlands established to guide Nigerians into the Dutch labor market but most are home town associations which offer help on an arbitrary manner. The associations interviewed are OtuIvbiEdo Association, Esan community, The Nigerian foundation, Oduduwa descendant association and Nigerian women association. Two others, Vital Aid Foundation and Goodwill heritage foundation, are formal non-governmental organizations not affiliated to any home town.

None of the home town associations presently has any structural project to directly prepare immigrants for the Dutch labor market though in the past, they had served as informal networks for their members to find jobs, often low skilled jobs.

On the other hand, both Vital Aid Foundation and Goodwill Heritage Foundation regularly organize Dutch language classes, information and ICT classes, business development skills, etc. for immigrants. This is to help develop the skills of Nigerians to enable them function in the labor market. Again this is aimed at low and semi- rather than the high-skilled immigrants. These two organizations focus on those who are desperate and don't know how to go about getting support and information in the Dutch society. They feel that the highly skilled are able to care for and inform themselves better than those the foundations help. They are therefore preparing these immigrants to be able to function at the bottom end of the Dutch labor market.

From the findings of this research, there appears to be no organization at present that to care for the interest of skilled immigrants. Some Nigerians are working to correct this. According to Jaye,

there is an organization of skilled Nigerians being set up to coordinate all the activities within the community and explore the possibilities. He speaks of extending it beyond Nigerians to include other African immigrants, in which case, the concept is that of an African consultation assembly. The aim is to form a platform across involving Africans which will be a political force negotiating with politicians in the Netherlands and/or supporting African politicians in governance back home (Amsterdam 14 July, 2011).

## 5.5 Conclusion

In this empirical Chapter, factors that contribute to the underemployment of Nigerian immigrants from the perspective of the immigrants and Dutch institutes have been presented. A major factor is the undervaluation of immigrants' educational qualifications by the evaluation commission and the lack of recognition of non-formal skills and experiences. These anomalies, according to Nigerian immigrants, make it difficult for Dutch employers to understand their pre-migration human capital and relate it to Dutch human capital. The evaluation commission has its system of evaluation of Nigerian educational qualifications which is based on its interpretation of the quality of education offered by Nigerian educational system.

The Dutch institution explains it in terms of imperfect transferability. That is, the context of these educational and professional qualifications is different from that of the Netherlands and so cannot be optimally utilized. Immigrants therefore should acquire the so-called host country specific skills or in this case, Dutch specific skills. A foremost requirement being proficiency in Dutch language. Nigerians interviewed perceive these requirements as exaggerated and designed to exclude thus making successful labor market integration a difficult task. Moreover, acquisition of post-migration skills has not been an automatic solution since in some cases, they remain underemployed in spite of their Dutch education.



Another significant factor is possession of the accurate residential documents without which participation in the formal labor market is legally impossible. None of the undocumented respondents had any job since it is an offence punishable by fine in the Netherlands. Instead undocumented immigrants either work privately in homes where no permits are requested or when they have jobs in the formal sector, it is usually by 'borrowing' the permit of a documented immigrant. This is the situation of Isibor (28) who delivers newspapers using the resident permit of another immigrant. All administration is done in the name of the owner of the permit (with his *Sofî* number) even though he does not carry out the job personally.

Duration of living in the Netherlands also has an influence on the level of integration of Nigerians. However this could be related to individual character of the immigrant. For the highly motivated Nigerians, their long stay in the Netherlands has been used to acquire human capital in specific specializations which has improved their outcome in the Dutch labor market. On the contrary, there were others who had lived for longer than 10 years in the Netherlands but had not improved their human capital and were still unskilled laborers. The agency of the individual and his attribution propel such an individual to take positive steps to succeed.

In the last chapter, these results are related to the concepts of this thesis and some conclusions are drawn.

