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DURHAM UNIVERSITY

School social workers' role in facilitating the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi Arabian public schools

PhD Thesis

School of Applied Social Sciences

Durham University

Majed Alharbi

February 2024

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Abstract

This research study explores the role of school social workers in Saudi Arabia in integrating Syrian refugee students (referred to in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as 'visitors') into schools and identifies their needs and the challenges they face. The study responds to a gap in the research literature, where attention to Syrian refugee school children has focussed on countries other than Saudi Arabia. Using a mixed methods approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with school principals, social workers, and Syrian refugee students in two cities, while school teachers participated in an online questionnaire to understand the experiences of all parties in working towards the integration of refugee students in the school system. Five principal themes emerged associated with: i) hardships faced by the Syrian refugee students and their families; ii) the implications of refugees' status as 'visitors' in Saudi schools; iii) challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia; iv) support systems and mechanisms within schools and v) what constitutes an appropriate school environment for successful integration. Drawing on ecological theory, this study explores challenges faced by Syrian refugee students and explores the role of school social workers in facilitating their integration into Saudi schools. School social workers address individual trauma and enhance communication between students' families and educational institutions, serving as crucial mediators across micro- and meso-system levels. They also collaborate with community resources, and actively engage with broader community and societal structures. As the first study to explore the obstacles faced by Syrian refugee pupils in Saudi Arabia, and the role of school social workers in promoting integration into schools, it brings unique insights into the role of school social workers in Saudi Arabia and their influence in the integration of refugee and non-refugee minorities into the prevailing public education system.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Study background

The Syrian civil war, which occurred in 2011 at the peak of the Arab Spring¹, forced millions of families to leave Syria and seek asylum or refuge in neighbouring and more distant countries. These refugees face multiple difficulties which demand attention from the countries in which they have settled. Adequate education, health, housing, and managing social issues are among the major challenges that confront them in the new places they now call home. Host governments and institutions are required by international laws such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, as well as their own national policies, whether or not they are signatories to these conventions, to help refugees by implementing policies, interventions, and programmes to protect their rights and affirm their well-being (Abahussain, 2019; AlThenayan, 2020). Children arriving with their families are among the most vulnerable as they face increased challenges, especially with regards to enrolment into host countries' educational systems. Indeed, access to education is an urgent need for refugee children. A 2019 report from UNHCR indicated that, worldwide, of the 7.1 million school-aged refugee children, 3.07 million did not attend school (UNHCR, 2019). I argue that schools' infrastructure particularly in terms of effective social work practice, should enable refugee students to integrate, overcoming the barriers they face and eventually fulfilling their educational need in their host countries.

Currently, Saudi Arabia has unclear policies and programmes regarding the integration of Syrian refugee students into public schools². Instead, Saudi Arabia receive refugees using its own regulatory frameworks, which do not necessarily align with the 1951 Refugee Convention (Lysa, 2022). Social workers, stationed in public schools, are vital to helping those in need to integrate into the school system successfully (Duman and Snoubar, 2017). However, this topic has not been investigated by researchers in the Saudi Arabian context. Most relevant refugee education studies have been undertaken in countries where Arabic is not the first language. For example, the current literature mainly contains studies conducted

¹ The Arab Spring was a series of protests and uprisings across the Arab world, starting in late 2010. It involved widespread calls for political reform, social justice, and economic opportunity, as people stood against authoritarian regimes (Zuber and Moussa, 2018).

² Public schools are educational institutions funded and operated by the government, providing free education to students.

in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and Scandinavian countries, which already have clear policies and programmes for refugee integration.

Moreover, in some Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey, Syrian refugee students suffer from language and cultural barriers that can seriously hinder their integration progress. And they may also face significant difficulties in Arab speaking countries such as Lebanon, which usually rely on other languages such as French and English in their school systems (Duman and Snoubar, 2017; Lau et al., 2018; Wofford and Tibi, 2018; Reynolds and Bacon, 2018; Crul et al. 2019; Dryden et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2021). According to Dressler and Gereluk (2017), various programmes and schools around the world utilise language or cultural advisors to support refugee students and their families by translating and explaining the host country's educational policies due to language barriers. Although many studies highlight language as a barrier to education for refugee students, this issue may be less significant in the Gulf countries³, where Syrian refugee and the local population both speak Arabic.

It is worth noting that developed and developing countries have established specific programmes for integrating Syrian refugees into their territories (Ferris and Kirişci, 2016; (Duman and Snoubar, 2017; Dressler and Gereluk, 2017). Those countries have their own strategies for helping Syrian refugees settle in, with programs that vary depending on each country's resources and cultural practices. This study seeks to address the gap in the literature by highlighting essential factors required to support Syrian refugee students' integration into Saudi schools. It is hoped that this will provide valuable insights to enable school social workers, policymakers, and educators to improve such integration. At this point, it is crucial to note that Syrian refugees are considered "dhaiif", which in Arabic means a visitor or guest – in this context a visitor or guest living in the cities - and this term necessarily confers the status of 'other' such individuals, who may need clear programs and intervention to support integration. This is because some labels assigned to refugees in a specific country might impact the effectiveness of programmes that help refugees in their new places (Zetter, 2007; Pace, and Simsek, 2019).

³ The Gulf Cooperation Council countries – Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.

Over the last two years, while carrying out my research and thoroughly exploring the field, there have been new developments in the literature about Syrian refugees in Saudi Arabia in general. Examples of scholarly publications on this subject are: *Nostalgia Among Syrian Refugees* (Wildschut, et al, 2019), which examines the refugees' situation; *The Case of Displaced Syrians in 2019: The Saudi Approach to Reception and Accommodation* (Osmandzиковic, 2020); *Saudi Policies Toward Migrants and Refugees: A Sacred Duty* (Kechichian and Alsharif, 2021); and most recently, Lysa's (2022) article titled 'Governing Refugees in Saudi Arabia (1948–2022)' (pp. 22 and 23). However, there have been no published studies concerning Syrian refugee students, the roles of school social workers or schools working with students.

1.2 The evolution of social work in Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia presents a unique case regarding the social work profession, which is marked by the country's rapid development towards global practices while also navigating the conservative nature of its cultural and legal frameworks. This section revolves around the progression of social work in Saudi Arabia, with a focus on education, ethical practices, and particularly the implementation of children's rights as part of the broader framework of global social work standards.

The profession of social work in Saudi Arabia has witnessed significant changes over recent years. Historically, social work in the Kingdom has been influenced by Islamic traditions and values, which emphasize charity and the welfare of the community. However, modern educational and professional practices have begun to integrate more secular and internationally recognised standards. According to Albrithen (2014), social work education features an evolving curriculum that now includes global social work ethics alongside traditional teachings. Although Saudi social work ethics reflects a broader, more universal set of values, integration is gradual and not without challenges. This is because ethical social work practice in Saudi Arabia must balance international norms with local cultural and religious norms, presenting a unique blend of guidelines that respect both global standards and Islamic principles (Albrithen and Briskman, 2015).

Saudi Arabia's engagement with international conventions is selective, reflecting its strategic national interests and cultural values. The Kingdom is not a signatory to the 1951

Refugee Convention, which significantly impacts the practice of social work with displaced persons and refugees. However, the ratification of the UNCRC has not been neglected in Saudi Arabia; it has significantly heightened focus on children's rights within the Kingdom, particularly in the educational sector.

While Saudi Arabia supports children's rights through its laws, the actual practitioners still struggle to meet these commitments due to several social and cultural challenges (AlThenayan, 2020). This is because such a path presents a complex interplay between international commitments and local practices. Abahussain (2019) argues that there is a growing awareness and implementation of children's rights among principals and teachers in the educational sector, although several challenges such as culture and school setting prevent the full realisation of these rights, especially in conservative and rural areas of Saudi Arabia.

Recent developments in Saudi Arabia's political, social, and economic sectors are aligned with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030, led by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. These aim to transform the Kingdom into a dynamic nation with a strong emphasis on social welfare. According to Mahmoud (2022), there is a need for a professional framework to support group social work practices, which are essential for advancing children's rights and welfare. Thus, consideration of international social work ethics is reforming how social welfare and children's rights are addressed by school social workers because as Saudi Arabia continues to implement its Vision 2030 policies, social work is becoming important in bridging the gap between traditional values and global standards.

1.3 Research rationale

The current research project was motivated by my personal observations and experiences in related educational contexts. While studying at undergraduate level in Saudi Arabia, I worked in the Education sector as a social worker and student counsellor and, during postgraduate training in the USA, I interacted with many individuals of different nationalities who represented minority groups within the host society. At that time, I helped minority group learners from different countries around the world with schoolwork and provided guidance to enable them to settle into their new social setting. Additionally, I assisted staff and teachers in understanding these students' personal situations and educational needs.

This experience resulted in me gaining valuable experience working with children and young people in American schools. I recognized the need for refugee students to adapt to their new educational and community environments which differed considerably from their previous experiences and backgrounds. Specifically, because the students came from different backgrounds, they had a pressing need to integrate into this new schools by overcoming a range of daily obstacles. Relatedly, research has shown that supporting integration plays a pivotal role in bridging the gaps between students' different backgrounds by unifying them as valuable members of their new community (Reynolds and Bacon, 2018).

Therefore, by interacting with members of refugee communities, educational researchers and practitioners can gain a better understanding of the difficulties that refugees and minorities face as a result of their transition into a new society. Numerous aspects including language, customs, and traditions can all affect this process and, in most cases, these differences tend to lead to multiple familial- and peer-related problems. Therefore, while it might seem inevitable that refugee students will encounter painful experiences while adapting to their new environment, experienced school social workers can assist them in learning to overcome these issues in school and in their new community by helping them to understand their new environment. Here, it is crucial to note that school social workers play a vital role in implementing and establishing programmes and strategies to assist refugees and minorities in integrating harmoniously with their new peers and minimise the challenges they face.

This research project aims to provide decision-makers (including the Ministry of Education, student counsellors, and educators) in Saudi Arabia with a valuable understanding of the needs and challenges facing school-aged refugees from war-torn Syria, who are likely to be suffering from physical and/or psychological harm as a result of their experiences in the conflict. Indeed, it is difficult and often impossible for these refugees to return to their homeland due to the ongoing life-threatening events they and their families face. Therefore, the Saudi Arabian government and its institutions need to combine their efforts to develop effective ways of supporting these refugees' integration by enabling them to take full advantage of the Saudi education system.

1.4 Aims, objectives and research questions

Host nations play a critical role in refugee children's lives as they grow up and become productive members of the host society. In Saudi Arabia, refugees generally do not have formal refugee status, as the country is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention; however, this does not necessarily affect their legal ability to work and earn. Most Syrian refugees in Saudi Arabia are not eligible for citizenship but do have access to health, education, and work, depending on their specific legal status. As for the duration of their stay, it often varies; some may view Saudi Arabia as a temporary refuge due to their legal status, planning to return to Syria when circumstances allow, others might see a potential future in Saudi Arabia, depending on their access to employment opportunities and the stability of their homeland. It is therefore the responsibility of the host nation and their institutions, including schools, to provide for and satisfy the needs of these children to enable them to succeed in life. Most professionals responsible for these children in host nations focus on providing therapeutic interventions while others offer rehabilitation and prevention programs; however, host governments and relevant institutions also need to offer social support systems for these newcomers (Rousseau and Guzder, 2008; Soltan et al., 2020).

This study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role that school social workers play in assisting Syrian refugee children to integrate into Saudi schools. Given the limited literature on the direct practices of school social workers with Syrian refugees in this context, this research draws upon broader literature from various countries at different times, including the UK, the United States, and Turkey. By examining school social work practices centred around refugees, this study seeks to identify and articulate the specific roles and contributions of school social workers in facilitating refugees' integration into the schools.

It is hoped that the findings will maximise the opportunities for further studies in this field with a focus on the Middle East, and Saudi Arabia in particular, due to the increasing numbers of refugees from war-torn countries in the region. Although in developed

countries⁴, social workers play a crucial role in assisting the vulnerable, developing countries⁵ are also in urgent need of such professionals and evidence-based frameworks for them to provide such care. I hope that the results of this study will benefit the work of practitioners, researchers, educators, and policymakers in the near future.

In view of the importance of this research, its key objectives are as follows:

- To explore the roles played by school social workers in Saudi Arabia, and how they are helping refugee students to integrate into the Saudi schools.
- To study the impact of the Saudi school environment on Syrian refugee students.
- To investigate the challenges of Syrian refugee students experience both inside school and outside of school.
- To identify the roles of Saudi teachers in the school environment in relation to refugee students.
- To identify the interventions, using school social workers' (school counsellors') professional services, that meet the needs of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia.

Research questions

This section outlines the research questions relating to this study, as follows:

1. What are the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools?
2. What are the needs of Syrian refugee students and what obstacles do they encounter in schools?
3. What difficulties are encountered by teachers and schools when educating Syrian refugee students?
4. What is the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students to integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?

⁴ Developed countries typically feature industrialised economies, high living standards, and robust economic growth (Mahler et al, 2015).

⁵ Developing countries are often primarily agricultural or less industrialised, with lower living standards and economies characterized by weak growth or stagnation (Mahler et al, 2015).

1.5 Use of terminology

The concepts of domestic violence, child abuse, violence within the home, sexual exploitation, and sexual harassment are indeed contested, with definitions often varying across cultural, legal, and academic contexts (Backhaus et al., 2023; Laird et al., 2023; Elzamzamy et al., 2022; Ranganathan et al., 2021). Recognising these debates, I have chosen specific terms to provide clarity and context in this thesis, examining their implications for child well-being and protection. For instance, I use violence within the home as an umbrella term to discuss harmful behaviours occurring in family settings, and sexual harassment when addressing certain gender-related issues observed in school contexts. This helps maintain consistent terminology throughout to reflect these nuances and avoid conflation.

Additionally, I employ the term child maltreatment as it provides a comprehensive understanding that encompasses a range of harmful behaviours, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse. Unlike the narrower term child abuse, maltreatment allows for a broader discussion of adverse actions that may not be legally classified as abuse but still compromise children's well-being. This terminology captures the full scope of behaviours affecting vulnerable children, which is crucial for developing effective policies, protective measures, and awareness initiatives within educational settings. By clearly defining and distinguishing these terms, we can better address complex situations, promote positive relationships, and protect vulnerable children (Ranganathan et al., 2021).

1.6 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of eleven chapters as follows: Chapter 1 introduces the study and establishes the context. It describes the background of the study, the evolution of social work in Saudi Arabia and explains the rationale behind conducting this research. The research lies within the field of social work with refugees and education. Moreover, this chapter presents the aims, objectives, and research questions of study.

Chapter 2 begins by investigating and discussing the broad context of Saudi Arabia concerning refugees of different nationalities such as Uzbekistani, Rohingya, Iraqi, Kuwaiti, Syrian and Yemeni. More importantly, this chapter presents Saudi Arabia's policies

regarding receiving Syrian refugees as well as the important services provided to them. After that, it goes on to discuss the history of school social work in Saudi Arabia and how this profession has performed after passing five significant stages that benefit the Saudi schools. School social work with refugees is the third section of the literature review chapter that explores and discusses how school social workers integrate refugee students into schools. Most previous studies on the integration of refugee students and the challenges they experienced in their new land, were not specific to Syrian refugees and were conducted in countries other than Saudi Arabia. For this reason, the literature review involved broader studies conducted with refugee students who sought refuge in countries whose cultural background and schools differed significantly from their own. Thus, this chapter contains a section which addresses this situation and discusses social and school integration as a concept and its other related concepts such as assimilation and acculturation. Also, this chapter explores belonging and how it relates to school and social integration. Finally, this chapter consider important theories that discuss integration such as ecological and resilience theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Breda, 2018; Ungar, 2004).

Chapter 3 describes the design and methodology followed to achieve the objectives of the study and answer the research questions. It introduces the nature of the study as mixed method research and the ethical considerations involved in conducting it which involved seeking approval from Durham University and the Saudi Ministry of Education. The mixed methods approach involved two phases of the research. The first phase is qualitative, and participants include school social workers, principals, and Syrian refugee students. Moreover, it describes the procedure of conducting face-to-face interviews with male participants and telephone interviews with female participants as well as the locality of the interviews. It also discusses the techniques used to conduct a thematic analysis of the data. The second phase is quantitative and provides the recruitment of Saudi school teachers from two cities, A and B, to participate in the questionnaire. Furthermore, this phase includes discussion of the technique used to analyse closed-ended questions and the thematic analysis technique used for open-ended questions. Finally, it highlighted the reflection on the methodology, including the limitations, constraints, and strengths of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the first theme emerging from the qualitative data: hardships faced by Syrian refugee students and their families, highlighting the nature of their challenges before and after arriving in Saudi Arabia such as the impacts of war and legal status. Moreover, this theme includes the way Syrian refugees and their children rebuild their lives in Saudi Arabia and the effects of the circumstances experienced during this stage on the children.

Additionally, Chapter 4 involves a second theme which investigates the support systems and mechanisms within schools for Syrian refugee students. It also explores the motivation of school staff, which is based on religion and culture, in working with and integrating new students into schools, in the absence of a formal programme to integrate Syrian refugee students. This chapter will answer the first research question, which is: What are the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian schools? It will also partially address the second research question: What are the needs of Syrian refugee students, and what obstacles do they encounter in schools?

Chapter 5 introduces the third theme derived from the qualitative findings, which focuses on the challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia. This theme involves both external and internal challenges these students encounter, along with an exploration of how these challenges are interrelated and their social and psychological impacts. Internal challenges encompass bullying and discrimination, differences in curriculum, and the impact of attending single-sex schools. External challenges include the necessity for male students to work, as well as the risks of sexual harassment and violence within the home. This theme addresses the third research question: What are the needs of Syrian refugee students and what obstacles do they encounter in schools?

Chapter 6 is the last chapter of qualitative findings and discusses themes 4 and 5. The fourth theme concentrates on the experiences of Saudi schools in supporting Syrian refugee students which requires school staff to understand the students' backgrounds and circumstances. Also, this support entails detecting problems early, raising awareness of school staff and local students about the rights of Syrian refugee students, consultations, parental engagement, and financial support, with a shortage of resources and absence of a formal programme. The fifth theme refers to what is an appropriate school environment for integration. This explores the importance of a welcoming school atmosphere to ensure that refugee students form a positive impression of their new schools. This stage also involves

school staff's flexibility in facing and overcoming the challenges faced by students such as low academic achievement, working while studying, bullying, and discrimination. In relation to the research questions, both themes address the fourth research question: What is the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?

Chapter 7 describes the quantitative findings from the responses of the teachers who participated in the survey. The technique utilised in this phase was descriptive statistics. The chapter begins by providing a demographic of the schoolteachers such as age, city, gender, work experience, and subject. In addition, cross tabulation is used to find the similarities and differences between teachers' responses, based on the city variable, and the same approach is used to compare the responses of four groups of teachers, male and female and those who indicated that they felt experienced and those who indicated that they felt less experienced in working with Syrian refugee students. This chapter concludes with the emergent themes from the three open-ended questions in the survey that represent two main themes: the new social environment and the different school environment. These findings help answer the third research question: What difficulties are encountered by teachers and schools when educating Syrian refugee students?

To achieve a better understanding of the previous chapters, **Chapter 8** presents the major findings from both data sets by merging them to support a broader discussion of the role of school social workers in integrating Syrian refugee students into the Saudi schools. Their responsibilities involve all stages of Syrian refugee students' lives, both past and present, and how these affect their integration. This discussion also highlights the teachers' experiences of working with Saudi schools, indicated in open and ended- question in the survey. For example, teachers' perspectives of school social workers in implementing programmes for refugee students as well as the challenges they face while teaching Syrian refugee students. These findings are discussed in the context of the broader literature from other locations and contexts in order to inform a deeper understanding of possibilities and challenges in developing the role of school social workers in the integration of refugee children.

Chapter 9 delves into the practical and professional approach adopted by Saudi school social workers towards integrating Syrian refugee students. This highlights the significance of understanding the background of Syrian refugee students and identifying initial challenges. Additionally, collaboration with school personnel, particularly teachers, is explored based on teachers' perspectives. Furthermore, consultation services are examined, encompassing a structured programme intended for all students, including refugees. This programme entails three types of consultation related to students, families, and external institutions within the Ministry of Education. This chapter also discusses the importance of involving parents from the perspectives of school social workers, principals, and Syrian students and teachers. In this regard, the relationships between school and family are highlighted to explore their impact on the students' integration. Extracurricular activities as a strategic avenue for achieving the integration of Syrian refugee students are also discussed. This takes us on to the duration of stay in Saudi Arabia and how the refugee students perceived their sense of belonging. This is deemed noteworthy, with both factors being regarded as integral to the process of integrating into schools of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The chapter also explores integration as a concept for Syrian refugee students within the Saudi-school context, linking with broader understandings of integration and belonging. Lastly, it introduces the unexpected variances regarding teachers' responses to closed questions (Quantitative).

The concluding chapter includes five sections starting by highlighting the main findings of the research. It then offers the original contribution of the study the first work to investigate the sensitive and original topic of the challenges Syrian refugee students experience in Saudi Arabia, and the role of school social workers in fostering their integration into schools.

After that, outlining the recommendations of the study for practice, policy makers and for future research.

1.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the background of the study concerning the role of school social workers in assisting the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi schools and the evolution of social work in Saudi Arabia. It has outlined the aims, objectives, and research

questions and set out the structure of the thesis. Chapter 2 investigates the related literature and places the context of broader evidence and argument.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

As this research represents a new topic under investigation in Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to review the existing literature related to multifaceted topics. Exploring the literature assists in building knowledge prior to and after conducting field work, allowing a better and more thorough understanding of the phenomena being investigated in this study. Investigating previous studies highlights what is known and unknown in the topic, and assists in identifying any gaps in the current knowledge. This research will broaden the existing literature by exploring the diverse roles social workers fulfil in supporting the integration of child refugees, particularly in school settings. This approach acknowledges the importance of school social work while situating it within the larger context of social work practices that assist refugee children. Moreover, by reviewing the literature, a suitable topic, research questions and methodology can be established (Ridley, 2012). This will facilitate the generation of study findings, from which recommendations can be made for future studies to be conducted, as well as recommendations regarding the practices of school social workers working with refugees in Saudi schools. According to Bryman (2012), in the literature review the researcher shows their ability to conduct academic analysis based on what they have read and comprehended about the work of others on the same subject.

Based on the above, the goal of this chapter can be effectively achieved through the following eight sections. The chapter starts by introducing the history concerning refugees, and policies for Syrian refugees in Saudi Arabia during and since the Arab Spring. Subsequently, it details the historical perspective of school social work in Saudi Arabia and globally. It also examines the role of school social workers in integrating Syrian refugee students in various countries, including the USA, UK, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. Following this, the chapter addresses social and school integration as concepts, along with related concepts such as assimilation and acculturation, focusing on their differences. Additionally, it discusses the role of belonging in school integration. Then, it covers some of the key theories that explain the integration of refugee students into schools such as ecological and resilience theories. Finally, this chapter is summarised in a concluding section.

2.2 The history of Saudi Arabia concerning refugees and policies for Syrian refugees during and since the Arab Spring

In recent years, social and political conflicts have influenced many to seek safety in other countries. The UNHCR, whose mandate includes the protection of refugees and forcibly displaced communities, defines a refugee as an individual forced to leave his/her country due to persecution, violence or war. As stated in the 1951 Refugee Convention 'Refugees have a rational fear of persecution, or fear for their personal well-being, for various reasons, including political opinion, membership of a particular social group, nationality, racial identity, or religious background' (UNHCR, 1951). Refugee status applies to individuals who live either permanently or temporarily in a country that is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Despite that being the case, a problem arises regarding the status of those who leave their countries for the reasons described above and move to countries that are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention. For instance, it may not be clear whether these people have official refugee status and, thus, whether they qualify for benefits associated with this status. In the context of the present study, Saudi Arabia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 2013). However, it is among the countries that have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Abahussain, 2019). Despite this, Saudi Arabia has a long history of receiving and hosting individuals who have fled their countries for various reasons. According to Hitman (2019), people from Uzbekistan sought refuge in Saudi Arabia from 1930 to 1950, as they faced religious persecution in their home country. Then, in the 1960s, Saudi Arabia hosted Palestinians and Rohingya Muslims following political conflicts in their home countries (Batrawy, 2017). In the 1990s, Saudi Arabia continued to host people seeking refuge when it received approximately 32,000 Iraqi citizens to its Artawiyya and Rafha camps during the Gulf War (Al, 1994; Lysa, 2022 and Janmyr, 2023).

Moreover, during the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia opened its border with Kuwait, which faced an invasion by Iraq, thus facilitating the movement of about 200,000 refugees to its territory (Bastaki, 2018). According to Lysa (2022), Saudi Arabia has hosted approximately 1.07 million refugees, referred to as 'visitors' or 'guests', which represents around 5.5% of the country's population. This figure includes refugees primarily from Syria, Yemen, and the

Rohingya community. Since 2011, the King Salman Relief Center (KSRelief) has reported providing substantial support to these groups, amounting to approximately 16 billion USD (KSRelief, 2017).

These examples illustrate Saudi Arabia's long history of hosting refugees from other countries, particularly those from the Arabian Peninsula. Lysa (2022) indicated that 67% of refugees worldwide under UNHCR authority in 2020 were from a total of five countries, three of which have major diasporas in Saudi Arabia: Syria, Afghanistan and Myanmar.

According to the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the United States (2015), Saudi Arabia has hosted approximately 2.5 million Syrian refugees, who have faced forced displacement due to conflicts and severe political and social upheaval, aligning with the formal definition of refugees. Despite not being a signatory to the UNHCR Convention, Saudi Arabia has confirmed a willingness to treat people who have left their homeland to join Saudi territory as visitors and guests (dhaifs), in line with Arabic culture. The aim of this designation is to protect the dignity of these people. This concept has been evident in formal policy and research reports, which have particularly focused on the arrival of newcomers from Syria and Yemen (Doanvo, 2017; KSRelief, 2017 Bastaki, 2018; Aidan, 2019; Pace and Simsek, 2019; Osmandzиковic 2020; Lysa 2022). Rather than being considered 'refugees', in line with the designation in UNHCR treaties and documents, the Saudi government and society consider these newcomers as 'Arab brothers/sisters in distress' (Doanvo, 2017). Thus, this concept informs the policy of receiving and providing services for Syrian refugees in Saudi Arabia (Lysa, 2022).

It is noteworthy that this conceptualisation is associated with a trend in many Muslim countries of welcoming and respecting newcomers. For instance, in Turkey, which is a signatory to the Refugee Convention, the government has incorporated the concept of 'guests' in its policies (Karacizmeli, 2015; Pace and Simsek, 2019). This concept also depends on Islamic and Arabic culture and its conceptualisation of visitors.

Saudi Arabia has illustrated a whole-hearted and generous approach to hosting forcibly displaced people entering its territory after leaving their homeland for political, socioeconomic, or other reasons (Al, 1994; Batrawy, 2017; Doanvo, 2017; KSRelief, 2017 Bastaki, 2018; Aidan, 2019; Osmandzиковic 2020; Lysa 2022). In the 2011 Syrian crisis, arising

from the Arab Spring protests, Saudi Arabia reported that it had taken in 2.5 million refugees. These newcomers benefitted from free medical care and education in the country, with the school system serving approximately 100,000 Syrian students (Al Arabiya, 2015). Moreover, the Saudi government provided these refugees with the freedom to remain in the country, as well as opportunities for legal residency, such as the freedom to study, work, and benefit from other public services. In 2012, the Saudi government enforced a policy requiring schools to accept all Syrian students living in the country (Al-Ahmadi et al., 2012). The Saudi government's policies protect the interests and well-being of newcomers in the country, even though they lack the official designation of refugees.

However, in the absence of clear policies related to refugees in Saudi Arabia, the government provides support for Syrian refugees, based on the available resources, in a way that guarantees their dignity and preserves their human rights (Kerry, 2015). In this regard, Lasy (2022) argues that the absence of a formal framework to govern and protect refugees in the Kingdom does not mean there are no refugees in Saudi Arabia, but rather that their status differs from traditional legal definitions. This perspective has led scholars to overlook such refugees, who may not be visibly apparent.

The UNHCR's perspective is that the principles of Islam guide Saudi Arabia's treatment of refugees (UNHCR, 2013). However, it is essential to note that hosting such a large number of refugees from other countries, and providing them with these benefits, is a struggle for the government (Elasrag, 2016; Coddington, 2018). However, some argue that hosting Syrian refugees serves the interests of the Saudi royal family due to the fact that such effort leads to the preservation of its dominance and helps prevent internal social instability and is only beneficial to the Syrians over the short term (Hitman, 2019). Nonetheless, it is essential to note that the efforts of the Saudi government to improve the lives of Syrian refugees extend beyond the issue of their successful integration into Saudi society and acquisition of a good standard of living. This is reflected by the provision of benefits with real value for refugees, such as education and healthcare services. These give Syrians opportunity to integrate successfully into Saudi society and its education system (Kerry, 2015; Lasy 2022). According to Newbold (2005), immigrants and refugees who lack acceptable and effective access to such services in a host society face a difficult life and cannot integrate effectively. This

means that, rather than serving the interests of the Saudi Royal Family alone, the Saudi government's policies towards newcomers have intrinsic value for refugees.

Aidan (2019) asserted that, due to the war and conflict taking place in the Middle East, the approaches of Jordan and Saudi Arabia represent a model to address the refugee crisis. It is important to note that neither country is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. In a comparison between these two countries, he argued that the economic power of Saudi Arabia, which is called the Big Sister in the Middle East, led to the massive influx of Syrian refugees, even though Jordan is more experienced than the Big Sister, because Jordan was the first country to receive and host Palestinian refugees, many years ago. In his study the refugee crisis in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, Aidan claimed that Saudi Arabia does not take official action with respect to the current refugee crisis, similar to other countries, due to social, political and cultural securities, which affect the situation of refugees, especially Syrians and Yemenis, who live in Saudi Arabia (Aidan, 2019).

Saudi Arabia has always preferred to collaborate with international organisations in seeking to develop support programmes for Syrian refugees within the country (Aidan, 2019).

However, in recent times, international organisations such as UNICEF and UNHCR have advised the Saudi government to provide housing and citizen rights to Syrian refugees who have sought refuge in Saudi Arabia. Collaboration with these global organisations facilitates the protection of the rights of Syrian refugees specifically, and immigrants in general. For example, the 2012 Saudi Arabia–UNHCR plan for the promotion of the rights of Syrian refugees had a positive influence on refugees in terms of access to work and housing policies in Saudi Arabia (UNHCR, 2017). Another example is UNICEF, which has been operating in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) since the 1970s, and has worked to provide children from other countries, including Iraqis, Syrians, and Palestinians, with rights similar to those of their citizen peers regarding education (Almuhaid, 2015).

It is important to note that UNHCR's engagement with Saudi Arabia since the late 1980s which attempted to establish a formal presence in the country with Saudi Arabia's hosting of Iraqi refugees in the Rafha camp which provided an unexpected opportunity to UNHCR to be recognised formally in Saudi Arabia (Janmyr and Lysa, 2024). Such recognition arose from two factors; first, negotiating a Note Verbale provided UNHCR with official recognition in

1992, and second, a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 1993 provided the beginning of relations between UNHCR and Saudi which continue to the present day. However, this was not free from challenges for UNHCR as lengthy, year-long negotiations with the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs were required to formalise its presence in the country before the Saudi government would recognise UNHCR officially (Janmyr and Lysa, 2024). Such lengthy negotiations may be attributed to the Saudi government dealing with refugees based on an Islamic framework. Also, one of the clearest challenges is that due to the unique political dynamics of the Gulf region, UNHCR had to deal with sensitivities and complexities to establish its presence in the area.