# Conclusion and recommendation

## 6.1 Introduction

Making education free till the age of nine and compulsory till age 15 in Nigeria demonstrates the belief of the government and people in the value of education. My interactions with Nigerian immigrants before and during this research confirms that the bulk of them share this belief in education, are quite educated and belong to the group of immigrants that Mazuccato (2011) described as “having experience living in large metropolises in their own and other countries” (p 19). In the Netherlands, these same immigrants are forced by policy regulations and circumstances to set aside their prior skills and experiences and take on nondescript jobs that require very little skills. Jobs that pay very little. Remember Tom, the PhD holder at the beginning? His story narrated below is an example.

Tom was a university lecturer (with a master’s degree at the time) in Nigeria before travelling to the University of Liberia in 1997 on secondment for 2 years. At the expiration of his contract, he left for Singapore to study for a post-graduate diploma in management. In 2002, at the completion of this study, he decided to migrate to Europe for a PhD. He initially came to the Netherlands but because he could not get a position, he left for Spain. In Spain, he got a grant for a 6 year period, (two years to study Spanish and four years for the PhD). In 2009, he came back to the Netherlands to start a family with his Dutch partner. When I first met him in 2010, he had just had his certificate valued by NUFFIC and was looking for a decent job. In between job interviews, he was working in a manufacturing company as an unskilled worker. The job was temporary and was on call basis (*oproepbasis*). This means that the phone rings at 5 a.m in the morning for him to start work at 7.30 a.m which makes the job very insecure. For Tom it was very frustrating and he felt almost hopeless.

As at the time of this interview in 2011, he had lost this job but got another one as a cleaner in one of the train stations and has even enrolled for Dutch language classes. Meanwhile, possession of published journal articles is one of the requests from policy research organizations who are his prospective employers; thus he presently participates in conferences across Europe and submits articles to various journals for publication. Tom believes he is gaining more experience and building up his network. When I saw him in March 2012, it was in a library and he was writing an abstract for another journal. He still works as a cleaner at the train station but he is persuaded that eventually, he will get a decent job.

There are immigrants like Tom who work within the system to improve their position and participate fully in the Dutch labor market but there are others who are convinced that re-migrating to other parts of Europe is the simple response. There is a third group of immigrants (with skills) who remain in unskilled jobs, do not value their qualifications and cannot or choose not to re-migrate. In the course of interviewing my respondents, all three groups of immigrants were identified.

### *Summary of preceding chapters*

The first chapter introduced the utilization of skills of immigrants in host nations and identified brain waste as a problem with negative implications for the host and home countries and for immigrants. That is the link between migration, integration and development is reviewed. Chapter two explores the conceptual framework for this research and focuses on the concepts of human capital, attribution and deskilling. Within this framework, the relevance of pre-migration skills and the likely added value of post-migration skills are conceptualized. Next, literature on the labor market participation of African immigrants and in particular Nigerian immigrants is reviewed. It showed that they often work at the lower level of the Dutch labor market irrespective of their qualifications and experiences.

Chapter four presents the methods and methodology for the conduct of this research. Case study qualitative research method is used and data is collected through the use of in-depth interviews. Noteworthy is the insider-outsider debate. This is due to my being a Nigerian and a researcher interviewing Nigerian immigrants. Some of my respondents perceived me more as a researcher than a Nigerian, a perception that I often had to disagree with. It is not an issue of either one or the other but rather taking the required position to conduct a detailed research. In other words, sometimes being an insider who is able to identify with and better understand the subject and at other times, just a researcher. The results of the field work are presented in chapter five. The final chapter discusses the research findings and makes some recommendations both policy makers and further research studies.

## **6.2 Discussing research findings**

The first outcome of this study is the issue of certificate valuation and the implications of the advice of the certificate accreditation commission. The concept of recognition and the phenomenon of acceptance (see chapter 5) the basis upon which qualifications are valued, are regulations that raise some debate within the Nigerian (African) migrant community. A general consensus among immigrants is that their qualifications are almost always judged inferior to that obtained in the Netherlands and are thus downgraded resulting in a few immigrants (about 30%) participating at all in certificate valuation. A relevant question is, why are Nigerians so disinclined to have their certificates valued?