Despite not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, studying Saudi Arabia could significantly enhance research and practices related to the protection of refugees both nationally and globally. According to Janmyr (2021), studying the relationship between non-signatory countries and the 1951 Convention provides positive insights into international refugee law. This is because including non-signatory countries such as Saudi Arabia provides a global perspective on refugee protection practices outside the Convention's framework. Also, it reveals how these nations influence and participate in the development of international norms, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the development of refugee law and policies. Additionally, it establishes new research focused on the impact of non-signatory countries and the role of local actors related to refugees. Therefore, this study enriches the understanding of refugee protection on a global level.

2.3 Historical perspective of school social work in Saudi Arabia

School social work has had a long history, emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Allen-Meares (2013), school social work did not start within the educational system, but began through non-governmental organisations in three main cities in the United States – New York, Boston and Hartford. At the commencement of the school year in 1906/07, the NGOs began to support and enhance laws protecting children from work and ensuring that children had the right to study. Moreover, NGO agents supported school staff with suitable abilities, such as scientific and cultural backgrounds, to work with students to discover and interpret the social circumstances surrounding pupils in society which might impact their performance in school (Openshaw, 2008). It is essential to note

that social workers' understanding of circumstances assists in identifying the needs of children, allowing them to create and develop suitable programmes to enhance children's well-being. Thus, social work started to fulfil students' needs, promoting quality of life by solving problems and increasing the ability of students to face challenges and obstacles. Saudi Arabia is among the countries in the Middle East which started to establish social work in schools since 1953 (Abo Alnaser, 2017). This is because the government and policymakers in the Arab Gulf region were keen to promote the well-being of children by providing necessary services and resources (Sloan et al., 2017). It is crucial to note that this era was associated with the economic boom in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

According to Abo Alnaser (2017), school social work in the KSA has experienced five stages. The first stage was linked to the rapid increase in student numbers in schools, associated with the establishment of The Ministry of Education in 1953, replacing the Directorate of Education and signalling a significant shift in both the Saudi educational system and the country's growth (Alghamdi, 2010). At this stage, teachers without effective educational qualifications performed teaching roles, negatively affecting the educational environment. During this stage, teachers were neither equipped nor expected to be aware of students' circumstances and needs, due to the absence of school social work services. At that time, there were no official social workers in schools (Abo Alnaser, 2017).

In the second stage, known as the preparation stage, the Ministry of Education established the Social Education and Activities Administration in 1954. This department was overseen by specialized social workers who implemented a variety of social activities, including volunteer initiatives led by school teachers. This effort facilitated interaction between students and instructors throughout the educational process (Abo Alnaser, 2017). According to Snoubar and Duman (2015), the school environment is a tool that supports the well-being of students, since social workers adopt a significant role in helping teachers to understand the needs and behaviour of children.

In the third stage (1955), due to the insufficient Saudi social workers, the Saudi Ministry of Education recruited two Egyptian social workers in the cities of Jeddah and Makkah (Abo Alnaser, 2017). This implementation occurred because the Ministry of Education realised that the role of social practitioners was vital in the completion of the educational process.

The fourth stage in 1961 was linked to Saudi universities when they started establishing departments of social work in order to produce graduates to perform in the field of social work and, more specifically, in schools (Alghamdi, 2010; Albrithen, 2012; Abo Alnaser, 2017). The final stage was in 1982, when the Ministry of Education converted the Social Education and Activities Administration department to the Student Guidance and Counselling Service. Although school social workers are designated as student guidance counsellors in schools, their work is still purely based upon the role of a social worker. As per the findings of Gubary in 1989, as referenced in research conducted by Alajlan in 2000, there were 73 school social work supervisors within the Ministry of Education and various school districts, while the entire country employed a total of 713 school social workers.

Alotaibi et al., (2020), stated that the new stage after 1982, is characterized by professionalism of school social workers in providing services for everyone in schools including school staff members and students. It is important to note that such professionals are required to build mutual respect and trust among individuals in school. Also, school social workers' responsibilities include evaluating the services provided and working in schools. This is because in 1997 the Department for Guidance and Counselling started requiring annual reports from school social workers to evaluate their services and provide recommendations for improving their work in schools.

Currently, the Department for Guidance and Counselling in the Ministry of Education is responsible for ensuring that school social workers fulfil several significant responsibilities that ensure that students' needs are provided for. Those responsibilities include developing programmes and plans to assist counsellors and school social workers to direct and advise students Islamically to reach psychological, social, and educational stability. For example, understanding the cultural context helps social workers develop trust and connection with children and their families, making it easier to provide support and assistance (Allen-Meares, 2004). The Department is also responsible for conducting research with the aim of identifying the problems students face during their studies and those which school social workers experience during their work as well as for developing programmes that help school social workers to investigate students' talents and abilities to help them to improve academically and socially.

Furthermore, the Department ensures that school social workers and counsellors, who are necessary to strengthen the relationships between home and school, complement each other to serve students. These responsibilities inform school social workers' roles in providing religious, psychological, and social guidance to develop students' abilities both in and out of school. Additionally, their responsibilities include, but are not limited to, raising students' awareness about the risks that exist in their environment both in and out of school (Saudi Ministry of Education, n.d).

2.4 School social work with refugees

Social work for individuals, groups, and communities is essential because social workers use their professional skills to enhance the quality of life and welfare of those with whom they work. Social work includes working with those with disabilities, children and families, and working with mental health issues (Almaizar and Abdelhamed, 2018). It is essential to note that school social work is among the main types of social work; it was established to help students who face challenges and barriers in schools and in their social lives. In this research, school social work refers to professional efforts that promote the social development of students in order to create the most suitable conditions for their development according to their personal preferences and abilities, which are associated with their surroundings and circumstances (Abo Alnaser, 2017).

School social workers are an important part of schools, alongside teachers, principals and administrators, who guide students through the educational process. Moreover, school social workers are responsible for fulfilling students' needs and improving their skills in educational and social contexts, which ultimately targets the improved well-being of students (Duman and Snoubar, 2017). In addition, social workers play a vital role in education by conducting assessments, facilitating meetings, and serving as a bridge between home and school. Both educators and parents rely on social workers to resolve students' emotional behavioural and social issues (Constable et al., 1999). It has been argued that school social work is one of the main factors for the success of a school's mission, which goes beyond the simple boundaries of the classroom.

However, social work with refugees faces significant challenges when supporting refugees and immigrants globally. These challenges involve geopolitical and economic barriers that

delay or hinder effective support. Legal and systemic obstacles, such as restrictive immigration policies and the lack of a robust legal framework for asylum seekers in countries like Thailand, complicate protection efforts (Popescu and Libal, 2018). Social workers also face ethical dilemmas when implementing policies perceived as biased, and they must navigate issues of xenophobia and nationalism, which can hinder their advocacy for migrant and refugee rights (Popescu and Libal, 2018). These dilemmas are evident in examinations of social work practices in various global contexts, including Greece (Guskovitch and Potocky, 2018), Sweden (Gustafsson and Johansson, 2018), and Thailand (Teclé et. al., 2018).

As a result, social workers and policymakers need to implement effective strategies such as interdisciplinary collaboration, trauma-informed care, and the development of supportive community networks. In Greece, humanitarian staff emphasize the importance of training on stress impact, assessing secondary trauma, and providing mental health care services to aid workers. This highlights the necessity of supporting the well-being of those involved in refugee support efforts. In Sweden, social work faces ambivalence towards refugees and migrants due to shifting policies and resources, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive and compassionate approach towards asylum seekers. In Thailand, the lack of a legal framework for asylum seekers and refugees, particularly urban refugees from countries like Pakistan and Somalia, poses significant challenges (Popescu and Libal, 2018). Collaborative efforts among stakeholders are essential to address the protection and service needs of these refugees.

Advocacy and policy influence are highlighted as crucial components of social work, with a call for more comprehensive research to inform policies that support the well-being of refugees and immigrants. Emphasising the importance of cultural competence and community engagement, improved training, and education on the impact of stress and trauma are vital for aid workers, ensuring they are qualified to handle the psychological demands of their roles. Promoting collaborative efforts among stakeholders is essential to address the complex needs of refugees effectively (Popescu and Libal, 2018). In the same vein, Dressler and Gereluk (2017), argued that Syrian refugee education is a challenging yet essential attempt, requiring a multifaceted approach to support students who have

experienced trauma and displacement. Therefore, there is a need for increased focus on research and policy development to better govern asylum requests and access to services.

According to Smokowski and Bacallao (2008), in the United States schools play an essential role in facilitating the settlement of Latino students in their new host country. Yet the process of refugee integration is, in itself, not an easy task for social workers due to the necessary experience required to work with refugees (Duman and Snoubar, 2017). This is because refugees come from different countries and social backgrounds. As a result, integrating them into schools depends on social workers' ability to identify refugee students' needs, with a view to fulfilling them in consideration of the constraints imposed by the country's policies. For instance, Syrian refugee children in Turkey are expected to have similar rights to Turkish children regarding access to free education (Aydin and Kaya, 2019).

However, in practice, language barriers affect such students' integration into Turkish schools, resulting in depression and trauma, which in turn require comprehensive psychological support. According to Madziva and Thondhlana (2017), language is the main tool that helps Syrian refugee students integrate into non-Arabic-speaking schools, leading to social integration.

Moreover, schools are considered to be useful places for promoting wider social integration, because they provide spaces where refugee students can interact consistently with members of the host society (Ager and Strang, 2008). As a result, social workers should not merely focus on students' physiological needs, but also on their social and cultural needs, which will allow them to create meaningful and valuable cultural exchange (Jedouri, 2017). Such cultural exchange is implicated in the building of strong relationships among students, and the minimising of differences between newcomers and host-society students. Similarly, Bacallao and Smokowski (2008) stated that interaction between immigrant students and host country pupils in schools enhances the former's potential to integrate successfully into a new society, socialising according to the host society's beliefs and cultural practices. Although this situation mostly concerns immigrant students, it also reflects the situation of any members of minority groups within a given education sector.

Refugee students are more likely to face discrimination and bullying at school (Dryden et al., 2019). For instance, 33% of Syrian refugee students in Lebanon reported facing

discrimination at their new school (Human Rights Watch, 2016). It is important to note that the role of school social workers includes intervention to ensure that negativity towards newcomers in the school environment is eliminated. Thus, social workers' role should concentrate on the school environment, encouraging host-nation students to accept refugee students into their social circles.

However, school social work has been explicitly criticised for focusing only on students' interactions with each other within the school context, rather than on working with the other systems to which students belong, such as the family and the community, since each system influences the other (Clancy, 1995). Consequently, researchers from the 1990s onwards attempted to present a new direction of practice that might address, professionally and efficiently, the issue of assisting students within their wider social environment. This perspective asserts that practitioners should take the initiative in directing their work towards students' interactions with other systems, from the micro-level to the macro-level (Clancy, 1995; Snoubar and Duman, 2015). In this way, school social workers can effectively create and improve suitable programmes that focus on integrating refugee students into schools by concentrating on other ecological systems, such as school policies, the neighbourhood, the community, and the host country's policies.

It is important to note that the majority of refugee children in receiving countries are of school age and need to attend school (UNHCR, 2019). However, going to school requires the collaboration of several entities, including the government of the receiving country, schools, and families. For instance, the government provides policies concerning the acceptance of newcomers into the educational sector. Furthermore, as illustrated above, school social workers are among those who provide services and development resources for newcomers. Accordingly, the school social worker's role can be considered to represent an important link between schools, families and governments. For example, in Turkey, school social workers provide recommendations to policymakers, schools, teachers and other agents to improve the acculturation and social integration of Syrian refugees into Turkish society (Aydin and Kaya, 2017). Therefore, the role of school social workers includes working with other stakeholders and systems related to refugee students in their new environment.

According to the ecological school-based social work perspective, a comprehensive and intervention-based approach should incorporate all aspects of the school environment. Several programmes have been proposed for implementation in schools to link refugee students with the necessary resources to allow them to integrate successfully (Reynolds and Bacon, 2018). Nevertheless, linking newcomers with such resources requires refugees to be receptive and willing to integrate; negative social circumstances may reduce refugees' ability to benefit effectively from such resources. For example, the relationship between refugee students and their families may be influenced by the forced migration process, which may result in negative inter-family relationships (Reynolds and Bacon, 2018). In addition, such unstable family relationships are also likely to prevent refugee children from engagement in education, which represents another barrier to the integration process (Rousseau and Guzder, 2008). Thus, newcomers require a broad social work programme that fulfils their needs in school, in their local community, and at home.

Refugee parents who leave their home countries and seek refuge in a country with a different culture may inadvertently contribute to their children losing their original identity or culture. In their consideration of segmented assimilation and intergenerational acculturation, Piedra and Engstrom (2009) argue that intergenerational conflict often occurs when second-generation immigrants attempt to free themselves from the cultural and normative constraints imposed by their parents. Additionally, second-generation immigrants tend to face significant obstacles to their social mobility, including poverty, racial discrimination, language barriers, and the influence of inner-city subcultures (Piedra and Engstrom, 2009). As most countries are socioeconomically stratified, low-income immigrants encounter unique challenges, such as poor healthcare, inadequate schools, substandard housing, and unreliable transportation systems.

Reynolds and Bacon (2018) stated that schools might apply comprehensive advanced programmes to allow students to integrate into their new school community. For example, best practice for school social work might include supporting teachers by sharing information about refugees and creating suitable teaching strategies. It is important to note that teachers are expected to be supported by school social workers, whose role includes working with parents to identify students' problems (Heckman, 2008). Parental involvement in their children's education is important for their integration as regular communication

with parents helps address concerns and ensures a supportive home environment (Tösten et al., 2017; Karsli-Calamak, 2018). Such an approach may be enhanced by drawing on what are widely recognised as Syrian families' 'funds of knowledge' to create a learning environment at home, drawing on the expertise and experiences of Syrian refugee families to enhance language and literacy development (Madziva and Thondhlana 2017; Wofford and Tibi, 2018).

Moreover, maintaining and developing a partnership with society enables students to benefit efficiently from the resources supporting them in the educational process. Thus, social workers are required to work with other internal and external systems and stakeholders to support newcomers' successful integration. Specifically, some school programmes focus on the refugees' broader environment and the nature of activities inside and outside of school. This is because the priority is students' and families' experience of migration, rather than concentrating on psychological symptoms, which might inhibit the integration process (Lau et al., 2018).

School programmes should consider refugees' environment and their level of interaction with it. Rousseau and Guzder (2008) asserted that school programmes should consider refugees' surrounding environment, with which they interact. Such programmes include three main areas: (i) the adjustment of schools to the needs of refugee children through professional development; (ii) the improvement of the relationship between the school and the home; and (iii) the development of classroom or extra-curricular programmes. For instance, in one London borough, teachers support refugees by providing counselling, targeting their feelings of helplessness by empathising with the refugee families' situation in the UK (Rousseau and Guzder, 2008). Although such interventions are provided by teachers, programmes and initiatives for the integration of refugee students ought to be prepared and provided by school social workers.

Several successful strategies and programmes have been implemented to facilitate the school integration of Syrian refugee children in certain Canadian schools. According to Guo et al. (2021), one of the key approaches is providing language support through bilingual teachers, interpreters, and promoting multilingualism in classrooms to help students to engage effectively in their learning. Another crucial strategy is cultural sensitivity training for

teachers and school staff. By educating school staff about the cultural backgrounds and experiences of refugee children, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Mental health and well-being support is also essential, as many Syrian refugee children have experienced trauma and stress. Offering mental health services and support can significantly improve their overall well-being and academic achievement (Guo et al., 2021). Many Syrian refugee students witnessed conflicts in their home country and were recruited by army groups, trained, and involved in war. School overcrowding is severe, especially in refugee camps in Turkey and Lebanon (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Thus, trauma-informed practices to provide a safe environment for emotional healing and culturally support to address shifting experience related to Syrian refugee students are considered among the best practices for supporting them (Dressler and Gereluk 2017; Madziva and Thondhlana, 2017).

Furthermore, community engagement and flexible education models enhance the integration of Syrian refugee children. This engagement targets local communities to involve them in welcoming and supporting Syrian refugee children to creates a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of exclusion while implementing flexible education models helps in providing for the diverse learning needs and backgrounds of refugee children ensures their academic success. Additionally, policy advocacy is crucial for securing resources and prioritising the education of Syrian refugee students which might ensure their long-term integration and success in their new educational environments (Dressler and Gereluk, 2017; Guo et al., 2021). By adopting these strategies, Canadian schools can better support refugee children's school integration and help them succeed academically and socially.

The comprehensive approach needs to be implemented because many Syrian refugee students arriving in host countries may have missed several school years due to various economic, social, and educational barriers. According to Madziva and Thondhlana (2017), Syrian refugee students' enrolment rates are expected to be around 20 percent in Lebanon, 30 percent in Turkey, and 68 percent in Jordan. Additionally, educational opportunities are often strongly linked to previous experiences of conflict, displacement, and limited access to resources in transit countries. These challenges persist in their destination countries. For

example, Syrian refugee children often arrive in the UK at different times of the academic year, impacting their educational continuity. This can make it challenging for them to integrate into new learning environments, where they may face exclusion and discrimination (Madziva and Thondhlana, 2017). Regarding enrolment, parents may be affected by a negative environment. According to Sirin and Rogers-Sirin, (2015), Syrian refugee students encounter discrimination and verbal or physical abuse in schools, which can prevent parents from enrolling them. Such challenges hinder their academic progress and affect their ability to catch up and adapt to the new curriculum.

2.4.1 Syrian refugee students in Jordanian and Lebanese schools

Syrian refugee students in other countries, such as Jordan, experience different education policies and challenges. According to Elasrag (2016), Syrian refugees tend to live in Jordan for a long time, and they prefer to live in cities rather than camps, as this facilitates adaptation and integration into the host society. Although adaptation and integration benefit refugees' lives and well-being, accepting them might influence host societies negatively in terms of social and economic aspects. Thus, the attitude of the dominant group impacts the successful integration of refugee children into schools. Elasrag (2016) claimed that citizens in host countries become irritated due to the impact of Syrian refugees, which is linked to an increase in demand for rented housing and activities that are socially different from those of the dominant groups.

Morrice and Salem (2023), describe policy changes in Jordan over the past decade involving a shift from separate refugee education systems towards integrating refugees into national schools in three settings representing different models of integration: camp schools (within refugee camps), host community schools, and regular schools where shift systems with slightly shorter teaching hours have been introduced to accommodate refugees. The experiences of Syrian refugees attending each of these school types demonstrated that each model brought unique challenges affecting the quality of education. Yet despite certain advantages of host community schools that created the closest to parity with Jordanian students, none of the models achieved equity and social justice for the refugee children who continued to face significant challenges in integrating into Jordanian society.

To work towards achieving equity and social justice, Morrice and Salem (2023) argue that policy reforms are necessary to ensure equal access to quality educational resources and opportunities for refugee students to develop positive social relationships and a sense of belonging within educational settings, promoting their well-being and integration. Moreover, they suggest modifications to the national curriculum to include diverse perspectives and cultural recognition to address the misrecognition faced by refugee students and to promote inclusivity. And they identify a need for teachers to be provided with the necessary training and support to enable them to address the distinct needs of refugee students, thereby ensuring equitable learning opportunities. In these ways they envisage a holistic approach to integration that considers social connections, safety, and a sense of belonging alongside formal education to create a comprehensive support system for refugee students.

According to Alhaj (2018), educational policies concerning Syrian refugees in Jordan are implemented through several programmes, designed and applied by official organisations, which are supervised by UNHCR. Alhaj discussed two educational challenges: firstly, in 2016, 40% of Syrian refugee children were not attending school; and secondly, the quality of education among Syrian refugees was poor. Although the Jordanian government provides free education for all Syrian refugees, problems in relation to documents and registration might hinder the integration of refugees into schools. This is because Syrian refugees may lose their official documents during their transition to Jordan. Although such policies are important for the security of countries, the bureaucracy and restrictive policies may hinder children's opportunities to increase their well-being (Alhaj, 2018).

However, another issue that faces Syrian refugees is crowded schools, as the acceptance of Syrian refugees affects the quality of education negatively due to the pressure caused by a high number of students, stretching resources (Alhaj, 2018). Apart from that, a large number of pupils lack social and psychological support, resulting in missed opportunities for development (Ehnholt and Yule 2006; Alhaj, 2018). It is important to note that many Syrian refugee students are in urgent need of such support, due to war influences such as losing their parents and/or relatives. As a result, they require more support to overcome their negative experiences, and to settle in schools, than local students.

Alhaj (2018), argued that schools are including Jordanian teachers who cannot understand the needs of Syrian refugees. As a result, the Minister of Education should offer a policy which involves training teachers to comprehend the immediate needs of newcomers (Alhaj, 2018). In this regard, one of the most powerful resources that can be used is the potential contribution of Syrian teachers (who sought refuge in Jordan) in working with Syrian refugees, as they possess a complete understanding of Syrian refugees' needs and issues. Regarding the policy and its efficiency, Syrian teachers must be treated as teachers from the dominant society in terms of support, salaries and concessions. Such a step will ensure the rights of those newcomers, as well as facilitate students' integration into their new school environment and society in general (Alhaj, 2018).

Nevertheless, in some countries, such a policy cannot be offered to all refugee students attending school due to their national educational system. In Saudi Arabia, for example, instructors in schools must be Saudi nationals, although teachers of other nationalities can work in private schools, or in schools when recruiting non-Saudi teachers becomes necessary (Alosaimi, 2018).

Moreover, teachers who work with Syrian refugees should be aware of the background of refugee students that result in the stigmatisation of refugee students in schools. According to Alhaj (2018), Jordanian teachers must be trained to be aware of the problems faced by Syrian refugees. It is important to note that this step may help to prevent the possibility of newcomers being subject to verbal or physical bullying by teachers. This is because most refugees in general and refugee students in particular, face bullying in schools by students or teachers. Undoubtedly, school social workers are important in improving the school environment, making it a more welcoming and attractive place for refugee students. The issue of bullying hinders students' integration into their new environment, as the environment naturally becomes unsuitable, leading to a high percentage of school dropouts and isolation (Alhaj, 2018; Guo et al., 2019).

The implementation of desirable, suitable policies is vital in creating an appropriate environment for newcomers. This is because policies operate as tools, welcoming refugees to a new location (Hek, 2005). Hek's study, which examines the viewpoints of secondary school students, sheds light on the perceived significance of education and the environment

in aiding the process of integration. He argued that there are three factors which assist refugees to integrate into school. Firstly, specialist teachers who are familiar with the vulnerable background of refugee students can significantly assist in their integration. Secondly, social support from peers helps refugee students to feel more confident. Thirdly, teachers' behaviour and home and school relationships may all potentially help or hinder students' successful integration into their new environment. Such policies should be considered by school social workers who work with refugees, as these factors influence the level of integration. Although school social workers might improve the policies in schools in order to serve students' well-being inside school, collaboration with several parties, including teachers and administrators, ensures appropriate intervention.

Similarly to the situation in Jordanian schools, many Lebanese schools have received a large number of Syrian refugee students, putting significant pressure on their resources and infrastructure. Crul et al. (2019) and Mahfouz et al. (2020), claimed that Lebanese schools face significant challenges due to the influx of Syrian refugee students. Several challenges are identified by Mahfouz et al. (2020). First, overcrowded classrooms due to the sudden increase in Syrian refugee student numbers has forced many schools to implement double-shift systems due to insufficient infrastructure. Second, social and emotional challenges are also widespread among Syrian refugee students who have experienced trauma from the conflict in their home country. These students often require additional emotional and psychological support, but Lebanese schools are not fully equipped to provide such support. Third, cultural challenges arising from the integration of Syrian refugee students, who come from different cultural backgrounds to that of the local Lebanese students lead to tensions and conflicts within the school environment, requiring principals to develop strategies to manage and alleviate these issues. Fourth, academic challenges continue as schools struggle to maintain a good quality of education despite limited resources and large class sizes. Finally, teachers are often overwhelmed which prevents them from paying attention to Syrian refugee students, thus students' academic performance is negatively impacted.

Although schools collaborate with other institutions such as UNHCR/UNICEF to provide funds, educational leaders in Lebanese public schools employ various strategies to support both Syrian refugee and local Lebanese students due to the challenges posed by the Syrian refugee crisis (Mahfouz et al., 2020). These strategies include creating inclusive learning

environments which involve addressing cultural and social norms, providing academic support, offering emotional and psychological support, and promoting collaboration. By implementing such initiatives, educational leaders play a crucial role in supporting the holistic development and well-being of all students in schools during the sudden influx of Syrian refugee students.

Furthermore, many Syrian students arriving in Lebanon have missed years of schooling, leading to academic and social challenges. Regarding internal challenges, Syrian refugee children in Lebanese schools face a language barrier, as they are required to follow the same curriculum as Lebanese students, including subjects taught in English or French. Moreover, the majority of Syrian refugee children attend 'second-shift schools' with concerns about the quality of education provided (Crul et al., 2019). These factors highlight the difficulties faced by Syrian refugee children in accessing and integrating into the Lebanese school system.

It is important to note that Crul et al.'s study (2019) of Syrian refugee students in Sweden, Germany, Greece, Lebanon, and Turkey offers insights to enhance educational outcomes for refugee children worldwide. Key strategies include addressing language barriers, early intervention programmes to assess the educational background of refugee students and provide necessary support to bridge learning gaps caused by missed schooling or disruptions due to conflict, flexible curriculum models, teacher training, financial assistance, and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders (Albakri and Shibli, 2019; Crul et al., 2019).

However, such comprehensive strategies need to be sustainable to serve Syrian refugees and integrate students successfully into their new schools and communities. Albakri and Shibli (2019) explored the Ghata schools project which was specifically designed to address the educational needs of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. They found that this five-year project offered lessons for the wider development of sustainable quality education for Syrian refugees facing similar challenges arising from unclear policies, school infrastructure, language barriers, and weak social and psychological support. The Ghata schools project adopted several strategies to improve educational opportunities for Syrian refugees including providing financial support and scholarships, implementing language and literacy programmes, and offering psycho-social support through counselling and mental health

services. Albakri and Shibli (2019) recommended investing in educational infrastructure in host countries to ensure quality access and advocating for policy changes to simplify enrolment procedures and develop collaboration with community organisations.

These strategies aim to overcome barriers and enhance the overall educational experience for refugee students and safeguard their future. This is because education for Syrian refugees has benefits that extend beyond individual students (Albakri and Shibli, 2019). When refugee students are educated, they are better equipped to contribute to their host communities and, ultimately, to the rebuilding of their home country. Education provides resilience, improvement, and economic growth, which are all essential for sustainable development. Furthermore, it promotes social cohesion and reduces the likelihood of conflict and instability.

By implementing these strategies, policymakers and educators can improve educational outcomes and well-being for refugee children globally. Therefore, this perspective emphasizes the need for a global effort to meet the educational and mental health needs of Syrian refugee children, especially in countries of first asylum like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. This is because host countries are confronted with a severe burden in providing essential services to many Syrian refugee students. To effectively support students, there is a necessity for substantial international resources, including financial assistance, educational support, and mental health services (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Albakri and Shibli, 2019).

2.4.2 Syrian refugee students in Turkish schools

Another system encountered by Syrian refugee students in the Middle East is the Turkish educational system. Kirdar et al. (2022) argue that Turkish schools have experienced several challenges regarding Syrian refugee students compared to their local peers. Although temporary education centres provide urgent relief, they often fall short in delivering quality education and sustainable integration into the mainstream system. These systemic barriers not only affect academic performance but also hinder the overall well-being of refugee children. For example, Syrian refugee children have lower school enrolment rates compared to native children. Only 64% of Syrian refugee children (aged 7-17) are enrolled in school compared to 90% of native children. This gap expands as children age, with a drop off in

enrolment rates after age 12. The lower school enrolment rates of Syrian refugee children is due to their poor economic conditions and challenging living situations.

However, Syrian refugee children who arrive in Turkey at or before the age of eight integrate better into the school system. For these children, the enrolment differences with native children disappear when socioeconomic factors are considered (Kırdar et al., 2022). Therefore, the Turkish schools require interventions to address the specific challenges faced by Syrian refugee children. Enhancing their socioeconomic conditions, offering additional educational support, and reducing child labour are essential steps to improve their school integration and overall well-being. This is because the familial economic status impacts children in schools. Turkish school teachers confirmed that lack of physical necessities including clothing, food, cleaning supplies, and stationery items are some of common factors that affect Syrian refugee students (Gürel and Büyükşahin, 2020).

Lundberg (2020) confirms the importance of addressing these issues through comprehensive support systems and targeted interventions as refugee students have specific needs and challenges in schools. As a result, academic support involves tailored educational programmes, language support, and resources are essential to help refugee students overcome educational barriers (Aras and Yasun, 2016; Tösten et al., 2017; Crul et al., 2019; Karakus, 2019; Başaran, 2020; Lundberg, 2020; Guo et al., 2021). It is important to note that school leaders and practitioners have the critical role of implementing effective integration strategies that require the active involvement of these individuals to develop an inclusive school culture, providing policies that support diversity, and implementing practices that address the unique needs of immigrant and refugee students (Lundberg, 2020).

One of the significant challenges in Turkish schools is inexperienced teachers. According to Karakus (2019), many teachers in the refugee schools were not trained for teaching but performed the job due to economic hardships. These teachers faced significant difficulties with the curriculum and teaching materials, which were not designed for the needs of refugee children, leading students to forget what they have studied. This is because most refugee students displayed psychological challenges related to their previous experiences regarding the war, which affected their learning and behaviour in school. Similarly, Gürel

and Büyükşahin (2020); Soylu et al. (2020) and Özmen (2020) argued that the integration of Syrian refugees in Turkish schools is impacted by ineffective training for teachers and a lack of resources to address the diverse needs of these students.

To address these issues, studies by Gürel and Büyükşahin (2020), Soylu et al. (2020), and Özmen (2020) recommend integrating Syrian refugee students with their local peers from the host country. This approach may provide better social integration and sharing of resources. Additionally, the curriculum needs to be developed to meet the specific needs of refugee students while simultaneously enhancing the teaching skills of teachers to ensure that they are qualified to deal with the unique challenges of these students (Aras and Yasun, 2016; Tösten et al., 2017; Yamamoto, 2018; Karakus, 2019; Soylu et al., 2020). This is because teachers' positive attitudes play a significant role in contributing to the sense of belonging and integration of refugee students. According to Soylu et al. (2020), teachers play an essential role in supporting the adaptation of refugee students by developing cultural responsiveness and understanding cultural backgrounds and implementing effective strategies to facilitate integration into the school environment. This understanding helps in meeting the educational needs of students and creating a classroom atmosphere where students feel valued and respected. Achieving these changes can be accelerated through training programmes that help teachers address prejudices and promote empathy toward Syrian refugee students (Tösten et al., 2017; Soylu et al., 2020).

Syrian refugee students require a strategic programme, which can last for more than three years. Programmes such as this ensure that Syrian refugee students' well-being may be increased, but their implementation requires the Turkish government's collaboration with international organisations (Coşkun et al., 2017; Yamamoto, 2018). Due to poor management of Syrian schools in Turkey and their limited resources, these schools struggle to address all educational challenges faced by Syrian refugees, especially those seeking higher education. Therefore, creating connections between international/national supporters and Syrian schools can help these schools better meet the needs of Syrian refugee students (Yamamoto, 2018).

Coşkun et al. (2017), in their study, distinguished between two types of schools, public and temporary schools, which are supported by NGOs such as UNICEF. According to this study,

at the time of writing, there were 340,495 Syrian refugee students who did not belong to any kind of school or programme, even though 1,009,355 children were assigned to temporary protection. As the Turkish government allows children to attend school without certification such as ID, especially those who have recently arrived, the number of students remains ambiguous (Coşkun et al., 2017; Yamamoto, 2018).

Social policy and strategic programmes should be improved to achieve the social integration of Syrian refugees, but they first need to be enrolled in public school (Coşkun et al., 2017). Turkish policymakers were keen to place children who arrived in Turkey for the first time in a temporary education centre (TEC), which uses Arabic language, and employs Syrian teachers. Such centres serve to adjust newcomers to their environment, assessing their educational ability in order to help students to familiarise themselves with their new location, before transferring them to school. According to Aras and Yasun (2016), Temporary Education Centres (TECs) in Turkey are an important step in providing education to Syrian students and aim to transfer these students to Turkish public schools. However, these centres often lack resources such as transportation and counselling services, as well as trained staff, which limits their effectiveness. Although this temporary school serves newcomers, it might lead to isolation from local students due to the Arabic programme. To address such negative outcomes, comprehensive policies need to be established to integrate refugee education into the national education system directly (Aras and Yasun, 2016).

Nevertheless, Syrian refugee parents prefer the Arabic programme, as it prevents children from losing their culture and language. This preference is also linked with some Syrian refugee parents seeking gender-segregated education. However, coeducation will help them to interact effectively with students of the dominant society, which in turn facilitates the process of integration. Therefore, the nation must develop and implement programmes that provide children with opportunities to be integrated into the school system successfully, while also meeting the desire of parents regarding their children's place of study. Such a step will assist in maintaining positive relations between family members, because the failure to fulfil parents' desires affects children in school and their environment at home. Consequently, the integration of students into school becomes disrupted.

Coşkun et al., (2017) stated that, at the time, 59% of refugee children across five Turkish provinces were studying in schools, while the rest were not in the school system. There are five reasons why these children were not attending school. The first reason is the language barrier; however, the TEC teaches Turkish language to the Syrian refugees. The second problem concerns the poor infrastructure and facilities of schools, which can only be improved through strong financial support. However, financial support may be impacted by low transparency and accountability in financial management. This issue is linked to some Syrian managers in Turkey who are involved in anti-government activities or have connections to certain groups (Yamamoto, 2018).

As a third reason, Syrian refugee students attending those schools only have a single parent, since some fathers died during the war, influencing children emotionally and resulting in stress and poor school achievement. Moreover, some families, which lost their sole bread earner, have problems in financing the education of students. Consequently, most of these students live in suburban areas and they must travel long distances to attend schools, which leads to some deciding to stay at home instead of attending school each day. Lastly, the cultural barrier is the strongest challenge which limits the ability of refugee children in adapting to their new environment. Children who struggle to adapt to a multicultural environment are more likely to leave school within a few days of joining (Hek, 2005; Coşkun et al., 2017; Başaran, 2020; Soylu et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2021).

Briefly, Beltekin (2016) argues that in order to fulfil the needs of refugee students successfully, the Turkish educational system should develop policies in alignment with UNHCR standards which ensure certain positive aspects of education such as quality, participation, integration, protection, evaluation and observation. Moreover, refugee education needs to be considered from a holistic perspective, which involves international law and policymaking (Beltekin, 2016). Therefore, with the purpose of serving refugee students in the school, and guaranteeing that the integration process runs smoothly, school social work professional practices and interventions in terms of the levels of policy, institution and individual are necessary, and must be implemented.

Başaran (2020), highlights several key challenges teachers face related to the assessment of Syrian refugee students in Turkish schools. One significant issue is the lack of differentiated

assessment. Teachers conducted summative assessments without consideration of the unique educational and linguistic backgrounds of refugee students. This approach failed to consider the specific needs and circumstances of these students, potentially hindering their academic progress and affecting their performance compared to their local Turkish peers (Başaran, 2020). This is because testing and evaluation processes were not designed to adapt to the educational needs and trauma experienced by many Syrian refugees. As a result, this evaluation mismatch does not accurately reflect the students' knowledge and abilities, leading to potential inequalities in academic outcomes and further disadvantages for Syrian refugee students.

Positive bias in assessment was another issue related to Syrian refugee students. Some teachers admitted to grading these students more leniently than warranted to encourage and support them. While it springs from the teachers' good intentions, this approach can lead to unfair comparisons with other students and may not provide an accurate measure of the refugee students' academic abilities. Such bias can damage the validity of assessments and hide the actual educational needs of the students, preventing effective interventions that could help them improve in their new schools.

To improve the assessment of refugee students, it is essential to develop differentiated assessment strategies to provide the diverse needs and learning styles of refugee students as well as culturally relevant assessments that consider the unique experiences of Syrian refugee students. This involves incorporating elements from their cultural backgrounds into assessment tasks that might create a more inclusive evaluation process. Creating individualised education plans (IEPs) for these students is also crucial since it allows for specific accommodations and modifications adapted to their unique needs and circumstances (Başaran, 2020). These approaches ensure that assessments are fair, reasonable, and supportive of the educational development of Syrian refugee students.

Furthermore, to improve the quality of teaching, teachers encouraged students to participate actively in various classroom activities. For instance, they implemented seating arrangements to enhance interaction and communication between Syrian and Turkish students. Communication strategies were also employed, such as allowing the use of students' mother tongues or using peers as mediators to bridge language barriers.

Additionally, teachers used reward and punishment techniques to manage classroom behaviour, emphasising the importance of setting and enforcing rules to maintain a controlled environment. Conflict solution strategies and empowering student leadership roles further promoted a balanced and inclusive classroom atmosphere. Some teachers assigned Syrian refugee students leadership roles, such as class president or specific tasks, to promote respect, collaboration, and communication among students. These actions reflect teachers' efforts to create supportive learning environments that encourage active engagement and equitable educational opportunities for Syrian refugee students (Başaran, 2020; Soylu et al., 2020).

Similarly, in a study based on descriptive phenomenological approach, Tösten et al. (2017), collected data through semi-structured interviews with 28 teachers who worked with Syrian refugee students. The study highlighted several significant challenges faced by Syrian refugee students, including the general impact of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which severely hinders their academic performance and concentration in the classroom (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Tösten et al., 2017). Therefore, teachers need to be provided with additional psychological support to help students dealing with (PTSD). Such as strategy is crucial for better integration of Syrian refugee students into Turkish schools and for fostering their academic and social development.

Language barriers represent another critical issue, as many Syrian students struggle with insufficient proficiency in Turkish, affecting their ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in their new educational environment. This is overcome by enhancing teacher training programmes to equip teachers with language skills to support refugee students (Tösten et al., 2017; Gürel and Büyükşahin, 2020). Teachers reported feeling unprepared and unsupported, as they had not been involved in decision-making processes regarding refugee education and lacked proper training to address the specific needs of these students.

Consequently, teachers' low self-perception might lead to their work with Syrian refugee students being negatively impacted as their perceptions of the Syrian refugee students was linked to the fact that a high number of refugees in school correlated with more negative perceptions from teachers (Serin and Bozdog, 2020). This emphasises the importance of

providing support, training, and resources to teachers, as well as ensuring a balanced distribution of refugee students in schools to develop a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students.

Such training programme for teachers should be directed to all those teachers who have extensive experiences as well as those with a little experience in the field of education. According to Serin and Bozdog (2020), teachers with less than five years of experience were more likely to perceive refugee students as problematic, while those with more experience showed a more moderate perception. In their study on Turkish school administrators and teachers' perceptions of Syrian refugee students Serin and Bozdog (2020), revealed that school administrators tended to categorise refugee children using metaphors such as child with cultural adaptation and belonging problems, fragile and needy child, child who is no different from other children, and problematic child. In contrast, teachers used a wider range of metaphors, including guest, harmonious, incompatible, puzzle, and flower detached from the branch, indicating a more varied and potentially positive view of refugee children. Thus, negative perception might lead teachers to have problems communicating with Syrian refugee students, indicating a gap in understanding their needs and experiences (Serin and Bozdog, 2020).

The role of the parents of Syrian refugee students is significant in terms of partnering with schools to minimize cultural differences between local peers and refugee students. Through an ethnographic study, Karsli-Calamak (2018) indicates how Syrian refugee students' mothers engage in creating alternative spaces within schools to address challenges related to their children, including negative perceptions, dialogue, and attitudes. Despite finding contradictions between their goals for their children's futures and the school's vision, Syrian mothers remain committed to education and demonstrate a strong presence and readiness to assume active roles when opportunities arise. This is because these mothers actively share responsibilities related to child-rearing and school practices, utilizing cultural learning pathways to enhance their children's educational experiences.

To better engage refugee families, especially mothers, with schools, it is essential for schools to recognize and value the active participation of refugee mothers, thereby promoting strong collaboration. Schools should incorporate the cultural, religious, and

gender identities of refugee families into the educational environment and provide support interventions for those affected by trauma. Adopting a multicultural education approach and building upon the unique cultural practices of refugee families can promote comprehensive practices that enhance family engagement and improve educational outcomes for refugee students, ultimately creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students (Karsli-Calamak, 2018; Soylu et al., 2020).

For example, challenges such as insufficient infrastructure, limited availability of schools, language barriers, and social integration issues have led to low enrolment rates of Syrian refugee students, especially in Turkish urban areas (Demir et al., 2024). The engagement of Syrian refugee students' mothers in schools might be hindered by these challenges. This requires an inclusive planning strategy, as developed by Demir et al. (2024), based on the available capacities and resources of Turkish schools. This strategy involves two adaptations of the maximum covering problem (MCP): the cooperative capacitated MCP with heterogeneity constraints (CCMCP-HC) and the Modular CCMCP-HC. The former model is often limited because it primarily focuses on local education and does not consider other capacities or heterogeneity constraints. While these methods are commonly applied in various fields, they may not be suitable for complex scenarios like refugee education planning, where diverse needs and capacities must be addressed to ensure effective and inclusive solutions. This model addresses the random policies and non-capacity planning of schooling options existing in some countries, including Turkey, in terms of long-term integration for refugees. Such an inclusive model might guide leaders and school social workers to develop policies and practices that ensure the active engagement of refugee students' mothers, helping schools face challenges and integrate Syrian refugee students effectively.

2.4.3 Marginalisation of school social workers: obstacles to their role

Regardless of the significant role and tasks that school social workers perform at schools, generally, school social workers are more likely to be neglected and marginalised in school and by students' parents (Alajlan, 2015; Gherardi and Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018). Alotaibi's (2014) study, conducted in secondary schools in Afif, explored obstacles which face school counsellors in Saudi Arabia, preventing them from fulfilling their optimal roles, due to the

fact that they lack the collaboration of administrators and teachers as a result of the low awareness of their roles. However, Alotaibi revealed that other education institutions could collaborate and train school staff and counsellors, and assist students to understand the role of school counsellors, reducing such obstacles. Although Alotaibi's study was conducted in a small city in Saudi Arabia with different cultural backgrounds from cities A and B in this study, and with a smaller number of non-Saudi students, it suggests that helping students might not be effective in some parts of the country.

Similarly, Gherardi and Whittlesey-Jerome (2018) argued that school social workers are being marginalised in school due to their unclear roles. However, the marginalisation also links to the broader context, which is the educational policies developed by the Ministry of Education. The adverse effects of this marginalisation extend to the school setting, which contributes to unclear roles and the poor quality of professional interventions. Thus, resolving this issue requires social workers to link their role and intervention with the aims of the school in which they work, regardless of any lack of collaboration with teachers and school administration. Consequently, the role of school social workers is to ensure that negativity in the school environment is eliminated (Clancy, 1995; Piedra and Engstrom, 2009; Alhaj, 2018 Dryden et al., 2019; Celik, 2021). By doing this, a social worker's role concentrates on the school environment in order to address students' social and psychological problems, and to help students with low educational achievement (Paat, 2013; Duman and Snoubar, 2017). Therefore, school social workers need to overcome the marginalisation of the school staff by improving their services to avoid the impacts of such marginalisation. This will allow them to support school pupils regardless of their nationality or background.

2.4.4 Diverse cultural backgrounds in schools

School social work with refugees cannot establish strong practices to integrate refugee students into schools without focusing attention on the cultural backgrounds of newly arrived refugee students and the local population, including school staff and students. This is because such differences may have a negative impact on newly arrived refugee students and, more generally, the school environment (Piedra and Engstrom, 2009; Arar et al. 2019; Dryden et al., 2019; Bařaran, 2020; Soylu et al., 2020; Celik, 2021; Guo et al., 2021).

Challenges associated with diversity and difference can occur when different groups of students gather, and this gathering displays differences concerning any personal, physical or demographic attribute, such as skin colour, gender or ethnic origin, or it can indicate differences in attitudes, values and beliefs (Kastama and Bakirtizi, 2020).

This diversity applies to the integration of refugee pupils from a secular society background into educational institutions in conservative/religious societies, and vice versa. This is because such differences might hinder the integration of refugee students. For example, in many secular societies, there may be different expectations regarding the role of religion in society, the roles of men and women, and the type of behaviour that is considered appropriate. In contrast, conservative societies may prioritise religion, traditional gender roles and conservative dress codes. Such different beliefs and backgrounds represented by different groups of students in schools might lead to clashes.

Several studies indicate that new arrival students experience challenges in school due to the tension between their cultural background, and that of the dominant group, resulting in difficulty in adjusting to school (Morrice et al., 2019; Soylu et al., 2020; Celik, 2021). Sunata and Abdulla (2020), found that a large number of Syrians who have sought refuge in Turkey come from conservative families who may deem gender-mixed schools unacceptable, presenting difficulty in integrating female students into Turkish schools. This led some Islamic institutions, in cooperation with schools, to establish female schools after formal school hours, allowing those female students who prefer to study without male students to learn as well.

Correspondingly, Manzoni and Rolfe (2019) indicated in a UK study that new arrival students with a different background from dominant students need to be mixed with students in a similar situation, who speak little or no English, in special classes. This allows the newcomers to build confidence in order to be integrated into school. However, these classes are only offered at the end of the school day, over the short term. The findings of this study address both male and female students, and the study was conducted in the UK, a different context from the previous study of Sunata and Abdulla (2020).

Due to the apparent diversity in schools that hold a large number of refugee students, several studies suggest that teachers and other school staff need to be aware of the

newcomers' differences, and that local teachers should be encouraged to engage in training programmes to allow them to understand the cultural differences and needs of newcomers (Snoubar and Duman, 2015; Kaya, 2016; Hos ,2016; Duman and Snoubar, 2017; Alhaj, 2018; Bajaj and Bartlett, 2017; Akdemir, 2019; Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019; Koehler and Schneider, 2019; Gürel and Büyükşahin, 2020). This is because an absence of awareness among school staff produces negative behaviours attitudes and perceptions towards refugee students, which impacts their integration into a specific national educational system. For example, discrimination and bullying might spread in a school when its teachers have low awareness of refugee students' rights. Consequently, those programmes assist in establishing acceptance and tolerance among school staff, regardless of students' background, whether they came from a conservative or secular society.

Arar et al. (2019), argued that school leaders need to raise the awareness in teachers and local students to enable them to recognise and address social inequalities experienced by Syrian refugee students. Such intervention leads others to respect the cultural backgrounds of Syrian refugee students enhancing student engagement and the academic success of Syrian refugee students. By practicing an ethics of care and developing a pedagogy embedded in empathy and humanistic values, leaders create a supportive environment that meets the cultural, social, and emotional needs of both staff and students. This understanding bridges gaps between communities, promoting social cohesion and an inclusive educational setting for all students (Arar et al., 2019; Başaran, 2020; Guo et al., 2021).

Other scholars in the field of education have noted that awareness of newcomers' rights needs to reach other individuals in school, including local students, who represent a vital factor in facilitating a more positive school environment in relation to the integration of refugee students (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Dryden et al., 2019). However, shared identity, religion and faith contribute to mutual acceptance and source of support among local individuals and their guests (Alfadhli and Drury, 2018). A study in Jordan identified that shared religion, faith and Arabic identity among Syrian refugee students and Jordanian students helped in mitigating their differences, and creating a feeling of acceptance and belonging to their new land (Cohen, 2019).

However, national education/curricula around the world represents an issue which prevents mutual acceptance and the awareness of local citizens concerning refugee students' rights, which marginalises refugee issues and related information regarding their culture and new situation (Kumashiro, 2000; Hos, 2016; McBride, 2018; Koehler and Schneider, 2019; Cohen, 2020). It is important to note that politics and religion have a significant impact on the educational system, since they influence educational goals and curricula (Alharbi, 2017). Shared religion among refugee students and local students encourages tolerance, support, and mitigates differences, due to the religious curriculum that is taught in schools for all students.

Cohen's (2020) study, exploring how Syrian refugees expand inclusion and navigate exclusion in Jordan, found that several textbooks in Jordan's schools promoted Muslim solidarity regardless of country or background. Another lesson emphasises decent human treatment, referencing the Quran to underline the collective obligation of Muslims in society, irrespective of citizenship status (Cohen, 2020). Therefore, these subjects in the curriculum create intertwining lines between minorities and the dominant group in regard to culture. As a result, if cultural differences trigger challenges for refugee students, the remedy of such challenges involves a taught curriculum which addresses shared topics between the different groups, which is considered an important policy to be provided by schools and policymakers in the educational system.

However, a UK study of 15 schools by Manzoni and Rolfe (2019) argued that schools which establish and introduce a unique and special curriculum, covering diversity and allowing different uniforms for students, are more likely to integrate newcomers into school successfully. Although this perspective is significant for newcomers, national educational systems provide policies and regulation regarding curricula, as well as activities that schools should follow and perform.

A curriculum that meets the needs of Syrian refugee students is crucial for integrating them into schools. According to Hos (2016), most schools do not introduce curricula that address the specific experiences of those facing conflict and seeking refuge in a new country. A study conducted by Hos (2016), which focused on a community school for Syrian refugee children in Gaziantep during the 2014-2015 school year, revealed insights into the challenges and

successes of this initiative. One successful initiative was the establishment of Temporary Education Centres that used the Syrian curriculum to provide educational opportunities for refugee children, minimising disruptions to their learning process. This initiative received positive feedback from teachers, administrators, and parents, who appreciated the opportunity to be part of this educational effort. Such initiatives helped students transition more easily into their new educational environment because they addressed the unique needs of Syrian refugee children, such as transportation, skills to overcome previous challenges, and trauma.

2.5 Integration as a concept

2.5.1 Social integration

As a social concept, integration implies that individuals and groups move from a state of conflict to one of coexistence (Alawadh, 2018). Social integration serves to allow new individuals to be accepted into a community. In general, integration consists of two stages: solidarity and adaptation. The first stage includes the establishment of social relationships that link individuals and groups, while the second occurs when newcomers engage and share their opinions, values and attitudes with members of their new community (Alawadh, 2018). To achieve integration successfully, host societies' governments and institutions should ensure a healthy environment for newcomers by fulfilling their fundamental needs such as physiological needs which involve food, drink, and shelter (Alawadh, 2018). In the same vein, Strang and Ager (2010) asserted that social integration is a two-way process, which, first, requires the receiving society's individuals and institutions to accept new members, and second, requires newcomers to adapt to their new community's lifestyle norms. Here, it is crucial to note that social integration includes several significant concepts that reflect the realities of both the receiving society and the newcomers. For instance, the achievement of harmony and social adjustment between two groups necessarily involves integration, because such events also require the removal of social barriers between these two groups (Abu Al-Qasim, 2017).

The integration of refugee children into host communities is a complex process influenced by a range of factors at micro, meso, and macro levels. Individual characteristics such as race, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status significantly impact their integration

experiences (Hammoud et al., 2022). Factors such as economic hardships often act as barriers to children's education and social inclusion at these levels, limiting their access to necessary resources and opportunities. Additionally, living arrangements can influence language acquisition and cultural familiarisation, which are essential for integration.

Therefore, legal frameworks and policies at the national level profoundly impact the social integration of refugee children. For example, Australia's long-term residency and clear path to naturalisation enhance refugees' sense of belonging and access to rights and opportunities (Hammoud et al., 2022), whereas the short-term residency status offered in Lebanon and the medium-term status in Turkey can limit the stability and security of refugee families, affecting their long-term integration options. The availability of a supportive legal and policy environment is crucial for the successful integration of refugee children, as seen in the contrasting approaches of these countries.

Similarly, Strang and Quinn, (2021) argued that there are significant indicators that an integration framework provides a structured approach in understanding and assessing refugee integration. Such a framework emphasises the importance of social connections based on social capital constructs. By advocating for a holistic approach that includes relationships, trust, and reciprocal interactions, the framework highlights the importance of promoting a sense of belonging among refugees. Trust, in particular, emerges as a critical factor, as seen in the study of isolated single refugee men from Iran and Afghanistan, where low levels of social contact and trust hindered their integration. By addressing these factors through comprehensive strategies, policymakers and educators can create environments that support the successful integration of refugee children, promoting their well-being and inclusion in host communities.

In general, social integration involves processes that encourage individuals who experience social isolation or alienation to establish suitable and effective social relationships within the community (Abu AlQasim, 2017). This process depends on the extent to which the new environment is suitable for a particular group of refugees in terms of its values, customs and attitudes. This is because suitable environments tend to encourage refugees suffering isolation to engage in social life, and unsuitable environments are likely to hinder refugees'

willingness to seek social engagement with members of their new community (Abu AlQasim, 2017).

However, social integration does not always necessarily confer benefits such as social harmony and adaptation, which may occur in social life, especially between the group and social systems (Beresneviūtė, 2003). This is because integration is a multidimensional concept related to participation, which is a key factor for successful integration. However, the achievement of successful social integration assists minorities in creating social relations that enhance their sense of belonging. According to DeWall et al. (2011), belonging reflects the newcomers' acceptance, thus improving their ability to integrate and adapt to their new social environment. Minorities and newcomers, and especially children, tend to wish to experience a sense of connection and relationships with others in their environment, as this allows them to feel accepted and appreciated (Pillemer et al., 2000). Therefore, this sense of connection and belonging helps newcomers to feel integrated within their new adopted societies, facilitating improved social harmony and more cohesive communities.

According to Ager and Strang (2004), education is one of the most significant factors supporting successful integration, alongside adequate health provision, gainful employment and appropriate housing. Similarly, Robila (2018) explained that refugee integration is not a stress-free construct, due to the multidimensional processes it encompasses, including economic, health, educational and social factors. To explain, this is because such processes must be flexible; however, first policymakers and practitioners must take into account a range of factors that impact flexibility, such as refugees' experiences, mental health, and the availability of social support (Robila, 2018; Guo et al., 2021). However, developed countries that offer advanced social welfare systems always face challenges in regard to integrating new minorities (Valtonen, 2008).

When narrowing the focus to refugees, integration becomes a multifaceted process involving legal, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Refugees face unique challenges that require comprehensive approaches. One significant framework that addresses these complexities is the Indicators of Integration Framework by Ager and Strang (2008). This framework identifies key domains that contribute to successful integration.

Ager and Strang (2008) identify employment as crucial for economic independence and social participation. However, refugees face challenges in accessing employment opportunities due to legal restrictions, language proficiency issues, and lack of qualifications. Second, stable and adequate housing is essential for refugees to build a new life. Refugees frequently encounter difficulties in securing affordable and safe housing due to discrimination and economic constraints. Third, although integrating into schools can be challenging due to language barriers and differing educational standards, education is vital for the personal and professional development of refugees, including refugee students. Fourth, access to healthcare services is essential for physical and mental well-being; however, refugees often face obstacles such as limited healthcare access, cultural differences in health practices, and trauma from previous experiences. Moreover, social integration not only involves access to services, it requires social connections. Building social bridges (connections with other communities) and social bonds (connections within the refugee community) is fundamental for emotional support and integration.

The policies mentioned above are crucial for refugees to make a journey from exclusion to inclusion. Refugees are at risk of exclusion in their new communities because some countries' integration efforts have ignored their full rights. According to Feinstein et al. (2022), studies of 58 Syrian refugees in Germany, France, and Switzerland indicate that refugees consistently face exclusion in all aspects of integration, including markers and means (employment, housing, education, and health), social connections (bonds, bridges and links), facilitators (language skills, cultural knowledge, safety and stability), and foundations (rights and citizenship) (Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2015).

2.5.2 Integration into school

The concept of integration in the educational context can be defined as the removal of barriers that prevent refugees from living freely in their new environment. In such contexts, Syrian refugees must also be treated as equals, and have full access to the same rights which their peers enjoy, allowing them to interact with members of their new society without discrimination (Crisp, 2004). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) describes integration as an interactive process that relies upon the behaviours of both host societies and refugees. Indeed, refugees' adaptability plays a critical role in

facilitating successful integration. However, this requires the recognition of refugee status and the removal of discrimination, allowing refugee students to enrol in schools so that the process of integration can begin. Here, it is important to note that the principles of equality and non-discrimination represent the foundations of human rights law (Hunt, 1997).

Verbal or physical bullying can significantly impact the dignity of students, especially Syrian refugee students, as dignity (Karama) is an important cultural concept for them. This type of bullying, occurring at the micro level, influences their integration into new environments. A study conducted between 2013 and 2016 with Syrian and Jordanian psychosocial workers, who supported Syrian refugees in Jordan, indicated that dignity is a vital cultural concept that helps Syrian refugees face disasters. Although the concept of dignity differs between male and female Syrian refugees, it affects how individuals cope with their new environments (Wells et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2019). It is important to note that their studies align with the ADAPT model (Silove, 2013), which includes five adaptive systems: safety and security, bonds and networks, justice, roles, and identities. These systems provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the psychosocial needs of displaced populations and improving their skills of resilience.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that countries tend to have different perspectives on the integration of refugees and immigrants, which are linked to the receiving countries' refugee policies; for example, policies concerning the protection of national security. According to Celik and Icduygu (2019), a diverse range of integration models exist across European countries, due to their current and historical contexts as receiving countries. For example, refugee statuses in developing and developed countries tend to differ, as the former usually offer long-term refugee status, while the latter generally offer only short-term refugee status.

However, Saeedah (2015) claimed that Arab countries appear to lack clear policies on the integration of refugees, because they are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention. As developing countries currently host the highest number of refugees in the world, such countries' lack of clear integration policies means that their refugees' well-being is likely to suffer (UNHCR, 2019). Therefore, if receiving countries have appropriate refugee policies in place, this increases the likelihood that refugee students will quickly become well integrated

into schools. Moreover, this will also promote better integration for students' families, as their parents also become accepted as part of the local community through their children's involvement.

The general principles of school integration in educational literature and policies refer to the process of including students from diverse backgrounds, including those with special needs, disabilities, or from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds, into mainstream educational settings. It involves creating inclusive environments where all students have equal access to educational opportunities, resources, and support services. School integration aims to promote diversity, justice, and a sense of belonging among all students, regardless of their individual characteristics or circumstances. This approach emphasises the importance of providing a supportive and inclusive educational experience for all learners, fostering a sense of community and mutual respect within the school environment.

Lundberg (2020) defined integration as the process by which newly arrived immigrant and refugee students are incorporated into the social and academic framework of schools. This involves not only academic support but also fostering a sense of belonging. This study emphasises the importance of school leaders and practitioners in implementing effective social integration strategies.

Hammoud et al. (2022), argued that education and school practices play a vital role in shaping the integration of refugee children. The type of schooling arrangement, whether integrated or segregated, as seen in Lebanon and Turkey, has significant implications. Factors such as the quality of education, the presence of supportive teachers, and equal opportunities within the school system contribute to a welcoming and inclusive environment. These elements are crucial for promoting a sense of belonging and enhancing the social integration of refugee students. For instance, in Australia, compulsory schooling and programmes such as the Humanitarian Settlement Programme (HSP) further support the social integration of refugee children by enhancing self-reliance and community involvement.

With different cultures that exist in certain schools, integrative education policies should consider the cultures of students which differ from the dominant students. According to Timm (2016), to foster integration embedded in cultural diversity, schools must prioritise

multicultural education. Rather than treating students as human capital requiring education, multicultural education places students and their cultural identities at the heart of the learning process. This approach transforms students from objects of education into active subjects from whom both peers and teachers can learn. For example, the German school system focuses on test scores rather than a well-rounded education. As a result, Syrian refugee students of primary school age attend regular classrooms, whereas secondary aged refugees initially attend language preparation classes before being integrated into regular classrooms. This situation does not address the students' unique needs and rather focuses on an assimilation model which can prove to be damaging (Timm, 2016).

Due to the complexity of integration as a concept, there is a difference between social integration and integration into schools. Integration in general encompasses broader social, economic, and cultural dimensions, requiring the establishment of social relationships and the adaptation of newcomers to the community's norms (Strang and Ager, 2010; Alawadh, 2018). It involves addressing fundamental needs and creating environments beneficial to participation and engagement (Abu Al Qasim, 2017). On the other hand, integration into schools specifically focuses on removing educational barriers and ensuring equal treatment and access to rights for refugee students (Crisp, 2004; Hamilton and Moore 2004; Ager and Strang, 2008; UNHCR, 2019; Hammoud et al., 2022). While both forms of integration require the acceptance and adaptability of newcomers and host societies, the educational context places greater emphasis on institutional policies and practices that facilitate students' enrolment and interaction within the school environment. Additionally, while general integration considers multiple aspects such as health, employment, and housing (Ager and Strang, 2004), school integration highlights the role of educational access and the removal of discrimination in fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance among refugee students (Hunt, 1997).

2.5.3 Understanding integration, assimilation, and acculturation

Integration, assimilation, and acculturation are three separate processes that describe how individuals and groups adapt to new cultural environments. Understanding the nuances and differences between these concepts is crucial for policymakers, educators, and social

researchers who work with diverse populations. This discussion explores these processes, highlighting their unique characteristics and implications for individuals and societies.

Integration represents a balanced approach in which individuals maintain their original cultural identities while actively participating in the larger host society as mentioned in earlier sections. The concept of integration is sometimes referred to as assimilation (Bowskill et al., 2007). However, integration differs from assimilation in that it maintains the individual's own culture in a new society, which provides an environment in which different cultures may coexist and interact peacefully, whereas assimilation is a process through which individuals or groups adopt the cultural norms and values of a dominant culture, which leads to the loss of the original culture of immigrants and refugees. According to Gordon (1964), assimilation can occur in various stages, including cultural assimilation (adopting the language and customs), structural assimilation (entering social institutions like schools and workplaces), and marital assimilation (intermarriage with members of the dominant culture). While assimilation can facilitate smoother interactions within the dominant culture, it often comes with the loss of unique cultural traditions and heritage.

Acculturation, on the other hand, involves a mutual exchange of cultural features between groups as they connect with one another. Unlike assimilation, acculturation allows individuals to retain their original cultural identities while adopting certain elements of the dominant culture. Bowskill et al. (2007) argued that acculturation is the process where people from one culture interact with another, leading to changes in both cultures. This can result in different outcomes, such as assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization. Berry (1997) describes acculturation as a bidirectional process where both the immigrant and the host society undergo changes. This process can result in supporting the coexistence of multiple cultures, promoting cultural diversity and mutual understanding.

2.6 Integration and the role of belonging in school environments

Belonging is a fundamental concept that frequently emerges in discussions about integrating refugee students into school. This section aims to explore various aspects of belonging, which plays a crucial role in students' successful integration into school environments. By examining the relationship between belonging and integration, researchers might reach a better understanding of how belonging leads to integration.

The concept of belonging has become fundamental in the study of integration, particularly for individuals from refugee backgrounds. This is because any minority groups who come from a different background and settle in a new school setting become marginalised in the new school which directly impacts their psychological status and well-being (Sobitan, 2022). The literature indicates that belonging is a complex, multifaceted experience that significantly impacts the lives of young refugees, who often face numerous challenges in adapting to new environments such as psychological well-being challenges (Ager and Strang, 2008; Carlson et al., 2012; Due et al., 2016; Chen and Schweitzer, 2019; Sobitan, 2022). Such challenges might prevent the successful integration of refugees. Therefore, belonging is not merely a feeling and experience built by refugees themselves but also is an active process shaped by other individuals who interact with refugees in their surroundings and broader context (Chen and Schweitzer, 2019).

Belonging refers to the sense of being accepted, valued, and included within a community or society (Pillemer et al., 2000; Ager and Strang, 2008; DeWall et al., 2011; Due et al., 2016; Chen and Schweitzer, 2019; Sobitan, 2022). School belonging is crucial for the well-being and academic achievement of refugee students in the UK (Sobitan, 2022). It is strongly linked to their psychological and emotional well-being, leading to positive mental health outcomes and higher self-esteem when students feel a sense of belonging. In contrast, a lack of belonging can result in feelings of isolation and anxiety. Similarly, Guo et al., 2019, in their study of Syrian refugee parents and children aged 10-14 based on focus group interviews, revealed that Syrian refugee students not only struggled to make friends with local students but also faced issues like bullying and racism, which significantly impacted their sense of belonging and connection.