Three possibilities; First, either the remaining 70% concluded a priori that their diplomas are not worth valuating because they are of inferior quality; Secondly, they have concluded that even with the valuation, there is little or no chance of getting a job at commensurate level in the Dutch labor market; Thirdly these immigrants stay in the Netherlands long enough to obtain the necessary permits to enable them migrate onto where one of my respondents described as “a place of confidence”. In other words, the Netherlands then becomes a stepping-zone country to places like England or Canada, where most Nigerians believe that their certificates are better recognized and accepted and where language is not a barrier. It is also expected that there will be less underemployment and better prospects of high skilled jobs in their new destinations. van Rijn et al (2004) in their study about the 1998 cohort of Nigerians in the Netherlands also found that Nigerians tend to leave the Netherlands after arrival. The question here is what are the implications for the Dutch state of being a stepping-stone country for immigrants? It would appear that once they have the right documents from the Dutch state which allows them free access to other parts of the EU, they re-migrate. This is at a cost to the Dutch state, both financially and socially. If their re-migration has any consequences for the Dutch state, then it is necessary to provide the mechanisms for labor market integration. It is important to investigate the circumstances under which high skilled immigrants work and to make changes where necessary.

These immigrants conclude that there was no need to go through the long and expensive process of valuation; the plan is to live long enough in the Netherlands to work and save sufficient money to transit to the final destination. It is important to note that the valuation of certificates is not expensive in absolute amount (an application for a credential evaluation costs € 122. In case of an urgent application the costs amount to € 176). The argument of those who are against accreditation is that since the result of the valuation hardly improves their chances in the labor market, then the money is considered as not well-spent.

The connection of NUFFIC as the accreditation institute is crucial. If so few immigrants participate in certificate valuation, is the process failing or is the organization dysfunctional?

If so, what is the implication for policy? Is NUFFIC missing the point? If skilled immigrants use the Netherlands as a stepping zone to other countries, then that should raise some concerns among policy makers. If there are concerns, then there is need for NUFFIC to create programs to recognize educational and professional capabilities of immigrants.

Then what emerges out of this are a few principal findings:

As conceptualized by human capital, there is a direct relationship between level of educational qualification of an individual and the positioning of that individual in the labor market; however, the case of immigrants, is more complex. This is due to the effect of the source of their qualifications. A situation described as limited transferability of skills and imperfect compatibility of home and host country labor markets (see Basilio & Bauer, 2010). Explaining further, Schmidt (1997) posits that skills valuable in one labor market may not raise productivity in another labor market and hence may not generate equal income. That is, human capital of immigrants has to be transferred from their home country labor system to that of their host country, and because they are not often perfect substitutes, they are downgraded. Yet with the same certificates that are not 'compatible' in the Netherlands immigrants are able to get commensurate employment in England (see Mazzucato, 2011).

Being compelled to take unskilled jobs is one of the effects of undervaluation but it could also lead to lack of commitment to the Dutch society by Nigerians. The system, in their estimation, is unjust and conservative rather than progressive and this has implications on their level of participation in the society. Considering the current discourse on immigrant integration in public and private fora, there is need for a revision of rules and regulations governing the operations of Dutch organizations like NUFFIC. For example extending the Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) program to immigrants and also increasing the number of professions such that prior work experience are also evaluated instead of only their academic qualifications. There is similarly a need for coordination of various institutes which are responsible for the labor market integration of immigrants. This creates easier access to information (both about the institutes and the immigrants) and makes for improved communication between all actors.

For example, is it possible that there is too little publicity about the activities of NUFFIC at local levels? For example do city councils provide information to citizens especially immigrants about the functions of NUFFIC especially certificate valuation? Across Dutch municipalities and various institutes, there are numerous booklets providing information about available services but certificate valuation is not one of the services that are publicized in such a manner.