In terms of academic success, school belonging directly impacts students' motivation to learn, participate in activities, and seek academic support, which ultimately improves their performance and achievement levels. Additionally, school belonging provides a support system for refugee students within the school community, helping them navigate challenges related to their refugee background. Therefore, developing a sense of belonging in schools is essential for refugee students to succeed academically and emotionally in the UK (Sobitan, 2022).

However, developing a feeling of belonging is a crucial factor that may support the integration of refugee students. Comprehensive interventions help students in schools, with one notable example being the Bio-Psycho-Socio-Ecological Model of school belonging (BPSEM). Developed based on studies in the United States, New Zealand, and Australia with non-refugee populations, this model is influenced by the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, known for his ecological systems theory (Sobitan, 2022).

The BPSEM recognises the multifaceted nature of school belonging and emphasises interactions occurring at different levels within the school system. The biological aspect focuses on students' individual characteristics, such as cognitive abilities, emotional regulation, and physical health, which can influence their perception of belonging in school. The psychological aspect centres on students' mental and emotional well-being, including self-esteem, motivation, and resilience, as key factors shaping their sense of belonging and overall school experiences. The social aspect considers the impact of social relationships, peer interactions, and support systems within the school community on students' sense of belonging, highlighting the importance of positive social connections and a supportive environment. The ecological aspect examines broader environmental influences on school belonging, including cultural norms, institutional policies, and community resources, with attention to interactions at mesosystemic and macrosystemic levels (Sobitan, 2022). By integrating these bio-psycho-socio-ecological factors, the BPSEM offers a holistic understanding of school belonging, particularly relevant for designing interventions and support strategies for students, including those with refugee backgrounds.

Refugee students' sense of belonging in schools is impacted by negative relationships with teachers, racial bullying, and social exclusion. These barriers can be overcome by strategies such as teacher training on cultural sensitivity, implementing anti-bullying policies, and promoting inclusivity among peers (Sobitan, 2022). Utilising an ecological and interactionist approach can help professionals understand the complex factors influencing the school belonging of refugee students. This approach emphasises the importance of considering interactions at various levels within the school system.

Due et al. (2016), in their study focusing on the school belonging experiences of 15 children aged 5 to 13 with refugee backgrounds in Australia, highlight several strategies that schools

can use to help students develop a sense of belonging. These strategies include fostering positive relationships with teachers and peers in order to create welcoming physical spaces within the school. The study notes that the Intensive English Language Centres (IELCs) these students attended supported their sense of belonging through specific policies and inclusive practices. However, such support may not be achieved without the positive physical environment of the school, such as classrooms, play areas, and common spaces because of their significant role in shaping children's sense of belonging (Due et al. 2016; Başaran, 2020). Access to safe and welcoming spaces where they can participate in activities and engage with others contributes to their attachment to the school community.

Moreover, the research emphasises the importance of inclusive activities and events that relate to the cultural backgrounds of refugee students and their families. By incorporating culturally responsive practices, schools can create a more welcoming and supportive atmosphere for young children with refugee backgrounds. This approach not only enhances their sense of belonging but also improves their overall well-being in the educational setting. Such support is crucial in mitigating the challenges faced by refugee children in their new schools (Due et al., 2016; Soylu et al., 2020).

Similarly, belonging is a significant feeling that may support the integration process. For instance, Dromgold-Sermen (2022) found that Syrian refugees who felt a strong sense of secure belonging were more likely to engage positively with their new communities and exhibit better psychological outcomes. Her research indicates that community programmes designed to foster social connections and provide emotional support are critical for enhancing the sense of belonging among refugees.

According to Guo et al. (2019), Syrian refugee students faced issues like bullying and racism, which significantly impacted their sense of belonging and connection. This discrimination was based on stereotypes related to their refugee status, such as being perceived as unruly or violent, leading to unfair treatment in schools. Such treatment by locals provides feelings of isolation, depression, and a strong desire to return to Syria, which impact their emotions negatively and hinder the integration process. Also, difficulties including bullying, racism, and unfair treatment by teachers, bring other barriers to their socio-cultural well-being and identity development. To deal with challenges, schools need to understand the various

needs of refugee children, reduce prejudice, and provide a comprehensive environment that contributes to active learning and socialisation.

It is important to note that the concept of belonging is essential for understanding the integration of refugees. Refugee students often face unique challenges as they adapt to new educational environments, making a sense of belonging particularly critical for their successful integration. By incorporating belonging into integration theories and frameworks, school social workers and policymakers can develop more effective strategies to support refugees in their new environments. These strategies might include creating culturally responsive curricula, providing language support, and providing peer mentoring programmes. As a result, belonging can help refugee students feel valued and accepted, which ultimately contributes to their integration and well-being in the new school.

2.7 Theories related to integration

This part of the literature review will discuss multiple theories related to refugee students. The ecological perspective has gained wide acceptance in the social sciences, primarily because it provides effective and holistic explanations of diverse phenomena. In particular, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, was the first to address the relationships and interactions between children and their families in relation to their environment (Jack, 2000). This part will also discuss resilience theory, which is highly relevant to the current topic and its research questions, including: What are the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools? What are the needs of Syrian refugee students, and what obstacles do they encounter in schools? What difficulties do teachers and schools face when educating Syrian refugee students? What is the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?

2.7.1 Ecological theory

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the ecology of human development is connected to the relationships that exist between child and environment; these relationships involve people, institutions, and communities (see Figure 2-1). This theory highlights the importance of the individual, ensuring a focus on the surrounding setting which may affect their

development. Specifically, the ecological perspective investigates an individual in terms of four levels. The first level is the microsystem, which includes the child and their related institutions, such as the family and school. It is important to note that such institutions impact children directly due to the interactive nature with children. The second level is the mesosystem; this includes the different interconnected interactions and interrelationships among the institutions, such as the family and school, which tend to have extreme influences on the child (within the context of the microsystem). The third level, the exosystem, represents indirect settings or systems related to interactions that also affect children’s development. Finally, the macrosystem encompasses all of the previous levels. In other words, the macrosystem represents the overarching environmental factors, including culture, values, systems and institutions. More recently, Bronfenbrenner developed a new level, the chronosystem, which explains the different changes which an individual experiences during their lifetime within the context of both events and interactive relationships.

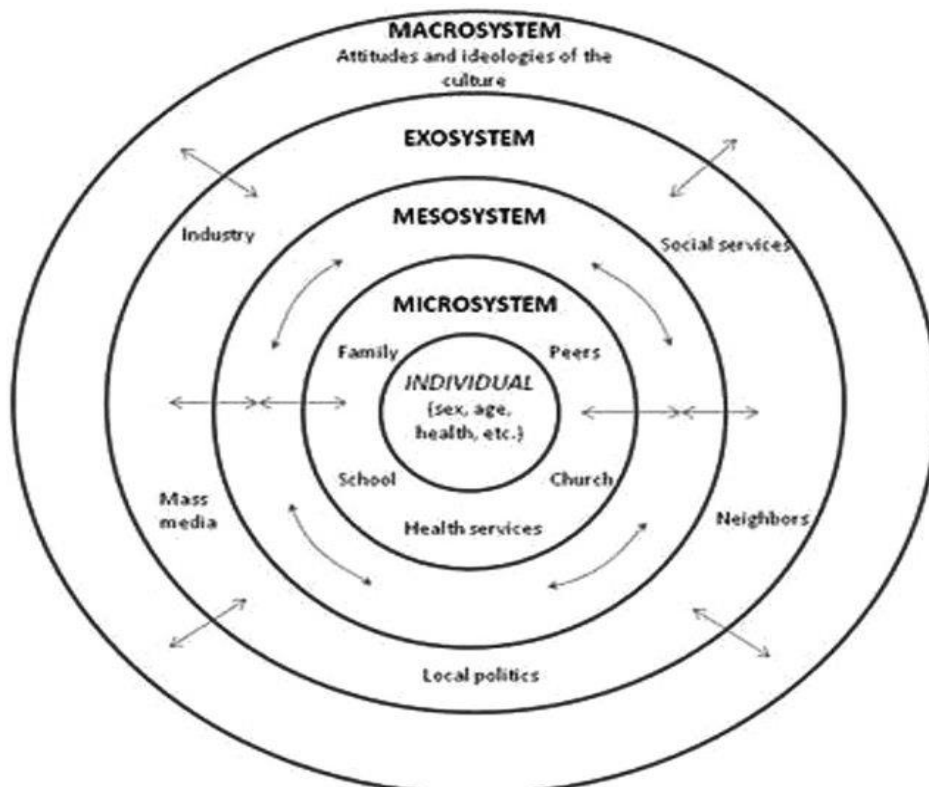


Figure 2-1 Bronfenbrenner (1979) Social-ecological model of human development

Ecological theory suggests that an individual cannot be separated from their surrounding settings, because each setting affects parts of the whole. Teater (2014) asserted that social workers should assess the individual and identify the level or system that requires an intervention; by identifying the impacted level, social workers might be able to accelerate the development process, which might assist the success of the professional intervention. This ensures that while practitioners concentrate on one level, they do not neglect the other levels at the same time.

According to Teater (2014), the ecology of human development is connected with relationships between children and their environment. External factors such as work patterns, the quality of available childcare services, and the social support available from the community usually affect parents' ability to provide what is required for positive child development. For example, families with low income status are likely to live in socially and economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where crime and substance abuse is common (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This is likely to expose refugees to risk factors that decrease their likelihood of successful integration since they are placed in low income areas. Thus, refugee students living in such areas might greatly benefit from macrolevel intervention programmes. For example, intervention programmes that address general issues such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to resources.

Hamilton and Moore (2004) confirm the importance of this theory in designing an educational interventions programme for refugee children. They argued that effective interventions must consider the multiple layers of influence on a child's educational experience, including family dynamics, peer relationships, school environment, and cultural factors. Holistic approaches need to address the interconnectedness of these systems. For instance, supporting refugee children in schools by not only providing education but also fostering positive relationships with peers, teachers, and families in the educational process. This approach ensures that interventions are most likely to address the diverse needs and experiences of refugee children. Moreover, the integration of cultural sensitivity into the curriculum and teaching methods can help refugee children feel more accepted and recognised in their new environments.

Hamilton and Moore's model examines the journey of refugee children through three key phases. First, the Pre-migration Phase, which indicates that the children face difficult circumstances in their country such as war, persecution, or deprivation, significantly impacting their development and well-being. Second, the Trans-migration Phase identifies the transition that takes place when children move from their home country to the host country. This stage brings stress, uncertainties, and trauma to vulnerable children. However, adapting to a new environment, culture, and system during this phase shapes their development. Finally, the Post-migration Phase represents the period after arriving in the host country, where refugee children confront new obstacles related to settlement, integration, and adjustment to a different social and educational environment. Factors such as language barriers, cultural differences, and access to support services play a role in influencing their development during this phase.

This model shows how various ecological systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem) influence the development of refugee children during different phases of their journey. By identifying the specific contextual factors that may support or hinder the adaptation and well-being of refugee children in educational settings, practitioners including social workers can intervene based on the impacted level so that the children can benefit from successful integration.

According to Yohani (2008), in his study conducted in a Canadian city, engaging refugee children in an Early Intervention Program (EIP) through various arts-based activities aimed at exploring ecological and resilience theory provides a holistic approach for supporting refugee children. This approach confirms the importance of the interconnection between individuals and their environments at multiple levels. According to Sirin and Rogers-Sirin, (2015), utilising nonverbal drawing exercises allowed Syrian refugee students in Turkish schools to express their feelings and how they have been affected by their previous experiences of war and movement. It is important to note that many drawings depicted indicators of trauma, such as violence, death, and loss. These factors provide a glimpse into the children's inner worlds, revealing their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. By examining the drawings, school social workers might better understand the children's psychological well-being, identify distress or trauma, and create thorough interventions to meet their specific needs.

Human ecological theory, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner, emphasises the importance of understanding how individuals are influenced by various interconnected systems, including family, community, and broader societal contexts. In the case of refugee students, interventions informed by this theory can play a crucial role in helping them establish connections with their new social and cultural environment. By recognising the multiple layers of influence that affect these students such as their immediate family dynamics, peer relationships, and the educational system interventions can be designed to facilitate integration and support. This holistic approach ensures that refugee students receive the necessary resources and social support to navigate their new surroundings, ultimately enhancing their educational experiences and overall well-being.

Moreover, different levels of the ecological system have specific features that impact children's mental health. In a systematic review by Abreu et al. (2019), an ecological approach was employed to understand the impact of acculturative stress on refugee youths' mental health. Their study highlights how stressors at different ecological levels, such as family separation, language barriers, and discrimination, influence the mental health of refugee youth. By adopting an ecological approach, practitioners can develop effective interventions that address the causes of acculturative stress, which influence socio-emotional development (Abreu et al., 2019). Such stressors might impact refugee students during their integration into new public schools. As a result, school social workers should consider assessments of these multiple layers when working with refugees, especially during the design of interventions.

Despite its attractiveness, critics of ecological theory point out that it attempts to provide an overly broad and complicated account, due to the multiple layers that surround a person's environment, and this makes it impractical to implement, thus resulting in unsuccessful interventions (Williams, 2010). However, these criticisms can be overcome if social workers seek to avoid its limitations related to broadness by relying on the most important level of children's needs, without disregarding the other levels with which they interact. Such a step might ensure that there is balance between the levels, leading to more successful interventions, as systems necessarily involve transactional processes between individuals and their environment (Golden and Earp, 2012).

2.7.2 Resilience theory

Resilience can be defined as one's ability to overcome misfortune or adversity (Breda, 2018; Yaylaci, 2018). The resilience model includes different factors such as optimism, determination, perseverance and high self-esteem (Breda, 2018). Moreover, one of the most vital factors is the protective factor that asserts an interaction between the risk factors and protection, which minimises exposure to actual risks, thus effectively reducing the possibility of a negative outcome. Such protective factors include emotional management skills, job skills, problem-solving skills, life skills and planning skills (Ungar, 2004; Yaylaci, 2018).

The various hardships refugees face in their home countries drive their need to flee to safe haven countries. Adversities such as war and political and religious persecution prevent child refugees from having the opportunity to grow up in safe and stable environments (Duman and Snoubar, 2017). In addition, refugee students, in their host countries, face several different types of adversity, such as poverty and discrimination. Furthermore, refugee students in host societies are also likely to be required to play secondary roles, such as acting as interpreters and helping their parents to build cross-cultural relationships with native citizens, which are likely to be stressful and beyond their abilities (Reynolds and Bacon, 2018). These responsibilities can also negatively affect refugee children's ability to integrate into their new school. Therefore, to help such students to integrate into their new schools, social workers and teachers should encourage them to acquire particular protective factors. For example, in the school setting, students can be taught problem-solving skills, planning skills and life skills. Once refugee students learn these resilience skills, it is more likely that they will fully integrate into their new school community.

Moreover, resilience theory is essential for understanding how individuals, especially vulnerable populations like Syrian refugee children, can positively adapt to adversity by focusing on strengths rather than weakness. A study conducted by Yaylaci (2018), focuses on the psychological functioning of Syrian refugee children, particularly those in urban areas or camps in Turkey. It identifies protective factors, moderators such as identity and belonging, and mediators such as a sense of efficacy and meaning derived from ethnic identity which act as protective factors, mediating the relationship between perceived

discrimination and mental health outcomes. Therefore, these factors contribute positively and guide intervention strategies (Yaylaci, 2018).

Likewise, Alsayed and Wildes (2018) argued that despite the challenges faced by Syrian refugee students, they demonstrate remarkable resilience. However, they also encounter significant social and psychological difficulties, including discrimination and mental health issues. This study aimed to examine the psychological status of Syrian refugee children residing in Antalya and Turkey by using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). In this way, resilience theory promotes a holistic approach to studying human development, considering the interaction between risk and protective factors at different levels and within cultural contexts.

This approach involves considering multiple layers of influence, including societal, proximal, and personal attributes, to understand the complex interplay of risk and protective factors impacting the well-being of refugee children. Factors such as cultural beliefs (macrosystem), family support (microsystem), and individual coping strategies all contribute to the adaptive functioning of these children. The societal context, including access to healthcare and education under the temporary protection status, can act as both promotive and inhibitory factors for integration and resilience among Syrian refugees in Turkey (Yaylaci, 2018). Understanding resilience is essential for preventing negative outcomes, promoting healthy development, and assisting individuals in coping with and overcoming challenging circumstances.

2.8 Summary

This review of the literature started with a discussion of the contexts in which this study is set. Beginning with an account of Saudi Arabia's unusual position in terms of international refugee conventions and its approach to refugees as 'guests', it goes on to outline the development of school social work globally before tracing the development of school social work in Saudi Arabia. This is followed by an extensive review of knowledge about school social work with refugees - particularly Syrian refugees - across the globe, before focusing more closely on countries neighbouring Syria that are also hosts to large populations of Syrian refugees. This part of the review includes attention to the challenges faced by school social workers, both in terms of their position vis-à-vis other school staff and in terms of

developing the necessary cultural understanding to promote the well-being of refugee children, their families and communities.

The review then moves on to explore relevant concepts of integration, assimilation and acculturation, also paying particular attention to the concept of belonging. This is followed by an examination of theoretical approaches to integration before reviewing theories that support understandings of human development and well-being. While ecological theory addresses different influences in children's environments that have an impact on their well-being, resilience theory focuses on children's individual characteristics that can protect them from lasting impacts of negative events and experiences in their lives.

Based on these understandings of school social work in the KSA, and of relevant concepts and theories to inform a study of the role of school social workers in facilitating the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi Arabian schools, the following chapter outlines the study design and methods to reveal: i) the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools, ii) the needs of Syrian refugee students and the obstacles they encounter in schools, iii) the difficulties encountered by teachers and schools when educating Syrian refugee students, and iv) the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students to integrate into Saudi Arabian schools.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapters of this thesis provided the background and rationale for investigating the role of school social workers in integrating Syrian refugee students into the Saudi schools, and the defined concepts central to this study, as well as a review of relevant literature devoted to school social work with refugees, integration, and services provided to vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the gaps in the literature concerning the Saudi context were highlighted, namely, the role of school social workers in working with refugees in Saudi Arabia, and, more specifically, the integration of newcomers into schools. As a result, this topic is very complex, involving relationships and dimensions pertaining to government, education and social policies.

Chapter Three outlines the design and methodology of this research, which explores the role of school social workers in integrating Syrian refugee students into Saudi schools. It outlines the use of a mixed-methods approach, and specific techniques of data collection and analysis. Then, it discusses ethical considerations. Subsequently, it offers detailed description of the implementation of the qualitative and quantitative phases and their related procedures. This chapter also discusses how those data are used in terms of triangulation. Finally, it offers reflections on the methodology, including the limitations, constraints, and strengths of the study, taking into consideration the timeframe available to the researcher and the sensitive nature of the subject.

3.2 Research design and the nature of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of school social workers in integrating Syrian refugee students into Saudi public schools, and specifically to address the following research questions:

1. What are the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools?
2. What are the needs of Syrian refugee students and what obstacles do they encounter in schools?

3. What difficulties are encountered by teachers and schools when educating Syrian refugee students?
4. What is the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students to integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?

This is a field about which little or nothing is currently known in the Saudi context.

Considering the issue of Syrian refugees, and their current and future needs, this mixed methods study serves to explore this phenomenon, and the experiences of both school staff (principals, teachers and social workers) and Syrian refugee students. Recognising this gap in the literature, the adoption of a mixed-methods research design will shed light and contribute to a more profound understanding of this vital area. Five schools were selected in each of two cities, A and B, in the centre and north of Saudi Arabia, and home to many Syrian refugee families.

With little experience and knowledge of the dilemmas facing refugees, school staff and policy makers tend to be unaware of the needs of the Syrian refugee students and their families. This is reflected in the absence of specific and clear policies and programmes to guide the reception and placement of refugees. The mixed-methods approach offers the opportunity to gain a holistic understanding of the issues outlined in the research questions.

A mixed-method approach refers to both data collection and data analysis, to both quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g. Hesse-Biber, 2010; Creswell, 2013). However, establishing an appropriate combination of methods, particularly in terms of when and how such methods can be successfully integrated (Bryman, 1988), is not straightforward. In practice, researchers often prioritise one method above another in order to strengthen the significance of the other method, and support well-validated and substantiated overall findings, which is one of the advantages of this approach (Creswell, 2011). Exploring and investigating new phenomena, programmes or models requires researchers to adopt a broad, in-depth perspective on the research problem. Consequently, gathering data using both quantitative and qualitative methods can lead to a more complete understanding of the social phenomena in question.

Here, it is crucial to note that using a mixed-methods design enables the study to achieve more clarity and appreciation of the research problem, as the methods complement each

other, due to their potential in answering the research questions in all aspects (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010). According to Creswell (2011), adopting such a methodology in research emphasises the positive aspects of each method, as social research needs to overcome the complexities of its processes to reach a realistic understanding of the study's findings.

Although a simple quantitative method (such as a survey) may have been sufficient to address the research questions in a superficial manner, such an approach would have been unlikely to develop more nuanced understandings of the experiences of participants to inform future policy and practice. Consequently, I used a mixed-methods approach to generate sufficiently comprehensive data to fulfil the research objectives by following a convergent parallel design, as shown in Figure 3-1.

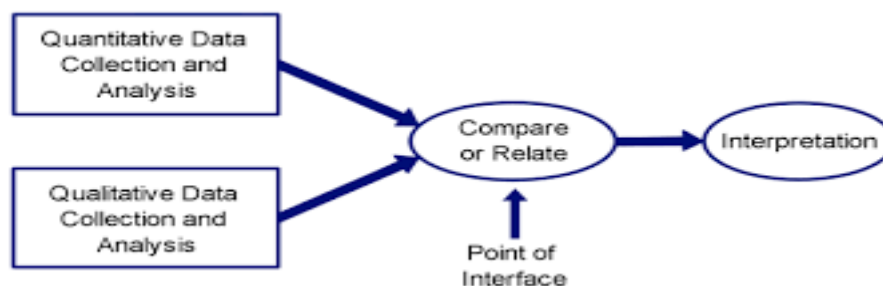


Figure 3-1 Convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell and Clark, 2011)

In accordance with the above discussion, this study adopted a mixed-methods research design (also known as triangulation). Creswell (2013) defined this approach as gathering both quantitative and qualitative data about a research problem simultaneously. According to Creswell (2011), researchers who conduct mixed-methods studies must consider the timeframe available for data collection when selecting their combination of methods. Due to the limited time available for the present study, a mixed-methods approach was employed to efficiently gather in-depth data from participants using various methods within a specific timeframe. Aside from this, the rationale for adopting this data collection approach in the present study was that it provides an opportunity for data confirmation (Andrew and Halcomb, 2009). Moreover, this approach is highly practical for studying different groups within a single study (Hanson et al., 2005). It is important to note that, after collecting both sets of data simultaneously, the analysis phases were conducted separately. Following that process, the data findings from both methods were combined.

In view of the importance of this research, its key objectives are as follows:

- To explore the roles played by school social workers in Saudi Arabia, and how they are helping refugee students to integrate into the Saudi schools.
- To study the impact of the Saudi school environment on Syrian refugee students.
- To investigate the challenges of Syrian refugee students experience both inside school and outside of school.
- To identify the roles of Saudi teachers in the school environment in relation to refugee students.
- To identify the interventions, using school social workers' (school counsellors') professional services, that meet the needs of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Academic research cannot be performed without consideration of the ethical aspects of research, which researchers must address before conducting the research and collecting data in the field, due to several important reasons. First, the researcher must provide assurances that they have addressed and accounted for any ethical difficulties that may occur throughout the duration of the study activity. This is critical, because human or animal subjects can provide considerable ethical difficulties that must be addressed. Second, these assurances display the researcher's dedication to following the ethics code and conducting research in a responsible and courteous manner (British Sociological Association, 2017; ESRC, 2021). This is significant, because potential incidents can have substantial ramifications for both the researcher and the research participants. Ultimately, this ensures transparency and responsibility for stakeholders, such as participants and regulatory organisations (Flick, 2009; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010; De Vaus, 2014).

3.3.1 Research ethics committee approval

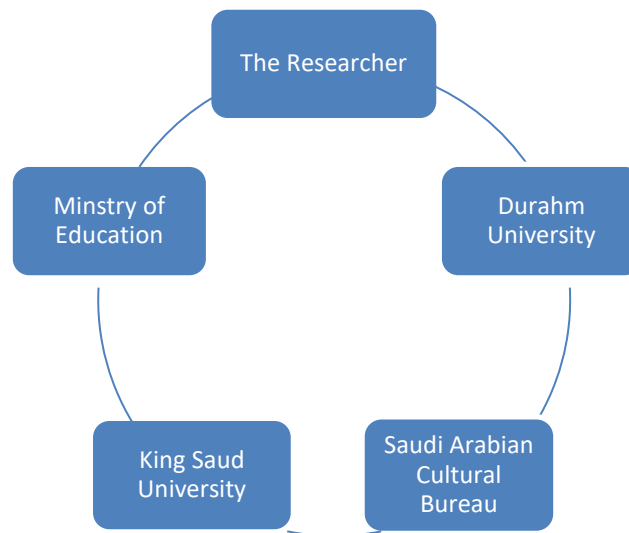


Figure 3-2 The processes involved in obtaining ethical approval

Acquiring ethical approval for this research study involved several committees and organisations. As a PhD researcher at Durham University, I was obliged to gain ethical approval in order to conduct this study, both in the UK and in Saudi Arabia. First, it was necessary to secure ethical approval from Durham University which was granted following minor amendments ([see Appendix 1](#)).

Subsequently, I began to seek ethical approval in Saudi Arabia by contacting the Education Policy Research Centre at the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia. After reviewing the questions, interview schedules, consent forms, and a summary of the research, permission was granted ([see Appendix 2](#)). However, Saudi researchers in the UK who plan to conduct research in Saudi Arabia must also seek the approval of the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London. The Saudi Cultural Bureau (2015) states that fieldwork must involve the conducting of experiments or interviews, or the distribution of surveys, and must be completed within 90 days.

The Saudi Cultural Bureau then contacted King Saud University’s Human Resource Office, which in turn contacted the Social Studies Department, which reviewed the request and later sent it to the College of Art Committee, which approved it and returned it to the Human Resource Office at King Saud University. Upon approval of this request, the Deanship of Scientific Research and Social Sciences Department at King Saud University reviewed the approval, then sought permission from the Ministry of Education and its branches in cities A

and B, in order to secure access to the schools. The committee provided the permission and sent me a letter, authorising me to carry out the fieldwork ([Appendices 3](#) and [4](#)). Once this authorisation had been provided, I could finally begin conducting the research.

3.3.2 Informed consent

As the participants' first language was Arabic, consent forms were translated from English into Arabic. Before the interviews, I read the information to the participants. This information comprised, but was not limited to, the following. First, the participants were informed that they had been invited because the study could be enriched with specific information to answer the research questions, which they could potentially provide, in turn achieving the aim of the study. Second, participation in the study was voluntary. As a result, participants who agreed to take part were apprised that they could withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, by first informing the researcher of this study. Consent forms were also given to respondents to complete before the interview process commenced, to ensure that they were aware of their rights before and after the process. Consent forms are key to any research process, because they help participants to understand the purpose of the study (Flick, 2009). Third, participants also had the right to refuse to answer any questions which they felt were inappropriate. Each group of participants (school social workers, principals and students) had a separate consent form and interview schedules ([see Appendices 5, 6, 7](#)). However, in Saudi Arabia, parental consent for the participation of students was required due to ethical research processes, so consent forms were provided for their parents ([see appendix 8](#)).

3.3.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

In order to adhere to research ethics, the confidentiality and privacy of the participants must be ensured by the researchers (Flick, 2009; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010). The interviewing of male participants (face-to-face interviewing) took place in secure locations in the public schools, which in turn ensured confidentiality and protected the privacy of participants by preventing other individuals in the schools from accessing or hearing sensitive information. All participants' names have been protected, and confidentiality has been respected at all times. This has involved replacing names with codes comprised of letters and numbers, such as MSSA1 and SFB1. I established the codes as a reflection of

participants' demographic information, forming the codes by using the relevant participant group (school social worker, principal or student), gender, city A or B, and finally the number of the participant (as shown in the next section). These codes assisted in the transfer of the interviews and coding process when using MAXQDA⁶. This strategy allowed me to readily distinguish each participant and group.

Furthermore, I ensured the anonymity of participants during the collection of data from surveys, as no names or identifying information were required. It is important to note the difference between anonymity and confidentiality; the former usually concerns participants whom the researcher cannot identify, while the latter involves the researcher knowing particular information about the participants, such as their names, but keeping such information protected, without sharing it with others or organisations such as schools (De Vaus, 2014).

3.3.4 Risks and benefits

Researchers from Durham University who intend to conduct a study outside of the United Kingdom must complete a risk assessment in order to evaluate any potential danger presented by the research; this was completed prior to leaving the UK to conduct the study in Saudi Arabia ([see Appendix 10](#)). Upon arrival in Saudi Arabia, I had to quarantine for 14 days in a hotel, due to the rules concerning those arriving from the UK, provided by the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia due to the Delta variant of COVID-19. The fieldwork was accomplished in April 2021; all COVID-19 precautions were followed, such as wearing a face mask, social distancing and hand sterilisation.

For the participants, especially the children, and due to the sensitivity of the subject, which could potentially impact the feelings of the children, social workers and parents were informed that they would be contacted immediately in the event that the children required any form of support (if the interviewing impacted them negatively). Consequently, to avoid the possibility of the interviews having negative impacts, participants had the right to refuse to answer any questions which were not comfortable for them. In addition, they could

⁶ MAXQDA is a software tool designed for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis, enabling researchers to analyse various types of data such as interviews, focus groups, panel discussions, articles, media, surveys, and Twitter (Marjaei et al., 2019).

withdraw from the interviews at any time without giving any reason and without any implications.

3.3.5 Data protection

I informed participants that voice records would not be shared with a third party, and, to ensure their protection, those records would be uploaded to a private device with a password. Additionally, the participants were aware that their responses would be destroyed following the completion of the study, and the results would only be used for the purpose of the study, with published results not including names or any other personal data.

3.4 Qualitative phase

3.4.1 Sampling

From City A, three male and two female school social workers, and one female and two male school principals, were selected in this study. The participants of both groups possessed at least five years' experience in the educational field (see Table 3-1). Selecting a sample depends on the type of study; this requires selecting a purposive sample which is also known as a judgment sample (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010). Similarly, City B involved three male and two female school social workers, as well as one male and female school principals (see Table 3-2).

For the selection of middle and high schools in both cities, I utilised a combination of direct personal and indirect connections. In City A, where I reside, I randomly selected schools within a specific neighbourhoods known for having a significant number of Syrian refugees, including the area where I grew up. I personally visited several schools, explained the purpose of the study to the school principals, and interviewed those who agreed to participate. In City B, I relied on recommendations from friends to identify neighbourhoods with large populations of Syrian refugees. I selected schools in City B based using the same criteria, choosing those where principals accepted to participate in the study.

In each selected school, one social worker and one principal were included in the study. In City A, School 1 (middle school) included one male social worker and one male principal, School 2 (middle school) included one male social worker and one male principal, School 3 (high school) included one male social worker, School 4 (middle school) included one female

social worker and one female principal, and School 5 (high school) included one female social worker. In City B, School 1 (high school) included one male social worker and one male principal, School 2 (middle school) included one male social worker, School 3 (high school) included one male social worker, School 4 (high school) included one female social worker and one female principal, and School 5 (middle school) included one female social worker.

Syrian refugee students were selected based on gender representation to ensure a balanced sample. The selection criteria included students' willingness to participate and the approval of their parents, facilitated through consent forms. In City A, School 1 included three male students, School 2 included two male students, School 4 included two female students, and School 5 included three female students. In City B, School 1 included two male students, School 2 included two male students, School 3 included one male student, School 4 included three female students, and School 5 included two female students. The total sample comprised 20 Syrian refugee students, with a balanced representation of males and females across the selected schools in both cities.

Table 3-1 City A: School staff

No.	School staff code	Sex	Age	Experience	Position
1	MSSA1	Male	35	+10 Years	Social worker
2	MSSA2	Male	48	+10 Years	Social worker
3	MSSA3	Male	44	+10 Years	Social worker
4	FSSA1	Female	40	+5 Years	Social worker
5	FSSA2	Female	42	+5 Years	Social worker
6	MSPA1	Male	46	+10 Years	Principal
7	MSPA2	Male	44	+10 Years	Principal
8	FSPA1	Female	36	+5 Years	Principal

Table 3-2 City B: School staff

No.	School staff code	Sex	Age	Experience	Position
1	MSSB1	Male	42	+10 Years	Social worker
2	MSSB2	Male	40	+5 Years	Social worker
3	MSSB3	Male	42	+5 Years	Social worker
4	FSSB1	Female	33	+5 Years	Social worker

5	FSSB2	Female	35	+5 Years	Social worker
6	MSPB1	Male	44	+10 Years	Principal
7	FSPA2	Female	49	+10 Years	Principal

Exploring the needs and obstacles facing Syrian refugees required the use of a purposive sample (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010). Altogether, 20 students were interviewed – ten males and ten female, aged between 13 and 18 years, and enrolled in public middle and high schools. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010), a researcher must choose participants based on criteria such as experience, knowledge background and age. Using this strategy will help the researcher to reach a deeper understanding of these refugees' backgrounds (see Tables 3-3 and 3-4). Purposive sampling means that the sampling is conducted with the research aims in mind, such that units of analysis are chosen based on characteristics that will allow the research questions to be addressed (Bryman, 2012). To achieve the research objectives concerning the role of school social workers in the integration of Syrian refugee students, all students had arrived in Saudi Arabia after the Syrian crisis in 2011 and were enrolled in Saudi schools. These students held visitor visas (residence permits), reflecting their formal residency status in the country.

Table 3-3 City A: Syrian refugee students

No.	Student code	Age	Sex
1	SMA1	16	Male
2	SMA2	16	Male
3	SMA3	15	Male
4	SMA4	17	Male
5	SMA5	17	Male
6	SFA1	15	Female
7	SFA2	16	Female
8	SFA3	16	Female
9	SFA4	16	Female
10	SFA5	15	Female

Table 3-4 City B: Syrian refugee students

No.	Student code	Age	Sex
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1	SMB1	18	Male
2	SMB2	16	Male
3	SMB3	17	Male
4	SMB4	18	Male
5	SMB5	18	Male
6	SFB1	18	Female
7	SFB2	16	Female
8	SFB3	16	Female
9	SFB4	14	Female
10	SFB5	13	Female

As the first mixed methods study of its kind in Saudi Arabia, using qualitative interviews as well as the more widely recognized survey method, the intention is not to generalise the findings but to begin to develop an understanding of how school social workers can support the integration of Syrian refugee students. Unfamiliarity with the use of interviews resulted in many potential participants expressing unwillingness to give up 30 minutes of their time to be interviewed about their experiences, at the same time indicating that they would have participated in a survey. These reactions led to a relatively small number of interviews, although this is not unusual in qualitative research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010; Bryman, 2012).

Furthermore, the nature of the research topic, in terms of sensitivity and modernity in Saudi Arabia, led to recruiting a sample of this size. Although the attainment of data saturation is generally an objective of qualitative research, the sample size assisted in obtaining this goal. However, researchers using a high sample size increase the likelihood of having repeated data (Mason, 2010). Hence, using such a number of interviews (a total of 35) is due to the context of the research and the sample, as discussed above; using apps to organise the interviews, such as MAXQDA, minimises such repetition.

3.4.2 Data collection

For the qualitative phase, the instrument for gathering data was semi-structured interviewing, allowing the collection of in-depth information about students' experiences as refugees in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the questions investigated the needs, obstacles and

social relationships of the students. Due to the nature of the research – in the context of Saudi Arabia, with its conservative background and the Ministry of Education’s policies preventing males from accessing female schools or interviewing female school staff and students face-to-face – the interviewing in this study took two forms. I held face-to-face interviews with male students and male school social workers and principals, and telephone interviews with female students and female school social workers and principals. The advantages and disadvantages of different types of interviews in social research, and the details of interviews, are discussed below.

At the beginning of the study, I was planning to seek the assistance of a female researcher, who could conduct interviews with female students and school staff, but after examining the literature concerning methods in social sciences, I decided to perform the interviews with females (school staff and students) myself, due to several reasons. First, due to the new topic being investigated, I was very keen to explore the actual experiences of school staff and students in relation to the latter’s integration into Saudi public schools. Therefore, researchers unfamiliar with this topic might not be able to ask follow-up questions during interviews, which could potentially have led to inaccurate and misleading responses. Second, due to the sensitivity of the topic in Saudi society, telephone interviewing encouraged female participants to discuss their experience without fear or apprehension. Moreover, this was an acceptable approach in the Saudi context, as females cannot meet unrelated male strangers. Finally, hiring a female researcher would also have been challenging in terms of resources, as a single researcher with no advance funding.

3.4.2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of different types of interviews in social research

Employing different types of interviews in Saudi Arabia is beneficial for the research process. This utilization is influenced by the cultural and religious principles that are followed in Saudi Arabia. As a male researcher, I could not conduct face-to-face interviews with female participants; therefore, using telephone interviews is the best approach to allow these participants to be interviewed. Taking advantage of telephone interviews enables female school principals, social workers, and students to express their feelings and discuss their experiences and other subjects without hesitation or shyness, especially when talking to an unknown man who is not their relative, for the first time. Further details on the use of the

interview types used in this study will be explained in the next section titled 'Procedures for Interviewing Male and Female School Staff and Students'.

Social research, whether it is performed in the context of quantitative, qualitative or mixed method research, depends substantially on instruments whereby researchers collect data about target phenomena, facts, and the social problems of participants. Among these instruments, one of the most widely used is interviewing. Interviewing is defined as a conversation between researcher and participant(s), which requires active questioning and listening on the part of interviewer and interviewee (HesseBiber and Leavy, 2010). Besides, the active conversation facilitated by interviewing allows researchers to collect data from respondents in order to answer research questions (Berg, 2009). Interview types consist of face-to-face, telephone and online interviewing, and each type or technique is associated with its own advantages and disadvantages. Here I discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each type, beginning with face-to-face interviewing, followed by telephone interviewing and online interviewing.

3.4.2.1.1 Face-to-face interviewing

Face-to-face interviewing is the most common type of interviewing, due to the range of benefits it offers. It should be noted that researchers over the last two centuries tended to use this technique, before the massive expansion of technologies, such as computer-based video interviews, over recent years. Regardless, Bryman (2012) asserted that face-to-face interviews are usually selected for use in qualitative research, as they allow researchers to observe paralinguistic social cues that participants may exhibit during an interview, which interviews conducted via telephone may fail to capture. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010), the nonverbal data of participants enhances the verbal data provided during the interview session. For instance, this nonverbal information includes body language and gestures, which occasionally link to the comfort and discomfort of participants in relation to the questions raised by interviewers. This is one of the most significant advantages of face-to-face interviewing, which cannot be found in other types of interviewing such as telephone interviews, in which interviewers cannot observe such reactions due to their spatial distancing.

Moreover, interviewing allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions, and to observe interviewees' reactions and feelings (Bell, 2008). Probing an interviewee's response to achieve clarity can be achieved by asking follow-up questions, while observing the reaction of participants. In the interviews, the researcher's reactions to the responses of interviewees promote a natural flow to interviews, with the use of nonverbal feedback such as 'mmm' and 'right', encouraging participants to provide more comprehensive answers. (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010; Bryman, 2012; Lune and Berg, 2017). It should be noted that during face-to-face interviews, the interviewer guides the interview without delay, due to the spontaneous answers from the interviewee, which saves time. Opdenakker (2006) asserted that interviewers tend to focus on creating questions formulated to encourage interactive communication; therefore, in most cases, the interviewees' responses require further clarification, especially in semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Therefore, the control interviewing provides for researchers, in terms of timing and opportunities to ask follow-up questions, allows them to gather in-depth data from interviewees, which represents one of the advantages of face-to-face interviewing.

Notably, any advantages of interviewing rely on the extent of the interviewer's skills. Gathering in-depth information requires the interviewer to develop a strong rapport with the interviewee in order to build trust and secure honest responses, especially for in-person interviews. According to Hesse-Biber and Johnson (2015), face-to-face interviewing is effective for building relationships with respondents, which ultimately allows interviewees to be more comfortable about expressing their feelings, opinions and attitudes. Another skill that might be significant is note-taking during the interview, regardless of whether the interviewer uses audio or video recordings. However, the interviewer needs to be cautious regarding the potentially distracting influence that note-taking may have on the interviewees.

Although face-to-face interviewing is linked to numerous advantages, it is also important to consider its disadvantages. Most qualitative research interviews tend to be very time consuming, due to the time required to transcribe interview transcripts, which may take five to six hours for just one hour-long interview (Bryman, 2012). The time-consuming nature of this type of interviewing can become even more significant if researchers collect data from several different cities in a certain region; in such cases, other interviewing types such as

telephone interviews might save time and money (Bryman, 2012; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003; Opdenakker, 2006). In addition, the researchers should be aware of the disadvantages of face-to-face interviewing as they plan data collection. For example, although researchers' physical presence when collecting data might enrich the study, ensuring researcher safety is an essential aspect of research ethics. For interviews with participants held in dangerous places such as prisons, researchers are advised to utilise different types of interviewing, such as telephone interviewing (Opdenakker, 2006).

3.4.2.1.2 Telephone interviewing

Telephone interviewing is another widely used type of interviewing in social research; it tends to be used particularly in quantitative research rather than qualitative research (Bryman, 2012; Novick, 2008). However, the advantages of using this technique as a research method apply equally to quantitative and qualitative research. One advantage of telephone interviewing is its convenience and flexibility; it allows respondents to discuss sensitive topics and issues that the interviewee may be unwilling to discuss during a face-to-face interview, as telephone interviewing maintains respondent anonymity. It is important to note that telephone interviews tend to be of shorter duration than face-to-face interviews, as a result of the necessary level of focus between interviewees and interviewers (Irvine, 2011). However, social cues that might otherwise be observed during a face-to-face interview are unobservable in a telephone interview. Moreover, this type of interviewing is suitable for people with busy schedules, or those who cannot meet the interviewer in person, such as mothers at home with small children, shift workers, computer addicts and people with disabilities (Opdenakker, 2006). Thus, telephone interviewing might enrich different kinds of study, whether quantitative or qualitative, depending on the information being sought from respondents.

Another advantage of telephone interviewing is its time- and cost-effective nature, since researchers are not required to travel. This advantage is especially valid when the study requires the gathering of data from participants in different cities, enabling the interviewer to gather data from home or at an office (Novick, 2008). However, interviewers may be forced to use this technique in some instances, such as in remote areas where travelling is difficult or impossible. According to Lune and Berg (2017), under certain circumstances,

telephone interviewing becomes the only means for collecting data. Besides, collecting data from unsafe places, such as prisons or dangerous and politically sensitive sites, requires researchers to utilise telephone interviewing, as there is no other choice (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003; Opdenakker, 2006). Regardless of the associated advantages of telephone interviewing, the researcher might be forced to use this interviewing type, as it may be the only feasible and/or available choice.

However, telephone interviewing is linked to several inevitable and unavoidable disadvantages. For example, interviewing participants by telephone might be impossible due to the unavailability of telephone connection in some places, such as poor or rural areas (Bryman, 2012; Irvine, 2011). As a result, the interviewer must travel to participants' locations to collect data using face-to-face interviewing, which is time-consuming, as discussed earlier. Furthermore, telephone interviewing might only be successfully performed with participants who are able to talk and listen effectively. According to Bryman (2012), people with hearing issues cannot be interviewed by telephone. However, this depends heavily on the type of research and the topic being investigated. Although improved technology might assist people with such disabilities, technology cannot solve all communication issues. According to Holstein and Gubrium (2003), linguists claim that usually people do not tend to ask for clarification over the phone, as they believe such information might be asked later in the interview; however, in face-to-face interviews, people might ask for clarification. It is important to note that to avoid such a scenario, researchers might ask participants at various stages if anything has been unclear or ambiguous. Thus, researchers use this approach depending on the nature of the study and the ability of interviewees.

3.4.2.1.3 Online interviewing

Online interviewing has recently become more popular among researchers, as it enables them to collect data from participants remotely using applications such as Skype (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003). Online interviewing has proven popular not only because of its flexibility, but also due to the advantages it offers. According to Lupton (2020), an online interview is a structured conversation that consists of three elements: the interviewer, the interviewee and the technology used to conduct the interview. Salmon (2010) stated that

online interviewing takes two forms: (i) synchronous, which includes audio, video and conference platforms; and (ii) asynchronous, which involves Internet networks such as email and Facebook. Synchronous interviews are performed simultaneously between interviewer and participants, while asynchronous interviews have no specific time in which to be completed.

As is the case for the other interviewing types discussed previously, online interviewing has its own advantages. Online interviewing might eliminate issues related to geographical distance, thus saving the time and effort required to travel to an interviewee in order to collect data (Bryman, 2012). Bryman also argued that online interviewing using video chat allows researchers to investigate the visual cues of the interviewee. Moreover, online interviewing utilises platforms such as Skype, which tends to encourage people to participate in the interview, especially if they cannot otherwise participate in a face-to-face interview, due to limited time or geographical distance (Janghorban et al., 2014). Lune and Berg (2017) pointed out that online interviewing can retain one of the advantages of face-to-face interviewing, in that some types of online interviewing allow the interviewer to ask probing questions to assist the progression and flow of interviews.

In addition, by using video, researchers are able to identify verbal cues, body language and behaviour that enriches their understanding of interviewee responses. However, these advantages might be moot if the interviewee lacks adequate Internet skills or a computer/Internet connection, because they live in a remote area or they are in poverty. That being said, researchers working with limited time and a large sample size might find this interviewing type useful in meeting the needs of their study.

One of the main advantages of online interviews is that they are easy to transcribe, as software applications are available which will automatically transcribe the audio into written speech, while preserving interviewees' anonymity (Bryman, 2012). Although such an advantage is mostly applicable to online focus group interview, it can apply to a personal online interview, as the same techniques apply. According to Jowett et al. (2011), a face-to-face interview takes more time to transcribe than an online interview, especially those utilising written methods such as email. Although this saves time for researchers, it is time consuming for interviewees. Therefore, this advantage only applies to online interviewing.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an urgent need to use online interviewing, not only because of availability, but to protect people's lives. Such a trend may help in preventing the spread of this disease which threatens the life of both participants and researchers. As a result, many researchers have changed their approach towards data collection in recent projects, or have planned new methods with which to complete their projects (Lobe et al., 2020). The authors also argue that online interviewing makes participation in research much easier for participants, due to the improved computer skills that they have gained during the pandemic. However, participants require particular technological tools to allow them to participate in online interviews, such as smartphones, computers and headphones. Furthermore, online interviews may use various platforms, such as Zoom, Skype and WebEx. Notably, while online interviewing shares similar ethical issues with face-to-face interviewing, it is still an important form of data collection in social research, due to the huge advantages it offers in safeguarding the health and safety of those participating in the research.

On the other hand, online interviewing is accompanied by several disadvantages, which might impact the research. For example, online interviewing tends to take a significant amount of time when compared to face-to-face interviewing (Bryman, 2012; Lune and Berg, 2017). However, this time commitment might be reduced if there is a strong relationship between the interviewer and the participants, which depends on participants' cooperation. In addition, participants' cooperation is likely to enrich the findings of a study, as the interviewer is able to contact participants again to obtain further formation, or to ask for clarification (Bryman, 2012). Thus, these time-related limitations of online interviewing might be eliminated by mutual relationships which ensure that participants stay in contact with the interviewer, and mitigate the risk that they will drop out of the interviews.

Furthermore, one of the other main limitations of online interviewing is technical issues that might occur, for example, when a network connection is lost, or when certain areas are not covered by Internet access. In the case of a poor network connection, the distance between the interviewer and the participants might result in a low-quality interview, which impacts the recording and contacting processes. Consequently, this issue is not only time-consuming for the interviewer and the participants, but also hinders their ability to build a strong relationship (O'Connor and Madge, 2017). In addition, during an online interview,

participants may experience disturbances in their immediate environment, of which the interviewer might not be aware, harming the flow of the interview. According to O'Connor and Madge (2017), during online interviewing, the interviewer may be unable to discover the extent to which these external factors affect remote interviewees. Therefore, researchers might be able to avoid this limitation of online interviewing once they develop suitable technology skills that assist them in collecting data remotely.

3.4.2.2 Procedures of interviewing male and female school staff and students

I began to work on the data collection instruments before travelling to Saudi Arabia, establishing the interview schedules for participants (students, school social workers and principals) and creating the teacher questionnaire. As suggested by supervisors, the interview schedules and questionnaire were written in Arabic before being translated into English for editing, in light of any suggestions. Moreover, several teachers and experts in the education sector in Saudi Arabia offered great feedback regarding the interview schedule and questionnaire. The interview schedule for the Syrian refugee students was pilot tested with three students before starting the formal interviewing process, as validation of the interview schedule was very important (Creswell, 2007; Hesse Biber and Leavy, 2010; Bryman, 2012).

After arriving in Saudi Arabia, and obtaining the necessary Ministry of Education letter and ethical approval, I started visiting several schools and meeting the principals of these schools, explaining the purpose of my visit. They welcomed me to conduct interviews, providing important COVID-19 guidelines were followed, while inspecting the letter from the Ministry of Education and the interview schedules and questions. Then, we agreed interview appointments. I held the interviews at three male schools in each City A and B, as they have the largest percentages of refugees in the country. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour, and I conducted the interviews in Arabic.

I conducted the interviews with female school staff via telephone. This strategy not only adhered to Saudi Arabia's cultural regulations, preventing potential conflict, but was also beneficial, since telephone interviews offer more convenience and flexibility in obtaining information (Irvine, 2011). This is an illustration of how using different strategies could achieve the aim of this study to investigate social workers' roles in facilitating the

integration of refugees into Saudi Arabian public schools. The school visits required the researcher first to meet the school gatekeepers, typically security personnel or administrative staff, who inquired about the purpose of the visit and then informed the school principals. After explaining my purpose, I was able to call either the principal or the school social workers in the school, with a telephone provided by the school in the gatekeepers' room, which is always located at the front of the school (in both cities). As was the case for the male schools, I arranged appointments for telephone interviews.

For Syrian refugee students, the school social workers of both sites played crucial roles in the process of interviewing the students; this is because those male and female school social workers contacted the parents of Syrian refugee students, obtaining their permission, allowing the students to participate in the study.

3.4.3 Data analysis qualitative phase

Prior to analysing the raw data, the interviews were transcribed between June and early September 2021; this process was crucial in enabling me to become familiar with the dataset and its patterns. According to Oluwafemi et al. (2021), this process of transformation leads the researcher to immerse themselves with the obtained data from the fieldwork, and to form impressions about qualitative data, which also helps in efficiently analysing the data. For these reasons, I performed the transcription stage with the use of manual transcription and voice recognition software provided by Google Docs. However, the transcription was carefully revised manually to ensure total accuracy.

Moreover, the interviews were transcribed in Arabic, to capture the actual experiences and keep the original meanings, before the evidence and quotes were translated into English ([see appendix 11](#)). In this regard, concepts, cultural practices and perspectives are maintained, which strongly support a rigorous analysis (Van Nes et al., 2010). In this case, my native Arabic language, helped in achieving this. Nonetheless, occasionally, I consulted a professional Arabic–English translator who works in the Saudi educational field.

A high number of interviews must be organised to allow for seamless analysis; this was especially the case for this study, which includes three separate groups (school principals, social workers, and students; all of these groups are mixed gender, male and female).

Therefore, due to the development of technology in software programs which assists qualitative research in terms of organising and managing interview data, I chose to use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA) to organise, classify code and collect extracts, and save the interviews. This is because one of the significant features of this software program is its support for Arabic language during the coding process. It is important to note that MAXQDA was not fully relied upon in analysing these interviews, because the role of the researcher is to process and implement this process (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Williamson et al., 2018). Thus, this stage facilitated the analysis of the interviews by relying on the approach of thematic analysis.

3.4.3.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used method for analysing qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and open-ended survey responses. Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2012) approach to thematic analysis is one of the most commonly used frameworks in social science research. However, as a new topic being researched in the Saudi context, such an approach facilitates the emergence of rich description which, in turn, assists the meaningful interpretation of the data set, allowing the development of knowledge (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2019).

The absence of literature specifically on the role of school social workers in Saudi Arabia also encouraged me to utilise an inductive approach during the early stage of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thus, I conducted the interpretive process of data analysis with reference to the few previous studies available on school social workers in similar contexts, as demonstrated throughout my thesis. As I will discuss later in this chapter, researchers can combine inductive and deductive techniques during the analysis stage. This combination provides the benefit of flexibility, which is grounded in thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and can enhance the validity of findings.

Braun and Clarke's approach involves six phases: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report. These phases are not necessarily linear, and the researcher may need to move back and forth between them as they analyse the data. I began by familiarising myself with the data by reading and re-reading the interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of it. Due to the high number of participants, consisting of three distinct

groups students, school social workers, and principals (35 participants in total) I initially read one interview from each group. This allowed me to form an initial impression of the experiences unique to each group. This involved taking notes, highlighting key phrases, and marking interesting or significant passages. In the second phase when I transferred all the interviews into the MAXQDA software, I started generating initial codes, by systematically identifying and labelling relevant features of the data, such as words, phrases, or patterns. Then, in the third step I combined codes together, seeking themes, depending on their shared meaning or relevance to research question. This stage entailed looking for patterns or groups of codes that indicate underlying themes or concepts (Braun and Clarke 2006; 2012).

In the fourth phase, I reviewed the themes, as this approach requires the researcher to check that the themes accurately capture the data and are consistent with the research question. This phase includes revisiting the data, refining or consolidating themes, or considering alternative interpretations. In the fifth phase, I began to define and name the themes, by summarising each theme in a concise and meaningful way, using descriptive labels that capture the essence of the theme. This involves developing a clear definition of each theme and providing examples from the data to illustrate its relevance. In the final phase, I produced the report by writing up the first two themes which are the hardships faced by the Syrian refugee families and their children in Saudi schools. Then, the third theme which is the challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia and, finally, the fourth theme which is school support, and the fifth theme, an appropriate school environment for integration. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the findings should be presented in a coherent and compelling way, highlighting the key themes and their implications with regards to the research question. Moreover, exploring under-researched phenomena using this strategy allows the researcher to gather valuable, comprehensive, and complicated data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Therefore, following this approach enabled me to answer the research questions regarding the integration of Syrian refugee students and the role of school social workers, while also allowing a nuanced understanding of the data.

Furthermore, deductive and inductive coding are two distinct approaches to coding in thematic analysis. While both approaches involve identifying and labelling themes in

qualitative data, they differ in the way the themes are generated and organised. Deductive coding is a top-down approach that involves developing a set of predefined codes or categories based on existing theory or research questions. The researcher begins with a preconceived idea of what they expect to find in the data and looks for evidence to support their hypothesis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2012). This approach aligns with my thematic analysis, as it relies on a clear understanding of ecological and resilience theories that promote the research questions. By applying these theoretical frameworks, I ensured that some of the data was systematically categorised into pre-existing themes relevant to these theories. This method allowed for a structured analysis that highlighted the interplay between ecological and resilience factors in the Saudi context, particularly regarding the role of school social workers in integrating Syrian refugee students into schools. Deductive coding is particularly useful when the research question is well-defined.

Inductive coding, on the other hand, is a bottom-up approach that involves generating codes and themes from the data itself. This approach does not rely on pre-existing categories or theoretical frameworks, but instead allows themes to emerge naturally from the data. Inductive coding is particularly useful when the research question is exploratory, and the researcher is interested in uncovering new or unexpected themes in the data. This approach requires a high degree of flexibility to allow for the emergence of novel themes and patterns.

In practice, most thematic analyses involve a combination of deductive and inductive coding. The researcher starts with a set of predefined codes, but also remains open to the emergence of new themes and patterns in the data. They may modify or expand their coding scheme as new insights are gained from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thus, I applied this combined coding strategy, due to the fact that this was a new topic to be explored to unravel new insights. Although the theories were introduced in the literature review, I remained open to new insights during the analysis and coding phases.

3.5 Quantitative phase

3.5.1 Sampling

As the Saudi Arabian education system separates genders with all-male and all-female schools, I sampled 40 male and 40 female school teachers from Cities A and B separately to participate in a survey questionnaire with closed-ended questions and open-ended questions ([see appendix 9](#)). In the same approach to selecting the sample as in the qualitative phase, the quantitative phase involved non-probability sampling, meaning that Saudi school teachers participating in this study had certain characteristics and experiences. Participation required at least two years of experience in the educational field, and their having worked with Syrian refugee students. Although designing sampling in mixed-methods research is difficult, researchers can establish simple or complex samples to address their study's purpose, objectives and research questions (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007).

3.5.2 Data collection

I chose to utilise a questionnaire as a data collection tool to complement the interview data, thereby achieving comprehensive insights and in-depth findings on the new topic under investigation. After reviewing the Eastern and Western literature in the field of school social work, education and refugees, it was difficult to find a questionnaire that was suitable for the purpose of the research. Consequently, I created a new questionnaire that consisted of four sections, as follows:

- The first section addresses basic data (city, gender, age, work experience, teaching subject, teaching stage, and educational qualification).
- The second section contains six direct questions (to be answered 'yes' or 'no') designed to gather general information about teachers' experiences and preparation in working with Syrian refugee students.
- The third section contains the four main categories of questions (needs and programmes directed at students, behavioural problems for students, social and school problems, and personal problems and family relationships).

- The fourth section contains three open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' perceptions of Syrian refugee students in terms of their integration into schools and the challenges faced by both the students and the schools.

Before starting to distribute the questionnaire, I needed to ensure its validity. After preparing the questionnaire in its initial form, the questionnaire's validity process began. The validity of the questionnaire refers to the degree to which the measurement instrument accurately reflects what it is intended to measure, both linguistically and analytically (De Vaus, 2014; Taherdoost, 2016). Checking validity takes several forms, among them, asking experts who are not part of the study sample to review the questionnaire and provide feedback regarding whether the questions appear to be relevant. Therefore, in this research, seven academic experts participated to determine the questionnaire items' effectiveness in addressing the research questions in relation to the research objectives. These experts work in universities in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and are specialists in the field of social work and education. The role of the experts involved feedback about the clarity, relevance and formulation of the statements forming the basis of the questionnaire.

Besides, a school principal, who holds PhD certification and works with Syrian refugee students, participated in assessing the questionnaire. This involved removing any unnecessary, unclear or ambiguous questions (De Vaus, 2014; Hesse-Biber and Johnson, 2015; Taherdoost, 2016; Nardi, 2018). I modified the form based on their comments, and, after review, the questionnaire was produced in its final form, as a valid instrument for measuring what it was designed to measure. It is important to note that before the questionnaire was distributed to experts, three Saudi public school teachers, who have taught Syrian refugee students, provided their comments and feedback regarding the questionnaire. At the point at which they considered the questionnaire to be clear and easy to understand, I subsequently sent the questionnaire to the experts. Therefore, to determine the validity of a questionnaire, it is important to consider all these factors, and ensure that the questionnaire is designed and administered in a way that maximises its accuracy and truthfulness.

I utilised Google Forms to design the questionnaire for this research. Some claim that using such online survey will lead to a poor response rate (Nayak and Narayan, 2019). However,

this technique benefited the study, with efficient distribution to participants, while comfortably fulfilling the required level of participation, which was 80 teachers. Although I was not present when they completed the questionnaire, and so could not ask whether there were unclear statements or questions, they could email me if they were uncertain about anything. One benefit of using this form was that teachers needed to answer a question before going on to the next question; therefore, the possibility of missing responses was avoided.

I distributed the questionnaire in coordination with the administrations of the schools and the school social workers. After finishing the interviews with school social workers, I explained to them the purpose of the questionnaire for teachers. All those school social workers were able to contact all teachers smoothly through the use of existing WhatsApp groups, in which all staff are included. School social workers shared the survey in those WhatsApp groups and teachers participated at a convenient time for them. Although the WhatsApp application is generally used on a basis of informal communication, it benefits people engaged in academia and research (Jailobaev et al., 2021). Using this application helped school social workers to contact the teachers without strict appointments, or disturbing them in school or online during their official work hours. This was reflected by the participating teachers' prompt return of completed questionnaires. Eighty teachers completed the questionnaire in no more than three months.

3.5.3 Data analysis

According to Bryman (2012), data analysis is a stage that includes various components. Therefore, descriptive analysis provides a summary of patterns appearing in the responses of the participants (De Vaus, 2014; Althuhyan, 2017). It is used to acquire a better understanding of the data and to recognise any patterns or trends. After 80 teachers completed the online questionnaire, I transferred all responses to the Excel spread sheet program, to be quantified and exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in order to perform the analysis process.

In this research, three techniques were used to analyse the questionnaire. The first was descriptive analysis of the dimensions of the questionnaire, namely the closed-ended

questions. The second technique was crosstabulation analysis, and, lastly, the third technique was thematic analysis of the open-ended questions.

Cross tabulation was the second technique used in analysing teachers' responses to the questionnaire. This descriptive analysis is widely used among social researchers, referring to the statistical analysis approach used to examine the connection between two or more variables, which is also known as contingency table analysis or crosstabs (White, 2004; Bryman, 2012; De Vaus, 2014). While cross tabulation can provide some insight into the relationship between variables, it should not be utilised to draw any conclusions about the population from which the data was collected. Taking into consideration the fact that one of the objectives of this study is not to generalise the results. Therefore, the samples used are representative and manageable within the time and resource constraints of a single researcher.

Moreover, an important aspect of this exploratory research is that the results cannot be generalised, because this kind of research seeks to investigate phenomena which have not been explored in the literature, hence reaching a deeper understanding (Reiter, 2017). Additionally, the number of Saudi school teachers it is not sufficiently large to support generalisability (Polit and Beck, 2010). In this study, I aimed to identify the similarities and differences between groups of Saudi teachers (male and female) and school teachers in Cities A and B. This technique allowed for a visual inspection of the relationships between two or more variables concerning the survey statements, which could help in identifying patterns and relationships in the data (De Vaus, 2014).

The last technique I used in analysing the three open-ended questions of the questionnaire was thematic analysis. In this stage of analysis, I followed the same approach I used in analysing the semi-structured interviews. The similarities of following the same approach in analysing data acquired from different sources (school social workers, principals, teachers and Syrian refugee students) and tools (semi-structured interview and questionnaire) helped in triangulating the data, and this strengthened the trustworthiness of the study, and assisted in confirming the data (as will be revealed in the discussion chapter).

3.6 Triangulation

Triangulation is an important strategy used by social researchers to validate study results (Bryman, 1988; Creswell, 2011; Mertens and Hesse-Biber, 2012). Triangulation involves gathering data using different methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex problems. In this study, data collection involved interviewing refugee students about their experiences and problems related to integration, as well as interviewing school social workers and principals. This approach led to the gathering of valuable data about the refugee children’s integration into the school system, allowing the best possible understanding of their situation in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, using questionnaires to collect data from teachers enriched the data, offering teachers’ perceptions of the students, their challenges, and the role of school social workers in helping refugee students to be integrated. Finally, interviewing principals from different schools enriched the study’s findings in terms of understanding the refugee-integration policies in operation in Saudi public schools. Table 3-5 below shows how each research question was addressed based on the sample membership and the data collection tools.