Second key finding is the emphasis placed on language proficiency by Dutch society. In the Netherlands since Dutch is the official language, immigrants are compelled to learn it in order to be able to function well in the society. For highly skilled immigrants, high level proficiency in Dutch language is a pre-condition for employment. From this study, it was discovered that majority of Nigerian immigrants find it difficult to attain the required proficiency level. This was due partly to individual characteristics like advanced age and institutional factors the (inadequate) curriculum of the *inburgering* program which has led to the failure of the training centers producing graduates with enough mastery of Dutch to function in even mid-level service jobs (see Bjornson, 2007). In this research three categories of Nigerians could be identified in terms of extent of participation in Dutch language lessons. First are those who completed the *inburgering* course and did further language study to improve their level of

Dutch proficiency. The second group stopped at the level of the integration courses but specialized in technological professions like ICT where extensive mastery of Dutch was not required. The third consisted of those who completed the civil integration program, did not do any further study of Dutch and did not acquire another post-migration qualification. Majority of the respondents were in this group and unskilled jobs in spite of their pre-migration qualifications.

It is often argued that the planning and delivery of the *Inburgering* program has given it more of an acculturating function than that of preparing immigrants to function at various cadres of the labor market. When Han Entzinger and Arie van der Zwan were commissioned (see van der Zwan and Entzinger, 1994) to prepare a new integration policy, it was with the labor market participation of immigrants at its core. In view of the overstated importance placed on language proficiency, it should be noted that highly educated African immigrants are linguistically versatile having studied in French, English, etc. and this should not be erased in the process of learning Dutch. As Bjornson (2007) wrote, the excessive focus on Dutch language acquisition, to the exclusion of other communicative skills, is symptomatic of the broader misconception about the post-industrial labor market and should be revisited.

In essence the above relates strongly to the concept of human capital. It would appear that acquisition of additional skills (post-migration) should be a gateway into the Dutch labor market. Apart from the problem of the cost of education which my respondents find unaffordable, even after acquisition of post-migration education, inadequate proficiency in Dutch language still creates an obstacle. Chiswick and Miller (2000) posit that knowledge of host country language can help immigrants make more efficient use of their pre-migration education and experiences. An argument based on results from this research is that it can also affect the use of post-migration human capital. For example, after finishing a study where English was the language of instruction, the graduate still has to work in an environment where Dutch is the language of communication. Inadequate mastery of Dutch can thus reduce the efficient use of the knowledge just acquired from a Dutch university. In a personal interview, a master graduate of Radboud University wrote more than 1,000 job application letters, attended some job interviews but did not get any job<sup>13</sup>. He was forced to go back to school to start a PhD program.

In this whole debate of finding adequate employment, the effect of social capital should be high-lighted. Van Tubergen (2006) pointed out that the type of social capital that immigrants build has enormous influence on their labor market positioning. It affects social mobility and access to the labour market (Drever & Hoffmeister, 2008) and when such contacts are built predominantly among their own ethnic groups as found by van Tubergen (2006), it tends to channel them towards unskilled and low-paid jobs. This is an argument that is debatable. Immigrants have the same need that human beings have when they get to a strange environment, and that is to seek the familiar and create some sort of identity. But then for the 'new type' of immigrant that is not all. Because he/she is likely educated, exposed to urban living and ambitious, this individual keeps his contacts within his ethnic group while building additional social networks in his new destination.

This was true in the case of my respondents when they first arrived in the Netherlands. They all initially identified themselves with other Nigerians in an attempt to sustain that atmosphere and character of home country that was familiar. This led them to take unskilled jobs since that was all their contacts with fellow migrants could bring them. However, the ambitious

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<sup>13</sup> Personal interview with a student of business management of Radboud University. He is originally from Somalia.

men and women among them who had been well-engaged economically in the Nigerian society before migrating ‘broke out of the mold’ and sought to educate and build better lives for themselves. They returned to school, got better jobs and built new networks while still keeping their network of primarily fellow migrants. The agency of the individual is thus an important factor in determining whether that individual makes the choices that leads to improved outcome in the labor market.