Table 3-5 Strategy to address the Research Questions

Research questions	Data collection set/s address these questions:
What are the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools?	Semi structured interviews with principals/school social workers/male students Telephone interviews with female students
What are the needs of Syrian refugee students and what obstacles do they encounter in schools?	Semi structured interviews with principals/school social workers/male students Telephone interviews with female students Survey of teachers
What difficulties are encountered by teachers and schools when educating Syrian refugee students?	Semi structured interviews with principals/school social workers/male students

	Telephone interviews with female students
	Survey of teachers
What is the role of Saudi school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?	Semi structured interviews with principals/school social workers/male students
	Telephone interviews with female students
	Survey of teachers

3.7 Reflections on methodology

This section includes my reflections on the methodology, including its limitations, constraints, and strengths and goes on to consider what I might do differently if starting the study again.

3.7.1 Limitations

One of the limitations that became apparent during the data collection was the unfamiliarity with research processes among some gatekeepers, especially in the female schools. Also, some of the gatekeepers believed that I was there to provide financial help, therefore, I had to explain to them the purpose of the research, which consumed a great deal of time. Similarly, when asked to give permission for their children's participation, some of the parents of Syrian refugee students asked if there would be financial support or not during the arrangement of the interviews; however, this was not a common occurrence. Such instances revealed that several of the Syrian refugee students' families were suffering financially, as confirmed by the findings of this research.

3.7.2 Constraints

The study was also subject to constraints, as the parents of Syrian refugee students were excluded from this research. Including them in order to explore the phenomena and challenges associated with their children in Saudi Arabia would be beneficial in terms of reaching a deeper understanding.

Furthermore, involving Saudi and other non-Syrian students in order to explore their relationships with Syrian refugee students, and discovering how their support contributes to the integration of their Syrian refugee peers, would help in unravelling actual experiences in schools regarding Syrian refugee students' integration. However, due to the available timeframe, and as a single researcher, I decided not to include them, as this would consume significant time that was not available. Despite these limitations and constraints this research with this sample of respondents can be considered a positive achievement, as it has established a basis for other researchers to conduct similar research in the field of school social work with refugees in Saudi Arabia and can inform policymakers and individuals engaged in the Saudi educational field to be aware of the phenomena discussed.

3.7.3 Strengths

The methodology of this study has several strengths. First, relying on my direct and indirect personal relationships facilitated access to schools in two cities. Second, it is the first study in Saudi Arabia to investigate the integration of Syrian refugee students by involving three diverse groups: school social workers, principals, and the students themselves. Third, this study uniquely includes both male and female participants, addressing a sensitive topic in Saudi Arabia. Finally, despite cultural and normative restrictions that prevent male researchers from interviewing female participants, I successfully conducted telephone interviews with female participants, ensuring comprehensive and inclusive data collection.

3.7.4 Reflection

Although I made every effort to adhere to ethical considerations in both the UK and Saudi Arabia before, during, and after data collection, I unintentionally neglected one of the most important aspects of confidentiality. While the ethical process included arrangements to support students who might become distressed during interviews, I did not mention in the information sheets, consent forms, or during the interviews that any harmful or abusive behaviours disclosed in school, at home, or in the community would be reported to the appropriate authorities. Fortunately, no such incidents occurred. However, if I were to conduct this study again or undertake future research, I would ensure that this important aspect is clearly addressed by informing the participants and including it in the information sheets and consent forms.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has covered the chosen mixed methodology approach, the semi-structured interviews and online questionnaires utilised to complete this research, and its ethical considerations. The data was collected from Cities A and B, which have a large number of Syrian refugees. Interviewing, as a tool for collecting data, involved three mixed gender samples – school social workers, principals and Syrian refugee students (35). The interviews were analysed by using thematic analysis, and organised using MAXQDA, revealing significant themes and major findings that address each research questions and achieve the objective of the study. Saudi school teachers from the same two cities also participated in an online questionnaire, which was later analysed to provide descriptive statistics as well as cross tabulation to identify any differences and similarities between teachers' responses based on the variables of gender and city. Collecting data using different methods has allowed for methodological triangulation validating the findings of the study. Finally, it highlighted a reflection on the methodology, including the study's limitations, constraints, and strengths, considering the timeframe available to the researcher and the sensitive nature of the subject.

General introduction to the findings

The following chapters present emerging findings from the qualitative (chapters 4-6) and quantitative (chapter 7) data. Chapter 4 will present and discuss the first two of the five themes identified through the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews: (i) Hardships faced by Syrian refugee students and their families refers to the first research question concerning hardships faced by Syrian refugee students and their families that includes the pre-migration experiences and the challenges of adapting to life in Saudi Arabia. (ii) The implications of refugees' status as 'visitors' in Saudi public schools which focuses on the experiences of Syrian students within Saudi schools, including school staff's motivation, new experiences, enrolment policies, and cultural interactions. This theme will help to address the second question. Chapter 5 addresses challenges faced by the students, including external and internal difficulties. Chapter 6 covers school support and the appropriate school environment for integration, detailing the actions taken by schools to support refugee students and foster a welcoming environment. Chapter 7 presents the quantitative findings derived from the survey offering statistical insights that complement the qualitative data. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings is discussed in Chapters 8 and 9, where the findings from Chapters 4-7 are synthesised to provide a comprehensive account of what has been learned through the exploration of the research questions (See Table 4-1). The findings are used to gradually build a new model of integration which is shown in its completed form in chapter 8, Figure 8–1).

Table 3-6 Structure of thematic analysis of addressing research questions

Theme	Description	Research questions addressed
1) Hardships faced by Syrian refugee students and their families	It links to the research question about the immediate and transitional challenges faced by these students and their families	(RQ1) What are the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools?
2) The implications of refugees' status as 'visitors' in Saudi public schools	Focuses on the experiences of Syrian students within Saudi schools, including school staff's motivation, new experiences, enrolment policies, and cultural interactions.	(RQ1) What are the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools? (RQ2) What are the needs of Syrian refugee students and what obstacles do they encounter in schools?
3) Challenges faced by Syrian refugee students	Identifies and explores external, internal, and social/psychological challenges faced by Syrian refugee students.	(RQ2) What are the needs of Syrian refugee students and what obstacles do they encounter in schools?

		(RQ3) What difficulties are encountered by teachers and schools when educating Syrian refugee students?
4) School support	Analyses how Saudi schools support Syrian refugee students, including understanding backgrounds, identifying problems, raising awareness, consultation, family engagement, and financial support.	(RQ4) What is the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students to integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?
5) Appropriate school environment for integration	Focuses on the actions taken by schools to integrate Syrian refugee students, including creating a welcoming atmosphere, fostering relationships, and promoting a sense of belonging.	(RQ4) What is the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students to integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?

Chapter 4 Hardships faced by the Syrian refugee students and their families

4.1 Introduction

The first theme, hardships faced by the Syrian refugee students and their families, related to the participants' experience of escaping the war zone in Syria in order to save their lives and secure their physical and mental well-being and attempting to re-establish themselves in Saudi Arabia. This theme included (a) the pre-migration experiences of the Syrian students and their families and their circumstances before arriving in Saudi Arabia as refugees, including their experiences of the war in Syria, the transition, the loss of official documents and the social and psychological issues of living in a conflict zone and (b) the challenges in achieving adequate standards of living in Saudi Arabia, which related to the legal status of family members, the family structure and relatives and responsibilities (See Table 4-2). This theme also presents the first and part of the second stage of the Syrian refugees in Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that the hardships faced by Syrian refugee students and their families are connected to their status as 'visitors' in Saudi public schools. This connection is illustrated in Figure 4-1, and all these connections will be interpreted in further detail in the discussion chapters 8 and 9.

Table 4-1 Hardships faced by the Syrian refugee students and their families

Theme	Description	Sub-Themes	Sub-Sub-Themes
1) Hardships faced by Syrian refugee students and their families	This theme focuses on the experiences of Syrian refugee students and their families as they fled the war in Syria, aiming to secure their physical and mental well-being and re-establish themselves in Saudi Arabia.	(a) Pre-migration experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The experiences of the war in Syria. 2. The transition. 3. The loss of official documents. 4. The social and psychological issues of living in a conflict zone.
		(b) Challenges in achieving adequate living standards in Saudi Arabia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The legal status of family members. 2. family support networks and structural dynamics. 3. Relatives and responsibilities

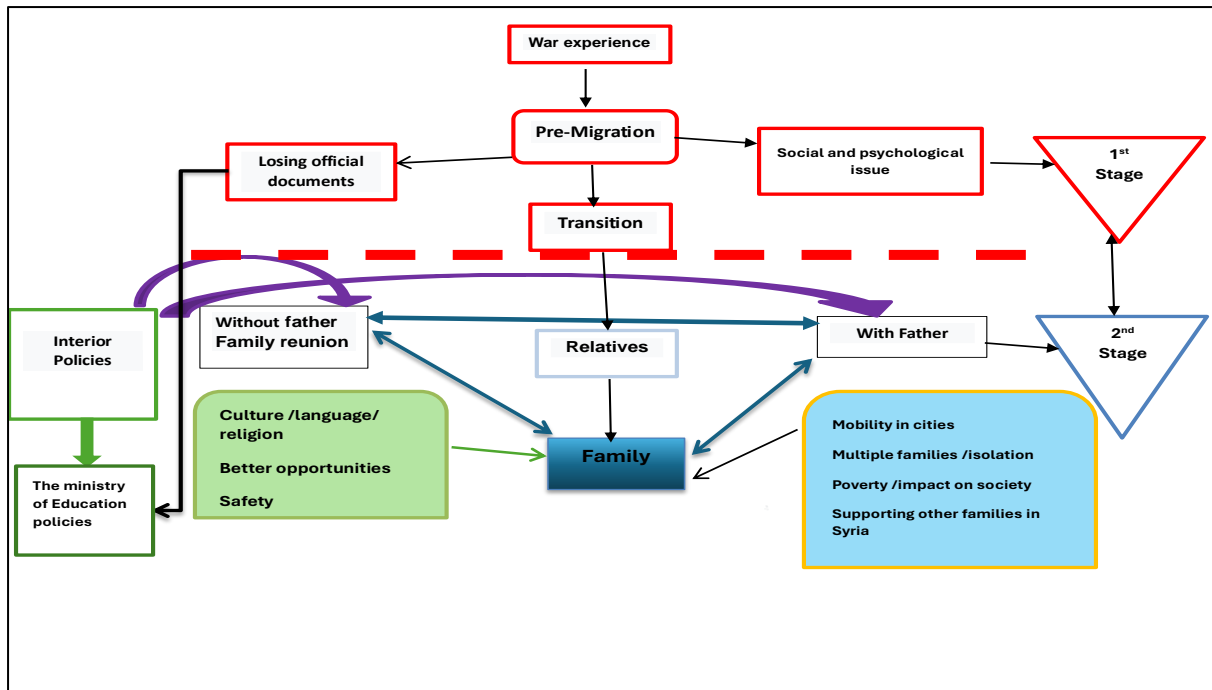


Figure 4-1 Hardships faced by the Syrian refugee students and their families

4.2 The pre-migration experiences of the Syrian refugee students and their families

The Syrian refugee students had a lot in common with other vulnerable individuals and groups around the world who have escaped conflict zones, whether accompanied by someone, such as a father who could provide protection during the associated dangerous periods, or on their own. Before their arrival in Saudi Arabia, the Syrian students faced tremendously frightening circumstances in terms of the ongoing war, which was clearly an unsuitable and unsafe environment in which to live. One Syrian student participant (SMB2) explained that one of the reasons leading his family to seek refuge in Saudi Arabia was the active conflict in Syria, which prevented them from remaining in the country. As this student explained, there was a substantial number of active terrorist groups in the country, which caused widespread fear and forced students and families to safeguard their lives and futures. Such experiences prevented the return to their own country. The war experiences shared by the Syrian refugee students suggested that their former lives were characterised by great insecurity and a lack of basic personal security and well-being due to the conflict. These terrorist groups, including ISIS, controlled the lives of innocent individuals, forcing them to leave the country for their own safety. The Syrian crisis and the terrifying experiences shared by some of the students forced most of those interviewed to flee their

country. As one of the students (SMA5) reported 'I came to Saudi Arabia not long after the war in Syria crisis had begun; if the war had not started, my family and I would not have come and live here in Saudi Arabia'.

School staff, especially school social workers who closely supported the Syrian refugee students, became intensely aware of the issues caused by the students' experiences of conflict. They were tasked with providing students with the necessary support services once they arrived in Saudi schools, which gave them an in-depth insight into the experiences of the newcomers in their home country. For example, one school social worker (MSSA2) stated that 'those visiting students who arrived in Saudi Arabia after experiencing the conflict for one or two years recognised the difficulties of life there (Syria) and the associated circumstances'. Additionally, the school social workers revealed that they uncovered details of the students' experiences of the conflict and its associated conditions by conducting an assessment performed by school social workers regarding students' needs and general situation, which involved several new students.

Most of the Syrian students who had arrived in Saudi Arabia in early childhood experienced a war and conflict that may have negatively impacted them and their development both before and after seeking refuge in Saudi Arabia. For some students, this was because they had lost family members due to the conflict. As one school social worker (MSSA2) reported, 'One of the male Syrian students lost his mother during the war and this harms him in school. The student has a good personality but...this loss negatively influences him in school and this impact will last for a long time; we discovered this after he had a behavioural issue at school'. Such situations were relatively common among the Syrian refugee students due to the trauma they faced, for example, witnessing both the bombing of their towns and cities by warplanes and the damage that was done to their homes due to shelling, as well as losing relatives. The students' experiences of war and conflict continued to strongly influence them even after settling in a new and safe environment.

In addition, some adolescent Syrian students (aged 13–18) reported that they had not attended school in Syria regularly due to the conflict in Syria. Consequently, the school social workers expected these students to experience significant pressure and stress once enrolled in new schools.

Education in Syria in the war zone was impossible as the students were unable to attend school. Although Syrian students had the right and enthusiasm to continue with their education, Syrian schools stopped allowing students to attend for months due to both the civil resistance and the war among armed groups and individuals as it presented a risk to their lives. Students reported being threatened by combatants, leading them to choose the safest option of leaving the country.

The fathers of refugee students who were already living and working in Saudi Arabia were able to provide a place of refuge where their children could live in safety and receive an education under Saudi working regulations and laws by acquiring visitor visas (permits for residents with family seeking refuge from war zones, including Syrian citizens in Saudi Arabia). This enabled the students to both acquire educational opportunities and receive support from the facilities and services offered in Saudi schools. It is important to note that those children whose fathers were not working in Saudi Arabia also had the right to seek refuge in the country (see section 4.3.1 Legal status).

4.2.1 Transition

Whether they arrived in Saudi Arabia with or without their family, Syrian students did not experience a smooth transition. This was because they were forced to escape the conflict and travel to Saudi Arabia to save their lives. The students and their families fled to Saudi Arabia via car and bus either on highways or desert roads, in itself a traumatic experience. The students also shared their experiences of leaving Syria via either Jordan or Iraq to reach Saudi Arabia as there is no direct route between Syria and Saudi Arabia. Such long journeys, each route with its own unique difficulties, likely impacted the children who had to pass through various checkpoints as the highways, and cities were controlled by armed groups and the Syrian army. One of the female students (SFA2) explained that before they had reached Jordan, they encountered armed individuals belonging to armed groups who stopped them and asked about their details before inspecting their identification, saying: ‘all of my family were frightened’.

4.2.2 The loss of official documents

The loss of official documents linked to the students' and their families' pre-migration experiences of the conflict had other negative impacts on the students and their family members, especially in terms of their official status in Saudi Arabia. Losing important official documents, such as passports and educational certificates, inhibited the integration process in schools. Some Saudi schools refused to enrol students that had lost the certificates from their previous schools. As one female student reported (SAF1): I missed a full year after arriving in Saudi Arabia as I did not have my educational certificates. I forgot all my formal documents in Syria and I could not attend school for a period in Saudi Arabia'.

Even though the fathers of the Syrian refugee students who had lived in Saudi Arabia for many years may have been aware of such procedures and policies, losing official documents was out of their control. As one female (SFB1) student participant whose father was working in Saudi Arabia before the crisis highlighted: 'The circumstances that evolved around the students during the war forced them to leave the country without preparation which meant they could not collect all their belongings, especially in circumstances that threatened their lives due to armed groups'. Another male student (SMB4) shared his story, explaining, 'I was living in the east of Syria and my father was working in Saudi Arabia during 2014. ISIS came close to our city, then we decided to leave the country just two days before the armed group entered the city; we left everything behind to escape the violence'.

Although Saudi schools introduced an alternative admissions process for some Syrian refugee students who could not bring require official documents, some missed their first year of school after arriving in the country. As one male student (SBM1) mentioned, 'I started going to school in Saudi Arabia when I was in elementary school approximately ten years ago, but I missed the first year when I arrived here due to missing certification'.

The school social workers reported that the loss of official documentation was a central barrier to enrolling Syrian students in school. As explained by (FSPA1), the experience of working with Syrian refugee students was just like working with other students and the only challenge the school faced was finding the official legal documents for the refugee students. In this regard, schools regarded the process of enrolling such students as different to receiving Syrian students before the crisis. This is because before the Syrian crisis, schools

received the children of Syrians fathers who were workers and residents, while after the Syrian crisis in 2011, Saudi Arabia opened its doors to all Syrians, resulting in the arrival of a high number of students. This in turn led the Ministry of Education to send letters to schools asking them to receive the Syrian refugee students and enrol them. This was highlighted by (SFB2), who stated that ‘when enrolling the Syrian students, they sometimes failed to bring certifications from their previous schools in Syria and proof of residence, such as a visitor card, which are the formal documents needed to enrol them at the school’. At the beginning of the school year, several students had issues with their official residence status, and schools found it challenging to identify whether those students had arrived as refugees or not.

4.2.3 Psychological and social issues

The above themes indicate that such challenges harmed the children’s mental health and social integration as they resulted in isolation and exclusion from school and peer groups, which perpetuated the negative experience of these refugee children, even though they had reached a safe physical environment. As one female school social worker (FSSB1) indicated, ‘One time, I got a student who had problems with fear and panic because her family was watching the news regarding the tragic events in Syria and she was very badly affected by the situation there’. Based on school social workers’ and principals’ responses such experiences were likely to be common among the Syrian children and impact their development by reducing their level of interaction with their peers in their new schools due to stress and anxiety. This was also mentioned by a school principal who stated that ‘the war left some of the Syrian students broken and scared’.

Additionally, such issues were linked to family structures and relationships between family members. For example, family separation was common during the war; in some cases, one or more family members sought refuge in countries such as Turkey while other members travelled to Saudi Arabia. Similarly, some of the Syrian students lost close family members due to the conflict. As one school principal (MSPA1) pointed out, the first action the school takes when completing the documentation and enrolling Syrian students at the school is to ask whether or not they live with both parents, as some live with their aunts or uncles as a result of losing their parents during the war. Such family issues represented a major

challenge for these children due to the associated social and psychological challenges of being in a new place. One male student (SMA4) stated that ‘part of my family was living in Saudi while others were living in different countries’. Both the relationships between, and support provided by, family members are essential for meeting the specific needs of children and ensuring their optimal development in school. Losing a family member either by death due to the war or separation due to seeking refuge in other countries harms the children because it hinders a key source of support. It is important to note that some refugee students arriving in Saudi Arabia were able to reunite with family members and live together once again because their fathers were working in Saudi Arabia before the Syrian crisis (family structure as a sub-theme will be discussed further in the next section and in chapter 8).

4.3 The challenges in achieving an adequate standard of living: access to basic needs and quality of life

The second sub-theme, the challenges in achieving an adequate standard of living, concerned the Syrian refugees’ legal status, family support networks, structural dynamics, and the role of relatives in Saudi Arabia in supporting their families and sharing responsibilities. These challenges represent the first step to be overcome by newcomers in Saudi Arabia and are significant because they explore the circumstances that the newcomers faced in the search for improved well-being and a safer environment.

4.3.1 Legal status

It is important to describe the legal requirements that Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools must meet before presenting the findings about their situation in schools. These requirements can either facilitate or hinder their integration into Saudi schools. Syrian refugee students fall into one of two categories: (i) those who arrived with their families in 2011 or later or whose family members have visitor status or whose parents have permission to work; and (ii) those who arrived accompanied by family members (mother, sisters and brothers) because their fathers were resident in Saudi Arabia before the Syrian crisis in 2011 and therefore had a valid Iqamah (residential permission to work). When the Syrian crisis began, Saudi Arabia received Syrian refugees, including those who had neither previously visited nor worked in Saudi Arabia.

Some of the Syrian refugee students reported that their fathers requested that they travel from Syria to live with them in Saudi Arabia when the Syrian crisis started. As a result, these students and families were able to escape the conflict and seek a positive future by seeking refuge in Saudi Arabia. As a male Syrian student (SMB3) stated, 'I came to live here in Saudi Arabia via my father who has a valid residential permission to work, so we came as visitors and have a legal position to live here, and to ensure that we can stay with legal status, my father renews the visitor card every three months'. As highlighted in the pre-migration and risks in Syria sub-themes, the fathers of these students who were working in Saudi Arabia were aware of the huge dangers their families were facing in Syria and decided to bring their families to live with them. It is important to note that Syrian students interviewed arrived in Saudi Arabia between 2011 and 2014 when the crisis reached its peak and large areas of the country were destroyed by armed groups that controlled many Syrian cities.

Syrian refugees arriving in Saudi Arabia for the first time faced significant challenges in rebuilding a stable and fulfilling life, which affected their quality of life in terms of social, economic, and physical aspects. Although some relatives were able to provide jobs for the Syrian refugees, jobs were often unavailable. This was evident from the number of Syrian students in this study who reported moving frequently with their families from one city to another. Such movement, especially in a new environment, may have impacted the children's well-being, as well as that of the family as whole (Paat,2013). As one male student (SMB2) stated, 'When we first arrived, I was studying 6th grade at elementary school in a city located in the south of Saudi Arabia. After that, they came here to city B and then they moved to another city near the capital. After a few years, they returned and settled in city B because of their father's work'.

Such frequent movement to new places may have triggered mental health issues. Moreover, such issues might deteriorate if the fathers do not have a good source of income, which impacts the child's integration at school. Student SMB2 also said, 'if the father is without a job, how can we live?; it is a disaster'. Because of this, some Syrian families tried to encourage their children to work while studying. It is important to note that compared to male students, female students did not talk about working while they were of school age.

Syrian students who sought refuge in Saudi Arabia as refugees with a legal right to live in the country were required to pay fees for their residence permits. Their fathers were responsible for paying such fees, which impacted the family's income. According to one of the school social workers (MSSA2), while the fees for refugees (visitors) permits were considered to be a small amount for each person, they still impacted those who arrived in Saudi Arabia for the first time and did not have a job. This scenario impacted on the children and their integration process at school. The lack of financial stability, combined with the frequent relocations, can create a challenging environment for Syrian students, hindering their academic performance, integration, and overall adjustment to the new school environment.

It is important to note that these findings reveal a notable absence of mothers in the data, a gap that requires critical reflection. This absence is not merely incidental but can be understood within the broader context of refugee and visitor policies in Saudi Arabia, which tend to centre on fathers as heads of households. In many refugee Arabs communities, including the Syrian context, the traditional structure places fathers in a dominant role in the families. This dominance is reflected in how refugee policies and services are designed, often prioritising male heads of households in documentation, decision-making, and interaction with authorities. By explaining this, the absence of mothers in the data becomes a reflection of the cultural and policy structures that shape the experiences of Syrian refugee families in Saudi Arabia.

4.3.2 Family support networks and structural dynamics

Although the Syrian crisis and its related violence impacted the children, it provided some with an opportunity for family reunification. As one female Syrian student (SFA2) stated 'I came to Saudi Arabia with my family, my mother and brothers, and now we all live together in an apartment by ourselves. My father was living here for a long time and right now we live with him'. Such reunification strengthened the social bonds between the family members of refugees whose fathers were in Saudi Arabia before the Syrian crisis and may have benefitted the children and parents both psychologically and socially.

One female Syrian student (SFA1) reported that 'the relationship with my family became stronger here because, when we were in Syria, each family member had their own life and

we did not spend much time together, especially when my father was working in Saudi Arabia. Here (Saudi Arabia) we are together and spend a lot of time together. Me, my brothers and sisters have come to know our father again because we see him a lot'. It seems that these reunions assisted the children's development in Saudi Arabia and provided them with emotional resources to enable them to overcome other challenges.

Although many Syrian refugee students arrived in Saudi Arabia in the early stages of their lives (mainly around 8–9 years old), they were able to express the benefits that moving to Saudi Arabia to live together had on their family relationships. This was mentioned by a Syrian male student (SMB3) whose father had more than one wife, with each wife living in a different Syrian city before coming to Saudi Arabia. This influenced the relationships between the brothers and sisters and resulted in weakened familial bonds. He explained, 'Surely no-one compares to family, family has priority. Look, when we came here, me and my brother and sisters were children, but now our connection is greater; I mean it is stronger than in Syria where we were separated because the two families were dispersed; each family was in a different city'. When asked to expand on this, he continued, 'My father married two wives, and each family was in a different city, so we were a little different from each other, but when we came here, we moved into one house, which has an apartment for each wife'. When asked to expand on how this affected family relationships, he explained, 'Certainly, they have become stronger; I mean with my brothers and sisters, we have seen each other a lot. In Syria, we were separated. I mean, one family was living in a city while the other family lived in the countryside'.

While this extract highlights that the move to Saudi Arabia reunited this family, this was not the case for all families. Nevertheless, enabling the rebuilding of such relationships by reuniting family members of two- and three-parent families may have supported the new students' integration in their new social and educational environments.

In addition, all school social workers who work closely with the Syrian students were aware of these circumstances surrounding the reuniting of such families, which was likely to have helped in both understanding the background of these newcomers to Saudi Arabia and offering more effective support services to them. As (MSPB2) stated, 'Some of the students' fathers had residence status and their children arrived in Saudi Arabia as visitors, so this

helped them to bond again and helped their integration in the local community and the school’.

While fathers who were already working in Saudi Arabia were able to facilitate the smooth resettlement of their children, those who arrived in Saudi Arabia accompanied by their fathers had not benefitted from the same level of care. Yet, most of the students had relatives in Saudi Arabia who were able to provide some assistance, such as accommodation for the students and their fathers arriving in Saudi Arabia for the first time. A male social worker (MSSB2) mentioned that at his school, the majority of students arriving from Syria had relatives such as aunts or uncles living in Saudi Arabia who could offer help and accommodation and that some Syrian students had relatives in the same school.

4.3.3 Relatives and responsibilities

The topic of relatives was mentioned frequently by the interviewees, especially school social workers and school principals. Relatives played a vital role in receiving and supporting the Syrian refugee families once they arrived in Saudi Arabia, which benefitted both fathers and students in their new country of residence. However, receiving family members resulted in a number of challenges for Syrians already living in Saudi Arabia, including the financial pressures of paying for their costs of living once they arrived in Saudi Arabia. Such stresses were likely to impact the children in school because of the financial status of their families.

According to one male Syrian student (SMA2), he came to Saudi Arabia with his father ‘because his uncle was already living in Saudi’. The notion of relatives as receivers and helpers was evident; the relatives often helped them to acquire the necessary official documents that enabled them to live legally in Saudi Arabia and provided the Syrian refugee with information on schools’ admission policies and how the Syrian refugee students could enrol their children. In illustration of this, one school principal (MPB1) stated that ‘some of our students here, they escaped and arrived after the crisis. Perhaps they live with their own community here, because their relatives arrived first, those who live here...some of them have the nationality or some are stateless; they can facilitate their life here, as well as facilitating their education, which is free of charge for those Syrian refugee students. Helping Syrian students enrol in education and things is not complicated’.

The above extract shows that school social workers and principals understood the children's background and were aware of circumstances surrounding their lives, which in turn helped them to offer support to enable these children to integrate well in their new schools.

Moreover, relatives were able to positively impact the school environment by enabling the Syrian refugee students to better integrate by helping them to understand the different Saudi curriculum, for example. As MSSB2 mentioned, 'Sometimes, for example, in the school, the visitor students had cousins who helped them in school'. This support was necessary as the new students were not familiar with how Saudi schools operated or what they needed to do to succeed. The following quote from a Syrian student (SMA1) highlighted this unfamiliarity and the differences between Saudi and Syria schools: 'There are differences in some subjects in Syria, for example, we started learning English from the beginning of first year in primary school, while in Saudi Arabia, for example, we study social subjects such as history and geography from the fourth grade in primary. I see this difference and there is a little difficulty in the curriculum'. Despite such difficulties, the presence of close relatives at schools, such as cousins, was important in helping the newcomers to understand their new education system.

However, interpersonal relationships are complex and the outcomes were not always optimal or helpful. Harm occasionally arose due to the actions of close relatives or friends of the Syrian students, which may have negatively impacted their ability to integrate quickly and successfully. For example, when one male Syrian student (SMA5) described his new friends, he mentioned that while some were good, others tried to destroy his life by talking behind his back, as did some close relatives.

Furthermore, as a school social worker (MSSA2) stated, 'The workers have large families to take care of. I mean, I know one of my Syrian friends and his mother is from Syria and his uncle and aunts lived with him after the crisis started and he has five families in one home and his salary is not enough. Sometimes he cannot buy basic things such as bread; most of the refugee families have a low income as they hold a basic job. This impacts the children of both the refugee families and the new families negatively in and out of school'. Both receiving and refugee families in Saudi Arabia had a lot of responsibilities as they often had to take care of other family members in either Saudi Arabia or Syria. Such responsibilities

influence the Syrian refugee students in their new environment due to their families' low income. Some families often transferred money to support other family members financially and socially in Syria, which made their life in Saudi Arabia more difficult, especially regarding providing students with the materials necessary for school. Providing healthcare support for those in Syria was another responsibility that worsened the families' financial status. Thus, Syrian families in Saudi Arabia had numerous responsibilities that need to be fulfilled, such as the provision of necessities for their children and relatives both in Saudi Arabia and in Syria. A male school social worker (MSSA2) stated that one of the parents holding a visitor visa told him that, in addition to caring for his family in Saudi Arabia, he is also responsible for supporting several members of his family in Syria, regularly sending them money for daily expenses and medical treatment.

Despite the challenges, relatives played a crucial role in assisting Syrian refugees during their settlement in Saudi Arabia. They provided essential services, such as offering basic necessities and explaining the country's policies. In some cases, these relatives were instrumental in facilitating the refugees' move to Saudi Arabia, either through financial or practical support, ultimately helping save their lives.

4.4 The implications of refugees' status as 'visitors' in Saudi public schools

Based on the semi-structured interviews regarding the implications of refugees' status as 'visitors' in Saudi public schools, this theme presents the findings that reveal the impact of unexpected influx of Syrian refugee students arriving in Saudi schools after the 2011 Syrian crisis. This theme includes school staff's motivation to assist the integration of newcomers, new experiences for the school staff, enrolment policies and interaction and culture (see Table 4-3). As discussed in the previous chapter, this theme also helps build the model and relates to the first theme, 'Hardships Faced by Syrian Refugee Students and Their Families,' as shown in Figure 4-2 below.

Table 4-2 The implications of refugees' status as 'visitors' in Saudi public schools

Theme	Description	Sub-Themes	Sub-Sub-Themes
2) The implications of refugees' status as 'visitors' in Saudi public schools	This theme focuses on findings from semi-structured interviews, revealing the unexpectedly high influx of displaced Syrian students into Saudi	(a) School staff's motivation to assist integration	N/A

	schools following the 2011 Syrian crisis.		
		(b) New experiences for school staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school staff's unfamiliarity with Syrian refugee students. 2. The actual situation and background experience for school social workers and principles.
		(c) Interaction and culture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simple cultural differences. 2. External opportunities for school staff.
		(d) Enrolment policies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parental involvement.

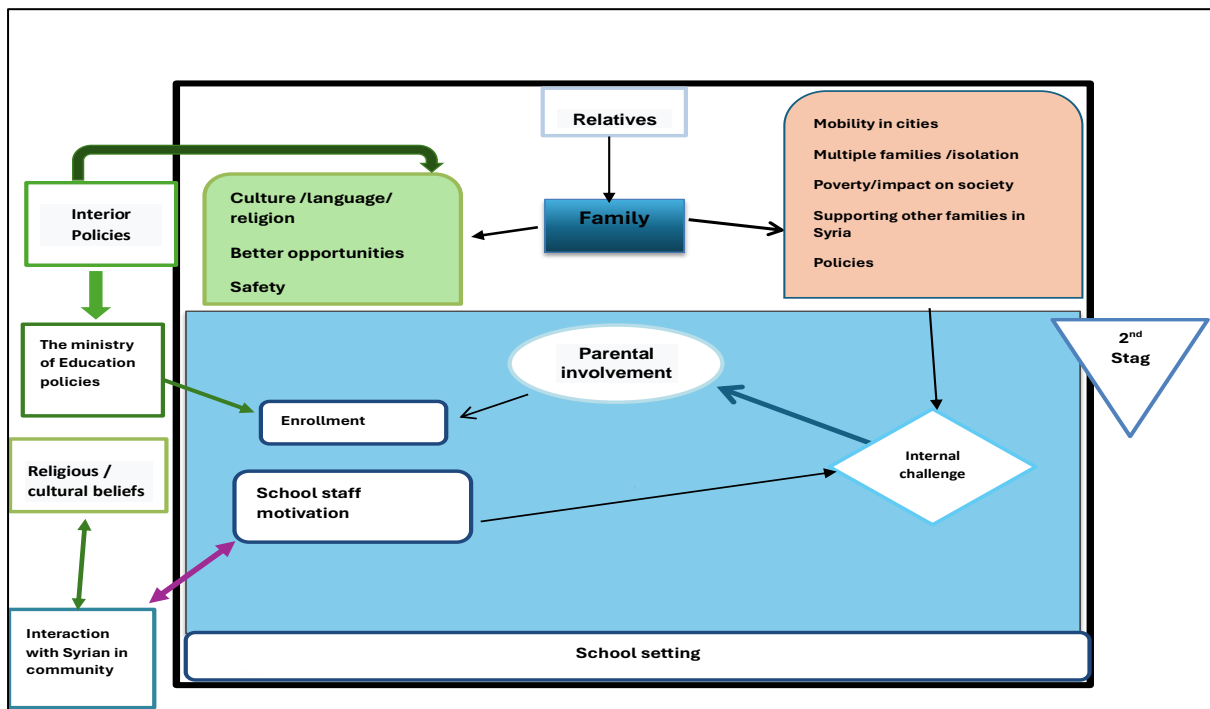


Figure 4-2 The implications of refugees' status as 'visitors' in Saudi public schools

4.4.1 School staff motivation for assisting the integration of Syrian refugee students

It was important to investigate and explore the motivations that guided school staff to provide services that strengthened integration, especially as this experience was relatively new for them. The school staff agreed that the most important and obvious inspiration for working with the Syrian refugee students and helping them to integrate into school was

culture and religion. They agreed that the newcomers were considered brothers and sisters to Saudi Arabia. Since the Syrian crisis, Saudi Arabia, along with its institutions, including schools, has opened its doors to Syrian refugees and carefully considers their circumstances, shaped by the war and displacement, in both policy and practice. This includes providing an appropriate school environment to ensure that they can implement integration processes when the students enrol in their schools. For example, one male school principal (MSPA2) pointed out, 'My experience of refugee students in general is that we received them and considered the difficult conditions when they arrived. We serve them as guests in the country and provide the services without distinction from Saudi students; the only thing we need to follow is their behavioural and social situations because they experienced crisis in their country'.

It is important to note that the cultural background of the school staff significantly affected their willingness to work with and provide assistance for the Syrian refugee students. For example, some interviewees rejected calling the students refugees and preferred the terms brothers, visitors or guests. A quote from a male school principal highlighted this when responding to a question about the number of refugee students in the school, he stated that the school received many of them, with similar numbers coming every year, and that he did not call them refugees but 'our Syrian brothers'.

Establishing suitable school environments that facilitate integration and minimise differences among children encouraged school staff to teach Syrian students the appropriate cultural practices that reflect the notion of brotherhood as Muslim. This was evident when school staff reported how they solved a problem that occurred between two Syrian students. One of the interviewed male principals stated that he had witnessed a fight between two Syrian students because one of them supported Assad's regime and the other student was angry because he disagreed. The principal recounted that to solve this, he summoned the fathers to school to talk and stated that they and their children were in Saudi Arabia as honoured guests and they are brothers, and political matters should not be discussed at school.

Moreover, school staff agreed that religious, national and humanitarian motivations were the main driving forces behind the implementation of ways to work with students in general

and Syrian refugee students in particular. This was because they regarded such practices as forming and ensuring a supportive environment for children as schools are the first formal institutions that Syrian refugee students engaged with once they had escaped the war. The school staff were keenly aware of the violence and human tragedy in Syria. As a result, the presence of Syrian refugees in Saudi Arabia was seen as opportunity for school staff to serve them.

Furthermore, religion played a vital role in motivating the school social workers and principals to provide services and integrate the newcomers into Saudi schools. As one male school social worker (MSSA3) worker pointed out, 'First is our humanitarian duty, as well as our duty towards our Arab and Muslim brothers, so the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has asked us to serve our brothers ... to ensure equality among our students'. This extract explains staff's motivations to help and ensure equality among the students, which sprang from their faith and religion. This aligns with the concept of karam (generosity) discussed by Chatty (2017), who highlights how, in the Middle East, the responsibility to be generous often serves as an alternative to rights-based asylum. In this context, acts of kindness and support for those in need, including refugees, are rooted in cultural and religious values rather than formal legal obligations, reflecting a deep commitment to humanitarian principles (Chatty, 2017). Another school principal remarked, 'At the beginning, thank God, here in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we first consider the teachings of Islam in dealing with everyone before we ask about their nationality or anything else. All students are treated the same as Saudi students or residents, regardless of nationality and political matters.

Additionally, some school staff expressed other motivations for integrating the newcomers. For example, as Syrian refugee families were suffering as a result of low incomes, school staff did their best to raise funds via donations in line with their religious and professional principles. These factors maximised the holistic equitable delivery of the required services in schools to foster better integration of the newcomers and help improve their well-being.

4.4.2 New experiences for the school staff

School social workers and school principals agreed that the influx of Syrian students into Saudi schools represented a relatively new and valuable experience for them. Although

dealing with the associated challenges required great effort, they realised that their past personal and professional experiences helped them to provide services and integrate the newcomers into their new schools, as discussed below.

4.4.2.1 The school staff's unfamiliarity with Syrian refugee students

The school staff agreed with the notion that the arrival of Syrian refugee students presented a new challenge in Saudi schools. A female school social worker (FSSB1) acknowledged this at the end of her interview, saying, 'Thank you for researching this new topic and for giving it your time and effort. Thank you for your research that investigates this topic within this group of people; the government and schools did their best to fulfil their right to education'. All the school social workers were aware that even though this was a new experience in schools, the right to education was one of the most important aspects that benefitted Syrian refugee students' well-being in their new place. This was also demonstrated by the support provided by the Ministry of Education for schools in Saudi Arabia to support the integration of refugee children into their new schools. One of the school principals (MPB2) shared this view, explaining:

I would like to thank you for coming here, we benefitted from you because of the questions you sent me. Now as a school principal and leader, I am thinking about how we can activate your ideas; we have done some work, but I will do more because your ideas have enlightened us. You have clarified some of the points that need to be improved, and we will work on them to help our brothers in their education.

Besides this extract showing a new experience for schools, as a researcher, my role extended beyond merely asking questions during the interviews. I actively engaged with the participants, adopting a collaborative environment where their insights could be fully explored and understood. Through careful analysis of their responses, I was able to identify key areas for improvement and suggest practical strategies. This process involved synthesizing the data to provide clear, actionable recommendations that could be implemented to enhance educational practices. My involvement ensured that the findings were not only theoretical but also grounded in school practices, making a tangible impact on the educational sector.

Regarding the Saudi schools, it was apparent that some principals had implemented procedures for serving the newcomers, even with their limited available resources, and that they were intent on meeting the obligation to improve their provision of these resources given that integrating the Syrian students was in itself challenging. One school social worker added that 'integration...is considered new, especially with refugees. Before coming to the interview, I did not know how to answer the interview questions'. Although school social workers carried out their roles in line with their professional backgrounds, new areas of knowledge and skills were needed to help them support the students in their new settings, especially those who had experienced violence and conflict.

Some school social workers mentioned that dealing with this huge number of refugees was completely different to their previous experiences (the last time this happened was during the war in Kuwait and the Iraqi asylum seekers who fled during the Gulf War in 1990). Although most school staff were not working in the educational field at that time, these were the only events that they had experienced indirectly in relation to refugees. School social workers and principals benefitted from their own personal experiences, using their understanding and sympathy when helping the Syrian refugee students. This may be because these employees were students at the time of the Gulf War and some of them have studied with Kuwaiti refugees in Saudi Arabia. Although I did not specifically ask about their personal experiences during the interviews, many participants voluntarily shared these insights. Their responses sprang from their own experiences, which provided valuable context and understanding for their new experience and motivation in working with Syrian refugee students.

In addition, some school staff members found that their personal experiences of growing up in a country different from Saudi Arabia enhanced their ability to support Syrian refugee students. For example, one school social worker (MSSB2) shared, 'I can understand the Syrian students' needs as I was born, raised and studied in Kuwait so I know how they feel in a new place'. This perspective was shared by a small portion of the staff; specifically, 1 out of 10 social workers and 1 out of 5 school principals reported that their experiences living in other countries helped them sympathise with the challenges faced by Syrian refugee students. Although this aspect was not included in the sample description, it offers valuable context for understanding the insights shared during the interviews. While some school

social workers may not have recognised the relevance of ecological theory when working with Syrian refugee students, they were aware of the various systems that aided and supported students in their new schools. Further discussion of the work of school social workers will be related to ecological theory and studies of refugees in the discussion chapters.

This new experience was also evident from, and in line with, the school staff's perspectives on one of the key differences between the Syrian refugee students and domestic Saudi students or those from other countries; the Syrian refugee students had, in many cases, lost their official documents – such as educational certificates – due to the conflict in Syria and did not have residence permits, both of which are requirements for enrolment in schools. This lack of documentation significantly affected their integration into schools, leading to delays in enrolment and making them feel different from other students. These challenges not only hindered their immediate access to education but also impacted their sense of belonging and stability within the school environment.

School staff explained this new experience in terms of the differences between domestic students and the Syrian refugee students. The Syrian refugee students were very different from other students who attended Saudi schools in the past, especially both those from Syria who started attending school in Saudi Arabia before the Syrian crisis in 2011 and Syrian students who were born in Saudi Arabia. School social workers felt close to the new refugee students culturally and witnessed how they were enjoying the safety and security of Saudi Arabia, as well as the developed services available in the country. One of the school social workers reported that the Syrian students who had suffered traumatic experiences in the war in Syria valued the safety offered by Saudi Arabia and worked hard both in and out of school to improve their lives despite the challenges they faced. School social workers were aware of the needs of the Syrian students and treated this new experience as an opportunity to meet the needs of all Syrian refugee students.

All school social workers and principals considered this as a positive opportunity and a new experience that motivated them to work with the newcomers. School staff reported being motivated to undertake such actions due to their Islamic faith, which requires them to provide services to those in need. Therefore, if Islam urges Muslims to help their Muslim

brothers and sisters around the world but they cannot due to the threats in a dangerous country such as Syria, then providing services in their own country enables them to take advantage of such an opportunity to help people in need.

4.4.2.2 The actual situation and background experience for school social workers and principals

The influx of Syrian students provided a new experience, reflected in challenges for school social workers, some of whom found this experience difficult, especially at the beginning when schools began receiving Syrian refugee students. However, after a period of time, the schools were able to tackle the challenges and integrate the newcomers more easily. This experience was challenging for the schools because the Syrian refugee students and their families were often impacted by their war experiences and related issues, such as financial and social issues. Drawing on their previous experiences of working with other students, the school social workers were largely successful in integrating Syrian refugee students into the school community. This led to the creation of a supportive and inclusive environment where Syrian refugee students could succeed academically and socially, despite the initial challenges.

The school social workers identified not being specifically trained for working with vulnerable students who had experienced trauma due to war as being particularly challenging. However, their combined experience in working with students in the field of social and psychological counselling and providing such services to other students helped them to provide services and counselling for the Syrian refugee students. Additionally, they benefitted from working with other Syrian students who had attended Saudi schools before the crisis, which helped them to understand the Syrian refugee students' backgrounds and needs. Furthermore, school staff agreed that all schools had accepted and enrolled high numbers of Syrians, either refugees or immigrants, which enabled them to gain relevant experience in the process. School social workers mentioned that understanding a student's background was one of the most important elements in providing the required support.

The school social workers' professional training assisted the schools in facing the critical stage of receiving the Syrian refugee students after 2011 as they had gained experience working with students, regardless of nationality or ethnicity. Whilst some of the school

social workers agreed that their previous experience was the most important factor in dealing with the new arrival, they believed their practical experience in social services benefitted them in their work more than reading books or studying and that working with large numbers of students would allow them to improve further. In addition, the school social workers who participated in this study were confident that their experience would assist them in working with the newcomers because they supported children pedagogically, regardless of their background. This finding will be discussed further in chapter 8'. School social workers were aware of the difficulties these children had experienced, which motivated them to support the Syrian refugee students in the process of integration.

4.4.3 Interaction and culture

4.4.3.1 The first simple cultural differences

School principals and social workers reported that understanding the cultural backgrounds and experiences of the Syrian refugee students was likely to assist them in supporting these students. In the beginning, the difficulties that these students were experiencing were to be associated with the slight cultural differences, which over time tend to disappear as the students become familiar with appropriate and inappropriate ways of behaving in Saudi schools. Although Syrian refugees and school staff shared the same religion and language, which helped them to interact and created a positive educational environment, their cultural differences presented a challenge when Syrian students first enrol at the schools. One school social worker (MSSA3) indicated that 'Syrian refugee students at the beginning display bad habits such as violence and inappropriate language; the school administration, represented by student counselling services, seeks to direct them on proper behaviours in their new schools by providing guidance and counselling'. Although the unfamiliarity of refugee students with school discipline and Saudi culture presents a challenge, social workers aim to address this issue through targeted rehabilitation efforts.

Interestingly, one male student (MSA1) stated, 'To be honest, it was a little different, not a big shock, but the differences were a little surprising to me about things in the new place, but as time passed, I learned to get used to the situation, I became one of them'.

Differences recognised by the school principals and social worker participants following the

2011 crisis helped to shape motivations of school staff to integrate newcomers into the schools in the present study.

4.4.3.2 External opportunities for school staff

The large population of Syrians living in Saudi Arabia enabled school principals and social workers in working with the refugee students since school staff interacted consistently with Syrians in the community in places such as shops and restaurants. Such external interactions allowed the school staff to understand the challenges faced by refugees supporting them to overcome such challenges.

Additionally, the long history of coexistence between Saudi and Syrian citizens in Saudi Arabia enabled the school social workers to understand the Syrians' cultural background, which in turn helped to integrate the Syrian refugee students into schools and into Saudi society in general. School staff were not surprised to find Syrian citizens living in the same neighbourhoods as them. One school social worker (MSSA3) mentioned that 'We are integrated with the Syrian people, as you can see Syrians have lived among us from birth. We are not surprised even in the neighbourhoods we interact with them but sometimes there are slight cultural differences. Another school social worker (MSSB1) stated that 'Indeed, there are many Syrians in this school, in the city, or in my shop when I work as a part time work, I saw large number of refugees that arrived in Saudi Arabia after the Syrian crisis. I dealt with them and got to know some of their behaviours and habits, and this helped me deal with them and get to know them closely in school'.

4.4.4 Enrolment policies

The topic of Saudi schools' policies regarding the enrolment of the Syrian refugee students was mentioned by different participants. The Syrian refugee students enjoyed their right to education once escaping the hardships linked to their experiences of the conflict in Syria. The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia introduced a policy of accepting all Syrians who arrived after the Syrian crisis in 2011. As one male school principal (MSPB1) stated, 'Some Syrians who came here after the Syrian crisis to live with their group in Saudi Arabia, the government has done their best in helping those visiting students to complete their education for free and the process is not complicated'. Some Syrian refugee students

arrived to live with their relatives, who, as previously mentioned, provided significant assistance to the refugee families in understanding the enrolment policies introduced by the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia.

These policies depended on the government's overarching policies regarding Syrian refugees who had entered and were living in Saudi Arabia legally. First, students must have visitor cards, which are granted for students who came to live with their fathers.

Additionally, students were required to provide formal identification regarding their previous school level. School principals explained that the schools were required to follow and apply the regulations and circulars issued by the Ministry of Education regarding the enrolment of Syrian students who entered the country as Syrian refugee after 2011.

The students' pre-migration and war experiences negatively impacted them in their new schools, particularly due to the loss of official documents. As previously mentioned, losing documents was not the fault of the students, it delayed their enrolment in school. One female school social worker (FSSA1) confirmed that students' enrolment was delayed, especially in the first weeks of the new school year. She stated, 'Frankly, it annoyed me because the delayed enrolment affects them. We celebrate together with new students while they are standing and waiting because of their files and lost documents. This point is a bad time, bad because it takes a whole week'. These delays not only hindered their immediate access to education but also affected their sense of belonging and stability within the school environment.

In certain situations, school social workers facilitated the enrolment of newcomers by delivering comprehensive levels of assistance, both psychologically and socially, to provide a welcoming environment. In terms of facilitating enrolment, one male school social worker (MSSA1) stated, 'I can serve them here as much as I can. I mean, I remember once that I facilitated a Syrian refugee student's enrolment in the middle of the semester and when the principal asked me, I said, 'this is the least I can do, it is our duty to facilitate their enrolment and try to help them'. This extract reflects the flexibility that schools adopted once they had received the refugee students. The majority of school social workers stated that their motivation was based on their religious, and national motivations to serve the community.

Others stated that the admission process was flexible and ensured that the students and their families were not placed under pressure when they had just arrived in Saudi Arabia. One female principal (FSPB1) explained that their procedures were straightforward and there were no difficulties once the refugees' documents were completed. Some schools enrolled students even if their documents were not available. One of the school principals mentioned that sometimes they had to wait until half-term to enrol as some of the students had not received their official documents. Thus, enrolling students without documents ensured that schools provided equal educational access for all students. Students expressed their experiences of a school's enrolment flexibility; for example, (SFA2) stated that 'the problem was with my visitor visa; at that time, I entered the school without the correct documents, as exceptionally, when we first came...only Syrian refugees who had a visitor visa were allowed to study, and I enrolled in the school'. Another student (SMB5) shared that they experienced similar flexibility in the enrolment process that made it easier for him to attend school, stating that 'the registration only took one day, and the on second day, I attended school'.

4.4.4.1 Parental involvement in providing official documents

From the data, it was evident that the students were confronted with the first challenge of adhering to schools' enrolment policies, which may impact them if the schools and policies failed to fulfil their needs. Although such policies related to the students' previous experiences, such as pre-migration and losing official documents, the schools could be flexible in some of their policies in terms of enabling the Syrian students to begin school. While these enrolment policies are set out by the Ministry of Education, school social workers played a critical role in reducing the pressure on the children by not requesting them to provide their identification documents, instead requesting them from their parents. This ensured the privacy of the children, protected their dignity and reduced stigma.

The school social workers agreed that ensuring such protection for children helped in improving the schools' environment by overcoming internal challenges in school such as bullying against Syrian refugee students. As they became more integrated, there was less evidence of bullying against the newcomers. One female student (SFB3) agreed that there was communication between schools and the families of Syrian students. She mentioned

that 'school sometimes contacted her parents when official documents were needed'. For example, after a period of time in Saudi schools and in line with their legal status, the Syrian refugee students were required to renew their visitor visa, and this document was also required by schools.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed the first theme which is hardships faced by Syrian refugee students and their families, beginning before they sought refuge in Saudi Arabia with their experience related to the war and how it impacted the students. This was followed by their preparation to leave their country of origin and the associated circumstances, which was linked to the loss of official documents such as Syrian national ID and school qualifications. The chapter has also discussed the refugee students' and their families' early days in Saudi Arabia and their attempts to build a new life. It should be noted that this stage was not stress free for the children and their families due to the issues related to their legal status with the new policies they faced and responsibilities they need to fulfil in association with changes to the families' structure since moving to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, this chapter highlighted the second theme which relates to the implications of refugees' status as 'visitors' in Saudi public schools that received an unexpectedly high number of displaced Syrian students since the 2011 Syrian crisis. It showed staff members' desires to integrate the newcomers into their schools, which is in line with principles of Islam and Saudi culture. Despite the absence of a formal integration programme for newcomers, Saudi school principals and social workers sought to support them with their available resources and programme. After presenting an overview of the situation of Syrian refugees and the Saudi schools in working with Syrian refugee students at the initial stage, the next chapter will explore the challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in their daily lives in Saudi Arabia, both within and outside of the school setting.

Chapter 5 Challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia

Introduction 5.1

The third theme that arose from the interviews was the challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia; these were evident in the data derived from the school principals and school social workers, with the latter having worked most closely with refugee students. Students also contributed to creating this theme, since they explored and discussed the challenges they experienced in their new environment both inside and outside school. These consisted of: (1) external challenges located outside the school environment including (a) students' work, (b) outside risks, (c) media impact and (d) violence within the home; (2) internal challenges in school setting including (a) bullying and discrimination, (b) differences in curriculum and (c) single sex schools; (3) social and psychological challenges linked to external and internal challenges (see Table 5-1). These challenges are also presented in Figure 5-1 contributing to the emerging model of integration as findings are revealed.

Table 5-1 Challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia

Theme	Description	Sub-Themes	Sub-Sub-Themes
3) Challenges faced by Syrian refugee students	This theme explores various challenges faced by Syrian refugee students, categorized into external, internal, and social/psychological aspects.	(a) External challenges	1. Students' work 2. Outside risks 3. Media impact 4. Violence within the home
		(b) Internal challenges	1. Bullying and discrimination 2. Differences in curriculum 3. Single-sex schools 4. Fear of future
		(c) Social and psychological challenges	N/A

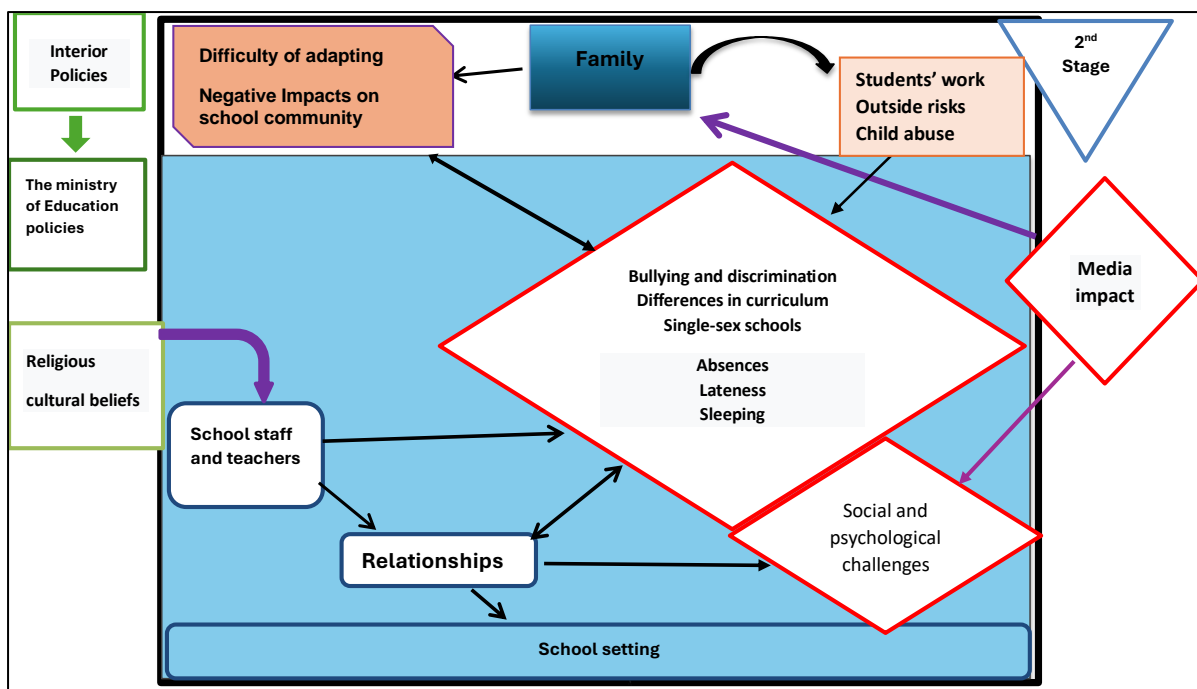


Figure 5-1 Challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia

5.2 External challenges

All participants agreed that newcomers faced many challenges once they had arrived. Although Saudi schools endured new experiences in this unexpected and unfamiliar influx of refugee students, they made a continuous effort to help the Syrian refugee students to overcome their obstacles, circumstances and cultural barriers, which included working while studying, and risks associated with day-to-day life. The collective efforts made by school staff, particularly social workers, in addressing the challenges faced by Syrian refugee students will be explored in detail in the following sections.

5.2.1 Working while studying

One of the unexpected topics that emerged from the interviews, regarding the current situation of Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools, was working to earn money. It is important to note that this sub-theme was exclusive to male Syrian refugee students, as female students did not mention that they were working while studying (though did express the wish to support their family financially). School principals, social workers, and Syrian refugee students mentioned that these students work for two reasons: (i) Syrian cultural expectations, and (ii) due to the urgent need to meet necessities such as food, clothing, and medical care for themselves and their family members.

5.2.1.1 Cultural expectations

Research indicates that Syrian families often encourage their children to work from a young age, as detailed by Tiltnes (2002) in his report on child labour in Syria and by Habib et al. (2019) in their study of displacement and labour among Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. This perspective is also reflected in the experiences shared by one of the Syrian students (SMB5):

‘My father said ‘rely on yourself’ we as Syrians have something like a law where the children learn how to do some kinds of jobs, because if someone has not completed school, he still knows how to work to get a stable income. I know because my father has a limited income and he is responsible for the house, the expenses, the residency fees are important for the house. So, I am responsible for my income to improve our situation’.

In this case, it was evident that the cultural background of the Syrians involved encouraging male children to work and learn something new, ensuring that they could contribute to the household income. However, SMB5 also mentioned that it was necessary for him to work to fulfil his family responsibilities, such as helping his father earn money. In addition, students aged under 18 years, or in middle school, were required by their fathers to learn how to do a job, as mentioned by one of the male middle school students, SMA1: ‘I have not worked but I go with my father to his work to learn, because if there were a chance I would work.’ Thus, the reason for the students’ working covered a combination of financial need and cultural expectations.

While learning how to perform a certain work role was important for the Syrian refugees and families in Saudi Arabia, working also improved their financial status. This led Syrian families to encourage their children to seek work even when they were very young, under ten years old in some cases. As male school social worker (MSSB3) stated:

‘To me, the Syrians work hard; boys who are five or six years old go with their father for sheep farming and sell sheep. This is because during the last four years, if the Syrians were in poverty or shortages, let’s say if the poverty was 90% in the last years, now it reached 50%, because the people work and a large percentage of high

school students work. We work close to them, and you can tell of their physical appearance, their hands larger than men's hands, even though they are children, but because of the work'.

Nevertheless, although work might improve the financial situation of the Syrian refugee students, the school social workers observed changes in their physical appearance, which represented the suffering and tough life circumstances of these children outside school.

In Saudi Arabia, as mentioned before, the relatives of the Syrian refugees also helped by working to overcome the challenges of being on a low income. Relatives were significant external sources of information for both the families and children due to the vital role they played in easing the former's integration by finding jobs and informing them of the laws regarding work. This was because receiving families had spent a long time in Saudi Arabia, and were aware of the resources that benefited newcomers' families in line with their legal status. In addition, the strong relationships and social bonds among Syrians in Saudi Arabia encouraged them to take responsibility to help newcomers. Therefore, the cultural backgrounds of the Syrians already living in Saudi Arabia meant that they were willing to support the Syrian refugees in the improvement of their financial status. A school social worker (MSSA2) stated:

The workers have large families to take care of. I mean, I know one of my Syrian friends and his mother is from Syria, and his uncle and aunts lived with him after the crisis started, and he has five families in one home and his salary is not enough. Sometimes he cannot buy basic things such as bread; most of the refugee families have a low income as they hold a basic job. This impacts the children of both the refugee (receiving families) and the new families negatively, in and out of school.

Another school social worker (MSSB2) confirmed this perspective:

Of course, with regard to the neighbourhood here, the Syrian refugees have relatives. Most of the visitors [are related] with others within the neighbourhood, such as the uncle. The visitors arrived in the area because of their relatives. Even the refugee students have relatives inside the school.

Regardless of the cultural motivations for work and the urgent needs related to displaced students, the issue of working while continuing to study was associated with numerous risks. For example, some Syrian refugee students engaged in hazardous work, which involved heavy loads and machinery. One student SM2A revealed that his work included operating heavy machinery to pave roads. When I asked him about how his work influenced his studies, he replied 'On some days, I feel extremely tired after I get back home. So, I go to sleep and relax, or I help my family at home.' Student SMA3 shared a similar experience: 'When I get out of school, I go to work, but with my father, he works with heavy equipment to help my family financially, because I do not have any brothers or sisters.' However, other students work in jobs as waiters and cashiers, which are less risky professions. Dangerous work impacts the children academically and physically, which represents another obstacle to their integration.

5.2.1.2 Urgent needs

Most responses, particularly from school social workers and principals, indicated that financial need was the main reason leading students to work while studying. One of the characteristics of the Syrian students observed by school staff was the financial hardships they were facing, as evident from their torn and worn-out clothes and uniforms. Working affected refugee students in terms of academic achievement and behaviour, as reported by school social workers and principals. However, for a few students, work did not cause problems at school, due to their academic achievement as well as their ability to balance their time and tasks between work and school. The issue of finance became apparent because the uneducated fathers of Syrian students had difficulties finding work, resulting in difficulty paying rent and expenses, which formed a key challenge related to their settlement and integration. Moreover, some of these fathers had several children and no stable income, which meant that their children had to seek work, which affected their performance in school and ultimately delayed their integration into school.

Most of the male Syrian students took responsibility for supporting their families while studying: one male student (MSA1) stated, 'I need to support my father with his work, since I am the oldest brother of the family, and my family has a very poor income.' Moreover, students often took responsibility when incidents occurred in the family, especially when

the father cannot provide an income; for example, if the father went to prison, then the children had to work to make up the family income. This was the case for a male Syrian student, MSA3: 'I remember I worked one time because my father was in prison'. While families exposed to such incidents received financial support from neighbours and mothers working from home, the children still needed to work in some cases. This was apparent when big families faced such challenges; a female (FSB3) student shared her experience by explaining that she and her sisters did not work, but that her mother helps her father by selling food from home.

In addition, the large size of families, including those living with relatives, was identified by school staff as a reason for the families' low income, which ultimately forced the children to work. School social worker MSSA2 confirmed this as follows:

The refugee families have become larger because of the visitors they responsible for, hence the father forces families members to work especially children, I see them when I go to the market next to the school, you see a young child around 11 years and 13 years old selling stuff at the traffic lights due to financial conditions, and this causes a problem in academic achievement and my role as a social worker is to prevent such issues by advising and talking to the fathers and children.

Hence, while taking care of large families on low incomes increased the pressure on children, it is important to recognise that, for some families, the income brought in by working children was essential for survival, complicating the narrative around child labour and its impact on well-being (Renkens et al., 2022).