### *Dutch labor policy*

At this juncture, it is appropriate to assess the Dutch labor policy from the perspective of immigrants, their reactions and effect on Dutch economy. The Netherlands was one of the European countries affected by the economic stagnation of the late 70s in terms of unemployment, budget deficit, bankruptcy of private enterprises, decrease of national income and loss of unionization (Visser and Hemerijck 1997). The dominant interpretation being that the low creation of jobs was caused by labor market ‘rigidities’ and there was only one possible answer, flexibilization. The *Flexibility and Security Act* thus came into force on 1st January 1999. It was the result of a long series of efforts to reduce unemployment by introducing more flexibility into Dutch labor law. These were joint efforts by employers, employees’ associations, trade unions and the government, a cooperation commonly termed the ‘polder model’.

In 2008, the European Union approved the policy framework on flexicurity which is applicable across the union (European Commission 2007b, 2008). But how does this affect immigrants from outside the EU? As indicated by various researches, a policy of flexible labor market makes immigrants from outside the EU vulnerable through temporary employment, inability to benefit from between- job and between-job and private life transitions, and forced self-employment. (Bijwaard and Veenman 2008; ILO 2007; OECD 2008a and 2008b).

The case of Nigerians in the Netherlands has some peculiarities which need to be reiterated. First, Nigeria belongs to the group of newcomers in the Netherlands who have not been prominent either in Dutch institutional statistics or social science research. The few available statistics indicate them as relatively well-educated, often with university education but generally with at least a secondary education. In addition to the population of documented Nigerians, there is an undocumented group for which there is no statistical estimate. Secondly, Nigerians have gained some notoriety in the Dutch public sphere due to the unscrupulous activity of very few members. This has smeared the image of Nigerians among the Dutch populace leading to negative attitudes towards Nigerians in general. These bad image has adverse effects on the activities of Nigerians and they conceive this image as additional reasons for their inability to participate fully in the Dutch economy, whether in seeking employment or as entrepreneurs. They therefore perceive themselves as doubly disadvantaged not just as immigrants but also because they are Nigerians with all the assumed negative implications of their nationality.

Yet, there are Nigerian immigrants, engaged in various sectors of the Dutch society, working for large Dutch and international organizations and contributing to the economy. There is even a larger pool, deduced from this study that is highly skilled, willing to participate in the Dutch labor market but hindered by a list of factors already mentioned. Their recourse is to migrate to other lands. These are the ones that Mazzucato (2010) described in her inaugural speech as having a higher chance of succeeding elsewhere and they therefore ultimately

leaving for 'greener pastures'. These are the educated ones with the right papers allowing them to travel. Mazzucato (2010) argued that these immigrants (when compelled to leave) are a lost opportunity for destination countries that need educated workers. The ones who remain behind do so because they are unable to leave. They are low-educated, have few financial resources and do not have the right papers to travel legally. Mazzucato (2010) further states that ultimately a hardened migration policy, and I add, labor policy, provoke those with financial resources and skills to leave and those with few resources and undocumented status to stay with little or no possibility of integrating into the host society. This is symptomatic of Nigerian and other African immigrants in the Netherlands and it is exemplified by the story of Joy (as narrated by Mazzucato, 2010).

Is the Dutch labor market an international and dynamic one responding to the changing face of its inhabitants or is it static, just keeping to same standards? Are the Dutch migration/labor policies strategically protectionist, are they designed to be inclusive or are they based on obsolete data? How do all of these ultimately affect the Dutch labor market?

In the Netherlands policies concerning immigrants are still based on data collection exercises of the 'traditional' migrant groups, meaning the guest workers who entered Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. But the new migrants coming into Europe since the 1980s are a distinct group. They often have experience living in large metropolises in their own and other countries, and thus do not need to adjust to an urban context when they arrive in the Global North (Mazzucato, 2010). The implication of this is that Nigerian and other African immigrants possess skills and experiences that should not be automatically discarded or downgraded. An example is the diverse language abilities of African immigrants. Highly educated African immigrants tend to be linguistically versatile having studied in French, English, etc. and this should not be erased in the process of learning Dutch. Excessively focusing on Dutch language acquisition, to the exclusion of other communicative skills, is symptomatic of a broader misconception about the post-industrial labor market (Bjornson, 2007). This is the current policy of the Dutch integration courses. Rather there is need to establish programs to recognize and utilize the various stock of human capital of immigrants.

Second, unlike the earlier traditional migrants, the new migrants presently travel to destinations with which their countries of origin had no previous colonial (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008) or economic ties. Now they are more guided by where economic and living opportunities lie for them, meaning they are more mobile and willing to leave when conditions are unfavorable. The case of the Somalis who left the Netherlands en-masse for London, Leicester and Birmingham between 1999 and 2005 is a case in point. Van Liempt (2011) estimated that between 10,000 and 20,000 Somalis left for the UK in this period for better economic and educational opportunities. These were refugees who flee to the Netherlands between 1989 and 1993 but due to difficulty in integrating emigrated from the Netherlands. According to van Heelsum (2011) the better educated ones constituted a large majority of those who left to seek better opportunities in the United Kingdom.

One implication of the stringent migration and labor policy on the Dutch labor market is a shrinking pool of high educated workers especially with the imminent retirement of a large part of the Dutch workforce. Corvers, Euwals & de Grip (2011) note that the supply side equation in the Dutch labor market is changing while as early as 2008, the OECD (2008) warned that the Dutch economy is now facing labor shortages related to the greying of the

population. More specifically, Corvers & Fouarge (2011)<sup>14</sup> estimated that between 2011 and 2016, about two million people will leave the Dutch labor market due to old age.

Going further, the OECD (2008) describes the continued weak labor market-participation of several groups including immigrants as another probable cause of labor shortage in the Netherlands. For those people, reforms are needed and activation strategies to get them involved should be enhanced. Their job-search activities should be facilitated by an easing of employment protection legislation, which currently reduces the fluidity of the labor market.

All in all, this thesis has been able to answer the original research question. The empirical data showed that Nigerians indeed possess diverse stock of pre-migration human capital at semi- and high-skilled levels. Their expertise includes medicine, computer technology, finance and accounting, music, etc. NUFFIC is the Dutch accreditation organization for higher education and it evaluates the educational content (of human capital) in terms of actual subjects and hours of schooling. However the professional competence of immigrants are neither recognized nor translated thus cannot be understood by prospective Dutch employers. This creates a hurdle for Dutch employers to depend on professional competence that immigrants have acquired in work environments which are different from Dutch work settings. Their previous skills are therefore not utilizable in the Dutch labor market.

Bearing this argument in mind and considering the concept of attribution, individual immigrants are motivated to acquire the so-called (host-country) Dutch specific skills (including language skills) and needed social capital which is more understandable by Dutch employers than skills that were acquired in Nigeria. It is expected that acquisition of new skills will make it possible to participate at high levels of the host country society and enable immigrants to better integrate and be more capable of contributing both to his/her host and home economies. This study shows that for majority of African immigrants, human and social capital are insufficient to get them well integrated in the Dutch labor market. In addition, there are political, social, cultural and economic factors within the structure of Dutch society that play major roles. It is therefore important for the immigrant to work within the structures and institutions operating in the society to achieve his/her goals.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

As a result of this study, I make the following recommendations.

#### *Dutch policy makers and institutes*

As stated a few lines ago, most government statistical data and research studies are still based on 'traditional' migrant groups in the Netherlands. These are the former guest workers from Morocco and Turkey; and those from the former colonies of Indonesia, Suriname and Antillean. There is need for data collection on the 'new' immigrant groups. Then future migration (and labor) policies could be based on current trends rather than solely on the dynamics of groups facing the consequences of policies from more than half a century ago. Only then can policy effectively address migration (and labor) issues and reduce unintended effects of contradictory policies. It will also keep the needed human capital from leaving the Netherlands for other countries.

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<sup>14</sup> See Retiring baby-boomers free up jobs on <http://www.rnw.nl/english/bulletin/retiring-baby-boomers-free-jobs>



There are various Dutch programs established to propel immigrants along the path to a successful labor market outcome. In addition to re-designing them, taking into consideration the new type of immigrant, there is need to make these programs more accessible to immigrants. To make these projects even more beneficial, there is need for improved working cooperation between Dutch organizations and diverse migrant groups including Nigerian migrant associations.

With regards to NUFFIC in particular, first of all, there is need to put mechanisms for labor market integration of immigrants in place. For example identifying the content of their prior human capital that is utilizable in the Dutch labor market and making provision for needed short-term training. This is possible if organized and coordinated with interested employers. Secondly, there is need for publicizing the activities of NUFFIC at local levels for example city councils, migrant organizations including churches and Dutch organizations handling migrant issues.

There is need for the establishment of an African information center. Such a center should aim to bring information about Dutch society to immigrants in simplified forms so that they are utilizable. Often there are multiple agencies in charge of different aspects of the lives of immigrants that information becomes very complex and difficult to process. From this research, it was obvious that Nigerians have a lot of difficulties in accessing information about Dutch society.

On the part of Nigerian immigrants, there is a need for a Nigerian forum. This is intended as a common 'front'. In the study of Nigerian migrant associations, the fragmented state of Nigerians living in the Netherlands became very obvious. Nigerians in the Netherlands are organized mainly along tribal lines. Each association organizes social activities for Nigerians from its own ethnic background and each is independent with very little working cooperation. In the course of the interviews with leaders of these associations and individuals, it appeared that the only meeting point that is central to Nigerians is the church. The organizational structure of these associations is weak and they are financially incapable of operating at policy levels in the Netherlands to influence matters of importance to their members. In the light of this division, establishing a Nigerian forum to help pursue matters of social and economic importance to the community is vital.

#### *Recommendation for further research*

As regards further research, this research shows that there is need for an extensive databank that catalogs the skills of Nigerian and other African immigrants in the Netherlands. Skill identification should be with the purpose of skill utilization in the labor market. There is research need in identifying the trends in integration. That is comprehensive, systematic and periodic reflections on the integration of newcomers. This way research can shed light on interesting improvements. The most essential data with regards to labor market integration is the socio-economic participation of immigrants and for African immigrants this is not yet easily available.

An investigation into the social mobility prospects for immigrants is a possible area of research. Considering the often cited problem of mismatch between immigrants foreign qualifications and the need and desires of Dutch employers, investigations needs to be carried out on the modalities for adapting foreign human capital to the Dutch employers desires. A joint effort between research institutes, the relevant division of government, employers and migrant organizations.

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# Appendices

## A. Sample questionnaire:

1. Personal Information of respondent
2. Migration history and motive
3. Residential status (1) Documented (2) Undocumented
4. Duration of stay: How long have you lived in the Netherlands?
5. Education: Which education/skill did you acquire in Nigeria and in the Netherlands?
6. Work experience: Work experience prior to and since migrating and relationship between the two.
7. Language skills: What is your level of spoken Dutch on a scale of:  
(a) Poor (b) Average (c) Above-average
8. Integration: What is integration to you and how integrated are you on a scale of  
(a) Not well-integrated  
(b) Averagely-integrated  
(c) Well-integrated
9. Social network. How well do you interact with Dutch citizens and those from other countries? Can you compare it with your interaction with fellow Nigerians?

## B. Summary of interviews

### *Juliet (44) Female*

Juliet came to the Netherlands in 1995 to reunite with her husband. As a qualified teacher in Nigeria, she expected to continue as a teacher upon arrival. In preparation, she took intensive Dutch lessons. Unfortunately, her request for permanent resident permit was delayed and without it she could neither validate her diploma nor follow the required teacher training education. Meanwhile, she started work in a factory at unskilled level to support the education of her siblings in Nigeria. After seven years and a court battle she got her permit. Even though she still desires to be a teacher, the conditions are difficult to fulfill. She has to quit her job and attend school, an action that limits the family income (she has four children aged 8-19) and her ability to assist her family back home is hindered. So she continues being under-employed, in spite of the frustration she feels.

### *Joy (37) Female*

Even though Joy was born in England, her parents returned to Nigeria where she had her education. She returned to the UK, got a master degree in computer science and worked in the IT sector. She came to the Netherlands as an expatriate and works as an IT consultant. Since her education and experience were acquired in the UK, it was easy to transfer those skills to the Dutch workplace. In spite of speaking little or no Dutch, she is able to function effectively in the international organization (in Amsterdam) where she works.

### *Marylin (38) Female*

Marylin migrated to the Netherlands with her three children in 1988 to re-unite with her husband. She was a graduate of banking and finance who worked as a finance executive with Cadbury Nigeria. Unable to find same level of work in the Netherlands, she retrained as a nurse. She spent four years learning Dutch in order to be able to practice as a nurse and



another four years to qualify. In her case, it was possible to devote the time because her husband earned enough income to support the family.

*Mike (47) Male*

As an economic migrant, Mike migrated to the Netherlands 22 years ago with a secondary education. He planned to continue his education, so in addition to working in a production factory, he followed an MBO in business administration. In spite of being a Dutch taught course, he could not get a job. He returned, this time, to a British University (in the Netherlands) to do a bachelor study in computer science. It was an English taught course. Mike was convinced that this Dutch would never be good enough for a high skilled job and since English was the universal computer language, it would be easier to get jobs with international organizations. Mike was right; he has been working with various international business organizations as a software programmer ever since.

*Peter (51) Male*

Like Mike, Peter was an economic migrant with music as his profession. Peter is a drummer and trained in the Netherlands as a sound technician. Peter has a wide audience of Dutch natives and immigrants that invite him to perform at various events. He has a broad social network. Although his level of spoken Dutch is low, he gets sufficient jobs since he does not need the language for his audiences.

*Jaye (42) Male*

Jaye was a practicing obstetrician and gynecologist in Nigeria where he met his Dutch partner who was a visiting doctor at the time. She returned to the Netherlands and he later, to join her. When he got here, he realized that he could not practice medicine immediately due to the language difference and the need for re-qualification, both of which would cost him 6 years to fix. His Nigerian medical certificate was not acceptable in the Netherlands. It was very frustrating for him and even though he decided not to clean toilets, he did work for the Postal service for some time. Working at that unskilled level was so unsatisfying that he left for Ireland where he was able to work as a medical doctor. This was possible after only 6 months requalification exams. After a period in Ireland he returned to the Netherlands because of his family and started the journey of re-qualifying. Jaye explained that knowing that he could go to another country and practice his profession built his confidence and helped him face the challenge of re-qualifying in the Netherlands. He is currently a general medical practitioner.

*Leye (32) Male*

Leye came as a student because at that time the cost of studying in the Netherlands was very low. His plan was to complete his education and move to the UK to work. He completed his study in accounting but met a Dutch native whom he married. This made him decide to stay and initially, he was underemployed as an account assistant, a job at VWO level. He worked there for two months before his employer noticed the quality of his work and re-examined his contract. He was then employed as a qualified accountant.

*Daniel (23) Male*

Daniel is an undocumented immigrant who has been rejected asylum. He had secondary education before migrating and during the asylum procedure he enrolled for Dutch language lessons and started a HBO study in international business. He was able to get sponsorship from (Stichting voor Vluchteling-Studenten, Foundation for Refugee students) UAF. One year after he started his study, his asylum request was denied and without a permit to stay, he

had to stop his education. So now he lives as an undocumented immigrant unable to complete his education, doing unskilled jobs when he can find it and living on the generosity of church members and friends.

*Isibor (28) Male*

Isibor migrated to the Netherlands five years ago due to political persecutions in Nigeria. His asylum procedure lasted three years before he was denied the permit to stay. He graduated with an OND and worked as an assistant administrative officer to the secretary to the government of one of the states in Nigeria. As at the time of this interview Isibor worked delivering newspaper. He is able to work by borrowing the SOFI number of a documented Nigerian. Out of the little he earns, Isibor has to pay for using someone else's document.

*Ayo (51) Male*

Even though Ayo was a university graduate in Nigeria, he ran his own small business. When he got to the Netherlands 17 years ago and it was with the intention of continuing as an entrepreneur, especially since his level of Dutch was poor and he could not take out the time to attend a language school. He worked for a short period as factory laborer before starting his import/export business. He has never evaluated his certificates since his plan was to start a business and not look for a high skilled job.