Whether the work of Syrian refugee students was due to need or cultural factors, young students were impacted negatively in school by the risks and tasks related to their work outside school. School social workers and principals emphasised that the main issue faced, as a consequence of Syrian refugee students' working, was their consistently absence from school. After the schools contacted the fathers and investigated this problem, school social workers found that the students were working during the evenings. These circumstances impacted the children, because some of them would go directly to work after school, and working until 10 or 11 PM. Some student participants confirmed this. As a male student

(SMB4) stated, 'I work from 2 PM until 11PM' resulting in a lack of sleep due to attempting to support their family financially with a low-income job. Another student SMA2 stated:

I mean, work takes time and requires effort; I mean, I go back home tired, and I don't have enough time to study and sleep, then the time passes. I mean I get out of school at 1PM and finish at 6PM, for example, at sunset, so I will be tired, I cannot study, I go to bed midnight and sometimes I oversleep. It is difficult for me but I need to help my family; we are just visitors here.

School staff mentioned that such impacts generally manifested when the Syrian refugee students had only just arrived.

Furthermore, most school principals and school social workers agreed that teachers were facing other problems in class while teaching Syrian students. One of the most obvious challenges was students' sleeping and tiredness in class. After teachers referred students to school social workers, and after investigation of the situation by social workers, who then contacted the students' parents, it became apparent that the students were working for hours during the evening. Furthermore, tardiness among Syrian refugee students was commonly experienced by school staff, which was considered to be another key obstacle impacting the children's school performance. Thus, the students' work outside school had considerable impacts that caused the children to suffer inside and outside of school.

5.3 Risks associated with day-to-day life

Male students confronted challenges outside of school due to the nature of their employment, which involved working unsupervised at a young age and exposed them to various risks. Syrian girls also faced challenges because they were not aware of the cultural differences in their new environment, as reported by most female school principals and school social workers. Consequently, Syrian families needed to support their children in overcoming the new challenges they faced in their new environment. However, integration is not solely the responsibility of Syrian families; it requires active engagement from both the host society and Syrian families to be successful.

5.3.1 Male students as victims of maltreatment and panhandling

Although most of the students asserted that their relationships with their families became stronger, a minority became victims of maltreatment and exploitation, due to their fathers' long working hours in workplaces far from the city. Child maltreatment refers to all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power (Backhaus et al., 2023). This situation usually prevented the fathers from taking care of their children and led to some students being involved in panhandling at malls and other places. Consequently, social workers dealt with these problems and were able to alleviate the situation in many cases by contacting and advising the guardians on the importance of proper childcare. For example, one father working from 6 AM until 10 PM did not have sufficient time to follow up on his son's activities outside school or his school-related work. This scenario also occurred in cases where a child was working outside the home without their parents' supervision. A school social worker (MSSA2) stated:

One of the challenges we faced was the behaviour of some fathers, who were unable to follow up with their children due to financial circumstances. As these fathers actively search for job opportunities, it's not uncommon to find students living with their families in City A, while their fathers work outside the city. These fathers may only visit their families on weekends, and sometimes for just one day. Additionally, some students' fathers work in the industrial area from 6:00 am until 10:00 pm, which means they may only have an hour to see and interact with their children at home. Naturally, the absence of a guardian from the home has an impact on the children's behaviour and exposes them to negative influences from the external environment. I've personally encountered these issues, and some Syrian students were at risk of exploitation or engaged in inappropriate activities. Thankfully, we were able to intervene and assist several students by providing advice. We also reached out to their fathers, urging them to visit the school to discuss their children's issues and actively participate in their follow-up.

5.3.2 Female students as victims of sexual harassment

Another identified external challenge facing female students was sexual harassment. New female Syrian refugee students, who were accustomed to different cultural practices, such as not wearing a hijab, were more exposed to harassment than female Saudi students, which placed them in very difficult predicaments. For example, they were subjected to harassment by other adolescents, including males outside of school. However, this does not mean that the efforts of integration depend solely on refugee students; Saudi students also play a crucial role. It is important to note that female students often faced these issues outside of school, as Saudi public schools separate male and female students, with each gender attending different schools. For instance, one female school social worker shared a story about a female Syrian refugee student. As stated by FSSA3:

One girl says, 'I had a male friend, and I gave him my pictures. He blackmailed me.' So I contacted his parents, we solved this problem in secrecy, and we try to change his behaviour, but we do not say this is a student from Syria, but she is our sister and student who needed help.

It seems that the female school social workers who participated in the study faced challenges due to the exploitation of female students. However, the stories of this nature had likely remained unrevealed due to cultural considerations and the importance of the reputation of students and their families. The same social worker FSSA3 stated that a lot of cases regarding exploitation had been recorded, but it was difficult to share such cases because of the ethical aspects of the profession, as well as the consideration of the reputation of the girls and their families. This account raises the strong possibility of risks to the psychological well-being of female refugee students, an issue that has been noted in studies of refugee children in Turkish schools (Duman and Snoubar, 2017).

Female students did seem to adapt to changes, because schools required all female students to wear formal school uniform, as well as a Hijab⁷ and Abaya⁸. Such requirements

⁷ Hijab: A traditional Islamic headscarf worn by many Muslim women to cover their hair, neck, and sometimes shoulders. It is worn as an expression of religious adherence.

⁸ Abaya: A loose-fitting, full-length cloak worn by many Muslim women, particularly in the Gulf region. It covers the entire body except for the face, feet, and hands, and is typically worn over everyday clothing.

were intended to minimise the differences among students and protect female students from exposure to exploitation. One of the female school principals FSPA1 stated 'There are not big differences between the Syrians and our society, except in some things related to their culture and awareness, especially when they had just arrived, such as clothing and other things.'

However, adapting to the changes took time and socialisation. One female Syrian student SFA5 stated that, after she had arrived in Saudi Arabia and started to attend school, she became familiar with Saudi culture. Consequently, she now wears a formal school uniform and an Abaya and Hijab, like her peers, and over time she has become more aware of Saudi culture, to which she adapted and became more conservative in her dress. The majority of school social workers and principals asserted that such cultural challenges at this critical stage might be eliminated by raising the awareness of parents. Contacting and meeting families benefited both students and their families, allowing discussion of the differences between the two cultures. School social workers provided the families with the advice needed to teach their children to understand Saudi culture, which helped the female students to overcome these difficulties. One school social worker MSSA3 asserted:

Through the services provided to the families of students, we provide assistance so a family can teach their children by urging them to know the changes that have occurred to them and the importance of respecting the new culture, customs, traditions, and regulations of the country.

Moreover, urging integration led to, friendship and respect with other pupils, and the formation of good relations among them. Thus, such initiatives help the students to avoid the psychological and social problems associated with these cultural challenges.

Additionally, one female school social worker FSSA2 mentioned that a minority of the Syrian families were not aware of their children's activities outside school. For example, some mothers had no knowledge that their daughters had received expensive gifts, or knowledge of where they were going after school. This lack of awareness persisted despite most female students in Saudi schools benefiting from free transportation. It seems that the availability of free transportation did not necessarily ensure that mothers were informed about their

daughters' activities. Instead, mothers tended to engage with schools and social workers primarily when their daughters faced significant problems.

5.4 Media impact

Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia were likely to be negatively impacted by the media. Although this was an external influence, it led to numerous challenges inside and outside of school for these students in terms of constraining their integration psychologically and socially. This situation is consistent with findings in the literature, such as those by Singer (2018), which highlight how exposure to violence and conflict through media can significantly impact the emotional state and educational performance of refugee children. For example, refugee children reported watching the news on TV with their family during the peak of the crisis, which exposed the students to bloody and sad scenes of the conflict in Syria. Such incidents led the children to suffer from trauma that disturbed their achievement at schools. As one female school social worker FSSB1 reported, 'One time I got a student who had a problem with fear and panic because her family was watching the news regarding tragic events in Syria, and she was very affected by the situation there'. Such negative impacts required effort by the families and schools to support the students.

Although student relationships within schools helped refugee students to feel welcome and provided them with a peaceful environment, the friendships of Syrian students were also at risk due to media influences. This was because the news media affected the students by reminding them of the previous traumatic events that took place in Syria. In some cases, this caused students to adopt political ideas as a consequence of the conflict in their home country. For instance, as male school principal MSPA1 reported:

At the beginning of the crisis and at the time of the Syrian revolution, the main news in the media and TV channels was the bloody effects on the local populations, and the students were impacted by this, and there was a student who did not support the current regime, while another student did support the regime, so they had a fight at the school.

Students were impacted by the media coverage of the events in Syria, which had unfortunate consequences on the school environment, which was supposed to be their safe

place, where they needed to live and interact peacefully to be integrated successfully. Although, the above incident occurred at one of the high schools, where the students were aged around 16 years old, the media stories of the events in Syria were likely to have negatively impacted younger children attending other schools.

5.6 Violence within the home

Although Syrian refugee student participants did not mention experiences of violence within the home, a female school social worker and a male school principal revealed that several Syrian students were at risk of violence within the home. According to these school staff, students whose families were aware of the importance of education in Saudi Arabia sometimes reported experiencing violence within the home intended to force them to achieve more in school. While most of the Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools believed that studying and achieving academic excellence was easier compared to studying in Syrian schools, parents pressured them to achieve highly in relation to their current educational level, which placed them at risk of violence within the home.

These situations were often discovered when students suffered from isolation in schools. The importance of the role of school social workers was crucial in identifying such violence by observing these students' interaction in school. For example, one female social worker (FSSA2) stated that 'she had dealt with isolated students, who talked to her a lot, and would not leave, and spending a lot of time in her office. Furthermore, she revealed how 'a student mentioned that she would be punished at home because her family was expecting her to achieve high grades'. Such incidents among Syrian female students place these students under severe pressure at home, which reflects on the students in their new school environment, and results in negative interactions with peers and school staff, and adversely affects their results and academic achievement, which in turn prevents individual integration into the school environment. Besides, such pressure impacts the children's well-being and may cause poor mental health and depression. However, support from the school social workers was important in raising the awareness of parents regarding how to treat their children in their new environment, which could often be achieved by involving and talking to parents.

Several school social workers also identified that the children became victims of such violence due to the parents' circumstances in their new environment. According to a school social worker (FSSA2), 'Violence from parents happened to the children due to the external stressors on the family as they adjusted to life in Saudi Arabia.' The families faced many challenges, such as low income and responsibility for other family members in Syrian, which influenced the students' integration at school. Consequently, the school social workers played a key role in reaching the families of the children to maintain their well-being in this new environment.

In addition, several fathers valued the importance of education, and were keen for their children to be successful in Saudi schools. Taking the children to the father's workplace was occasionally considered as a form of punishment for the students. For example, male principal MSPA1 revealed the following:

Syrian fathers wanted their children to learn and not to work in manual jobs when they left school, but when the child misbehaved in school, the fathers came to school and talked to the child; the fathers then threatened to take the child with them to their dangerous workplaces such as building homes.

Such threats were likely to impact the children at school and their relationship with their fathers.

5.7 Internal challenges within the school environment

Internal challenges within the school environment to include the following: (i) bullying and discrimination, (ii) differences in curriculum and environment, (iii) gender-separated schools, and (iv) fear of the future.

5.7.1 Bullying and discrimination

'When I came here first time, I was definitely a little stranger, no one knew me and I didn't know anyone!'

Syrian refugee students shared their experiences of the critical stages which they had undergone, namely early experiences at Saudi schools. These stages featured several challenges, such as bullying and discrimination. Although such severe suffering affected the

integration process in schools, hampering proper interaction between newcomers and students of the dominant society, with time such incidents declined in frequency, and were replaced by brotherhood and friendship. Syrian students encountered bullying and discrimination in their early school experiences due to their unfamiliarity with Saudi culture and customs. It should be noted that, male students faced more bullying than female students. It was indicated that teachers in some cases were responsible for a limited amount of oppressive behaviour and discrimination against refugee students.

Syrian refugee students said that they faced bullying and discrimination at Saudi schools. Some local students wondered why Syrian students came to their schools. Although the Syrian students generally tried to be respectful to everyone, bullying continually occurred. For example, as male student stated MSA4:

I used to face a problem. They always said to me: 'You are Syrian. Why did you come here?' But if I meet them now, they wouldn't say this, and I don't like to get problems with anyone.' This was one of the incidents I faced in elementary school.

The majority of Syrian refugee students were conscious of such incidents because they felt like strangers at school, and without friends. While the nationality of the new Syrian students was not revealed by school staff, the culture and dialect were likely to set them apart from the native students and identify them as Syrian students. According to one female school principal (FSPA2), identities were not revealed for anyone, including both teachers and students, so, other than these cultural differences, no one would know if a student was a displaced Syrian.

Syrian refugee students confirmed that bullying and discrimination diminished once they had spent more time in Saudi schools. Bullying had been experienced in elementary or middle school, while experience of such incidents in high schools was infrequent. It can be argued that young local students may engage in bullying behaviour towards refugee students due to a lack of awareness about the rights and needs of the Syrian refugee students. According to male student SMA3, 'There was a little discrimination among a few students in the middle school, but in high school most students did not say anything or bad words to me.' The majority of Syrian students mentioned that, recently, local students had

become more open- minded and understanding of different cultures. Another Syrian student (SMB3) remarked:

The simple problem I encountered was discrimination among students, but this was because of their age; they were kids they see themselves as better than us, but, you know, they were kids, but now they are in high schools no one says bad words...they treat me nice and like a man.

Syrian refugee students confirmed that these incidents were perpetrated by young, unaware students while the majority treated the Syrians as Saudis and did not discriminate. Moreover, students with poor social awareness and personality issues, such as jealousy, might bully new visiting students. For example, female school social worker FSSA2 stated that 'In female students, bullying is due to reasons of jealousy, young age, and ignorance. We have always been aware of the importance of continuous awareness campaigns against bullying and racism'. The discrimination and bullying represented a critical issue that newcomers faced during the early stages of their education in Saudi Arabia; however, as they became older, they faced fewer such incidents of this nature. Thus, the level of discrimination and bullying decreased as students advanced in their educational levels.

Although the refugees' and Saudis' common religion, language, and culture played a significant role in fostering interaction and harmony, and aiding the integration process, none of these factors prevented conflicts between the two groups. The simple cultural differences between Syrians and Saudis in schools often led to discord. For instance, Syrian students faced bullying and prejudice as a result of the inability to comprehend aspects of the new culture and the Saudi dialect in the new environment. According to male student SMB5:

When I arrived in school for the first time, I faced discrimination, but not from all students, because at that time, I did not know how local students talk and I did not know some of their words. There was a little difference about the culture but not huge difference. After that we became friends.

However, Syrian students improved their capacity to resist bullying by spending time at Saudi schools, where they learned the Saudi students' dialect. It is vital to mention that such

capacity cannot be strengthened without a suitable educational environment, which includes positive interactions with local students, whose acceptance, tolerance, and coexisting with refugee students opened opportunities for learning the local culture and adapting to the new environments. As one male Syrian student SMB3 stated:

Frankly, there was bullying and still is so far, but now what is the difference? I mastered the dialect perfectly; they accepted me, as I speak their dialect. I knew how and I do not face bullying anymore. Of course, when I attended the school first time, I was bullied. But now I have learned the dialect by practising, me and Saudi students, we are friends.

The similarities of Syrian and Saudi dialects and culture aided Syrian refugee students in comprehending and learning the nature of the new society, which led to fostering long-term friendships, ultimately easing their integration into schools. This therefore does not mean that the Syrian students have the only responsibility to achieve this but Saudi students need to be more open to accept the Syrian students.

Another student SMA1 shared a similar experience:

In the beginning, it was difficult to understand the dialect. It was a little difficult because I was a newcomer from Syria to Saudi Arabia, and the dialect was a little different and I did not understand it, but with time and with the help of the teachers, they made this difference easier for me.

The school staff's strong understanding of these difficulties, particularly that of teachers, also assisted in decreasing the impact of such differences, and this occurred as the relationships between the teachers and students became more trusting and secure. In addition, teachers' understanding of the needs and difficulties of newcomers assisted in minimising their differences, which in turn helped in ensuring a suitable new environment for newcomers. In this way, teachers endeavoured to foster a suitable environment, helping the newcomers to interact with confidence and to create good relationships with school members, especially teachers and students.

Furthermore, the bullying that Syrian students endured had a significant influence on their relationships with other pupils. Fights occurring in the early stages at school were often

linked to bullying, with Syrian students engaging in such behaviour not just to maintain their dignity, but also to establish superiority in response to perceived threats. As mentioned by a male Syrian student MSA2, some local students bullied him in order to prove themselves as leaders in classes. This was evident, because several school staff agreed that when fights occurred at schools, they would usually involve a Syrian student.

It is noteworthy that relatives in schools played a vital role in linking students with and teaching them about Saudi cultural norms. Syrian refugee students whose relatives attended the same Saudi schools were more able to avoid bullying and fighting due to their better social bonds and relationships. This was because Syrian students attended in particular schools due to their relationships with other Syrians, or with Saudis, who received them as refugees in Saudi Arabia. For instance, many Syrian students had Saudi cousins⁹ in their schools, which formed a suitable environment to help their integration into the schools, alleviating challenges related to the critical early stages. However, it is also worth noting that, during the arrival of Syrian refugees at Saudi schools (the early stages), such social or kinship grouping facilitated the creation of restricted friendship groups among newcomer students, which contributed to disharmony in the school environment. A female social worker (FSSB1) mentioned that, during the early stages of receiving the refugee students, there were restricted friendship groups among Syrian students. This stimulated social workers to mitigate such problems by working to ease the newcomers' integration into schools.

Although new students and teachers shared many aspects of culture, language and religion, teaching new students whose backgrounds included experience of war was considered a relatively new experience for those teachers. Syrian refugee students were rarely exposed to bullying by teachers; only two out of 15 school staff reported such incidents, resulting from teachers' lack of awareness of Syrian refugee students' needs and backgrounds. The important role of social workers involved discussing this with the Guidance and Counselling Committee in the Ministry of Education in an attempt to achieve equality and justice among students, and at the same time to raise the awareness of teachers. Inexperienced teachers in the educational field, with poor cultural awareness, might have engaged in bullying if they

⁹ Cousin refers in this context to extended family members, such as the children of one's aunts and uncles, who may have a closer familial bond than in some other cultures (Eliot, 2014).

had not carefully talked with Syrian students from different backgrounds, who had experienced severe circumstances during the war. However, school social workers and principals indicated that schools sought to overcome this by explaining to teachers the most suitable approach dealing with Syrian students at the beginning of the school year.

School staff mentioned that, while a minority of Syrian refugee students faced bullying by teachers, Syrian students were able to avoid this by establishing good relationships with teachers, and they believed that most cases of bullying occurred due to bullying students' poor awareness and ignorance. One male Syrian student SMB3 commented that:

The teachers and administrators welcomed and received me, but from the point of view of some students, there was hatred, I mean frankly, and there was bullying. I mean, there was envy from some students out of jealousy; at the beginning of school, it was difficult, but in the high school, most of students now are respectful, all the problems were in middle school.

Saudi schools were keen to avoid such harmful incidents by raising awareness of Syrian students' rights, thereby encouraging a suitable and comfortable environment for interaction. Nonetheless, the different, new environment held challenges for the newcomers, who required the assistance of responsible individuals involved in the schools, especially school social workers.

5.7.2 Different school curricula

The most clear differences reported by Syrian refugee students after attending Saudi schools were the different school curricula, and gender-separated schools for males and females. Although the school curricula of Saudi Arabia and Syria are taught in Arabic, significant differences were highlighted by the Syrian refugee students. For example, most participants agreed that the school curriculum in Saudi Arabia was very different to that of schools in Syria. In Saudi Arabia, the curriculum focuses more extensively on human and religious sciences, while in Syria the curriculum concentrates on scientific subjects, such as mathematics, physics and chemistry. It seems that this difference was encountered more by Syrian high-school students than middle-school students. This is because the middle-school students arrived in Saudi Arabia from Syria at early school ages, and had only studied in

Syria for two or three years. In contrast, high school students had studied for longer, spending more time in Syrian schools. One of the male high school students (SMB3) shared his experience: 'The differences between the curricula were significant. The school curriculum in Syria differs from the curriculum in Saudi Arabia. In Syria schools focus on English language, mathematics, biology and physics, and here in Saudi Arabia schools focus on religion and Arabic language.' Moreover, in Syria some school subjects, such as English, are taught from an early age, whereas in Saudi Arabia, English is taught from fourth grade onwards.

Several Syrian students reported finding social and religious subjects relatively easy, and these subjects helped them to achieve more in schools, because most of them had studied these subjects before coming to Saudi Arabia. Other students found that studying social and religious subjects was interesting, which helped these newcomers to understand Saudi culture and society. MSB4 stated 'To be honest, there is definitely a difference, but for me the educational content was difficult, because the focus is on the scientific subjects [and], mathematics. But here in Saudi Arabia, religious subjects are much stronger and something better'. It seems that these subjects may have helped the Syrian refugee students to better understand Saudi society and improved their academic achievement.

Though the Syrian refugee students agreed that their new experiences in Saudi schools were interesting and relatively stress-free, in the early stages of their school studies, family support in their school activities was essential for their success, since this was a critical stage in terms of their adapting to the new curriculum. However, most Syrian students achieved good academic success in their schools. For example, male student SMB5 stated 'In the beginning, at the elementary and middle schools, I depend on my family to help me with school homework, but later in high school I depend on myself more'. This male student had also achieved good grades since joining the high school, and was confident about his academic abilities. Another male student SMB3 shared 'In elementary school I got assistance from my mother, because I could not understand some tasks, but now I rely on myself'. Thus, while most refugee students made positive academic progress, and coped with the differences at the high school level, some students needed significant initial support.

A minority of the high-school students interviewed were relying on their families for help with homework and school activities in general. Several students reported that they still sought assistance from family members, such as their fathers and brothers; such help was sought due to difficulty in completing tasks related to subjects such as mathematics and chemistry. Continued family support was required for this minority until they had finished their studies to enable them to achieve the required grades in order to gain university admission.

However, family support, in a minority of cases, failed to fulfil the students' needs in schools, due to the challenges and hardships the Syrian families were encountering in Saudi Arabia, such as financial issues, students' and fathers' working, and the families' responsibility to support other family members, either in Saudi Arabia or Syria. Such challenges that impacted Syrian families led to children suffering at school, which required intervention from schools, especially by school social workers, to ensure that the new environment was suitable for the children, and to overcome the differences. Most school social workers, however, mentioned that Syrian refugee students suffered if their fathers worked outside of the city in which they lived, as this meant that the fathers spent inadequate time with their children, who then became exposed to external risks and received less support with regard to school activities.

5.7.3 Fear of future

One of the most evident concerns linked to internal challenges, which impacted the Syrian students in Saudi schools, was the weakness in opportunities to secure admission to Saudi universities. This issue was mostly linked to Syrian high-school students who could not be guaranteed a place at a Saudi university. These students could not rely on attending university for free, as Saudi citizens could: only 3% of university places are reserved for high-achieving international students. The majority of the male and female Syrian refugee students agreed that this obstacle caused psychological issues, as it affected their focus in school. As a result, students and their families experienced stress, which impacted their high-school education. In addition, due to scarce opportunities, students might travel to Turkey or other countries to attend university. Staff members at the school were generally in agreement that previous Syrian high-school students had travelled abroad to complete

their university education; this tendency was discovered when students requested academic recommendation letters for their applications for places at universities outside of Saudi Arabia. However, most Syrian refugee students explained that they could not travel because their families lived in Saudi Arabia.

5.7.4 Gender- separated schools

Most Syrian refugee students identified that the separation of male and female students in Saudi schools was one of the most obvious and substantial differences in comparison to their previous education in Syria. A majority of students had experienced going to mixed schools in Syria, but this was highly dependent on the Syrian cities in which they had previously lived. For example, students mentioned that, due to the small size of the villages and schools in Syria, male and female students attended the same schools. Additionally, Syrian refugee students confirmed that education policies may differ from one city to another. For instance, several students revealed that only their elementary and middle schools were mixed schools, and that separation began in high school.

In the interviews, students reported that gender-segregated schools represented a substantial difference, and a unique experience compared to their previous schooling in Syria. Female students in particular now expressed their satisfaction with being with classmates of the same gender. According to one female student SFA4, 'It is good to study with girls, frankly, girls like here in Saudi Arabia, because with girls we can share many things, and girls can understand themselves and the other girls well. If male students study with us, there is no peace of mind'. Another female student SFA1 shared the same opinion: 'A girl can feel comfortable if she studies with other girls we need to be relaxed like in our homes'.

It seems that female Syrian refugee students at Saudi schools regarded gender-separated schools as one of the components to facilitate integration into their new educational environment, due to their satisfaction with this policy. Single-sex school policies appeared to assist in enhancing the girls' sense of attachment and belonging to their schools, as they were more comfortable with classmates of their own gender. This is because female schools require the teachers also to be female, which likely enhances the free interaction among

students and staff. As SFA2 reported, 'We used to study in mixed schools, but I feel more belonging here. Why? First of all, they are all girls. We are all girls, female teachers treat us nicely, and it is safe as well'.

Furthermore, one of the female Syrian students SFA5 highlighted the following: 'Boys sometimes bother us. I mean, studying with girls, like here, in Saudi school, is convenient.' Likewise, some girls found their single-sex schools to be a safe place, in which they were required to wear the Saudi female school uniform, namely the Abaya and Hijab. As mentioned in Section 5.3, 'Risks associated with day-to-day life,' they were required to wear their school uniforms even outside of school to stay safe and to mitigate one of the challenges faced by Syrian girls in their new environment, specifically the risk of sexual harassment.

Similarly, as one of the Syrian male students SMB4 asserted, 'There was mixing, but here is better for me; I prefer this, and it is very comfortable and even possible for girls. I have sisters who studied here and in Syria, and they are more comfortable here.' Several male students also found studying with other male students helpful for improving their peer interactions, and coping with the differences in their new schools. For example, as SMB4 mentioned, 'I got used to understanding the new culture fast, and use the same dialect, so sometimes people cannot believe I am Syrian'.

5.8 Psychological and social issues

The challenges outlined above were linked to psychological and social issues among the Syrian refugee students in their new environment (see Figure 3-1). If neglected, children's capability to interact effectively would likely be compromised. Schools, families and other institutions in Saudi Arabia played vital roles in reducing the amount of suffering and challenges faced by the newcomers. These children needed a suitable environment free of complications and overlapping problems affecting their integration into schools.

For Syrian refugee students, financial issues such as poverty impacted the children; there was a need to support families when they became exposed to risks such as exploitation and work injuries. In addition, young children engaging in begging activities created huge risks

and unsuitable environments that affected the integration process and their well-being. These difficulties created social and psychological issues for children.

Moreover, the minority of Syrian refugee students who experienced violence within the home during the early stages of life in Saudi Arabia negatively impacted these students, and caused isolation in schools, which impacted the children's interactions with their peers and school staff. It is important to note that such isolation affected children's mental health severely, causing depression. For example, according to female social worker (FSSA1):

Regarding violence within the home, frankly some families use violence with children to relieve pressure. I understand their situation; the families are stressed and their children are the victims. I feel their feeling and I see their worn faces. I ask them 'Why don't you live your life? What happened to you?' Some reply 'My mother says I must read all my books and my father hits me.' All these unsuitable behaviours make children depressed; I have experienced situations like this several times; this causes psychological pressure on the students.

Another female school social worker FSSA2 shared a similar experience: 'Female students sometimes suffer from psychological problems because of the family's circumstances. I talk to her, and support and encourage her, and contact the family to support them through phone communication, or even to ask the family to come to school sometimes.'

Furthermore, the difficulty of securing admission into Saudi universities was revealed by Syrian refugee students as one of the most severe future issues they encountered in Saudi Arabia. Such issues were highly stressful and anxiety-inducing, which likely harmed their high-school education. This concern led to psychological and social issues, and factors such as family structure and legal status have also intensified these problems. For instance, students from separated families might experience emotional distress and instability, particularly when a family member, such as the head of the family, is financially supporting relatives in Syria or in other countries, adding additional economic burden and emotional stress. In addition, students who failed to renew their visitor permits (Iqamah) would not be able to apply for universities.

Those students whose families relied on them to earn money to meet their living expenses were unable to travel abroad due to financial issues. Thus, these issues overlapped and were interdependent, leading to an unclear future for the children. For example, a school principal MSPA1 reported that 'It can be a trauma because they left their country. All this causes psychological and social problems, tension and anxiety, so we try our best to make students feel better.' As mentioned by a school social worker, leaving Syria was a big shock for students, and they needed help from their school to overcome some of the issues related to their new environment in Saudi Arabia, even though they shared a similar culture, and the same language and religion. The children found some key differences in Saudi Arabia compared to Syria. As discussed already, their speaking in a different dialect to that of Saudi students led to Syrian students' exposure to bullying. As a result, their interactions with others were influenced negatively, resulting in isolation in schools, which caused poor mental health and well-being.

5.9 Summary

This chapter introduced and investigated the third theme, the challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia. Firstly, it looked at the challenges outside school relating to their precarious financial situation and their cultural background which pushes the children to engage in paid work. Although such challenges exist outside school, they impact the students' achievements in school as they are linked to absenteeism, tardiness and at times even falling asleep in class. The home environment can also present challenges for students, for example through experiencing violence as a form of punishment. This chapter also revealed the challenges that newcomers experience when attending Saudi schools including bullying and discrimination linked to their new situation and their inability to master the Saudi dialect. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the differences between the environments in Saudi Arabian schools and schools in Syria, single sex schools being one of the clearest differences providing comfort, especially for female students. This chapter concluded with the social and psychological challenges linked to external and internal challenges. All the above-mentioned challenges and new experiences for school staff, students, and families are represented in the components forming the next chapter which

includes two themes: school support and an appropriate school environment for managing the new experiences and challenges related to the integration of Syrian refugee students.

Chapter 6 School support and appropriate school environment for integration

6.1 Introduction

Firstly, this chapter will introduce the fourth theme which highlights the reality of the experience of Saudi schools in supporting Syrian refugee students. This involves the following six sub-themes: understanding refugee students' backgrounds, the importance of early identification of problems, raising awareness, consultation, family engagement, and financial support. The provision of support by schools is one of the main themes identified from the data and reflects the efforts made by Saudi schools in response to the new and unanticipated influx of students that has taken place since 2011. These efforts revolve around receiving and integrating Syrian refugee students and show that school social workers form one of the most important components for providing support and services for newcomers in order to ensure their well-being. Although the support aspect stems from the school social workers' motivations, which are based on their cultural, religious, personal, and professional backgrounds, such practices during this new experience were not dependent on specified and planned programs for newcomers (see Table 6.1). As shown in Figure 6-1, these themes help to build the model of integration gradually, similar to how Themes 1, 2, and 3 contributed to the model. Each theme interrelates by addressing different aspects of the integration process, thus forming a comprehensive framework. This integrated approach will be further explored in Chapters 8 and 9.

Secondly, it will present the final theme, the appropriate school environment for integration, which emerged from the interviews and includes three sub-themes: a welcoming atmosphere and schools' facilities; relationships; and sense of belonging. (See Table 6-2). This fifth theme explore the actions that schools implement to facilitate and ease the integration of newcomers who have enrolled in Saudi schools after the Syrian crisis in 2011. It is important to note that school social workers were the practitioners who guided schools in this new experience by implementing practices to ensure that the Syrian refugee students are able to integrate successfully into schools.

Table 6-1 School support

Theme	Description	Sub-Themes	Sub-Sub-Themes
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4) School support	This theme investigates how Saudi schools support Syrian refugee students, including various support mechanisms and engagement strategies.	(a) Understanding refugee students' backgrounds	N/A
		(b) Importance of early identification of problems	N/A
		(c) Raising awareness	N/A
		(d) Consultation	N/A
		(e) Family engagement	N/A
		(f) Financial support	1. Volunteers and donations 2. Sponsors 3. Charities

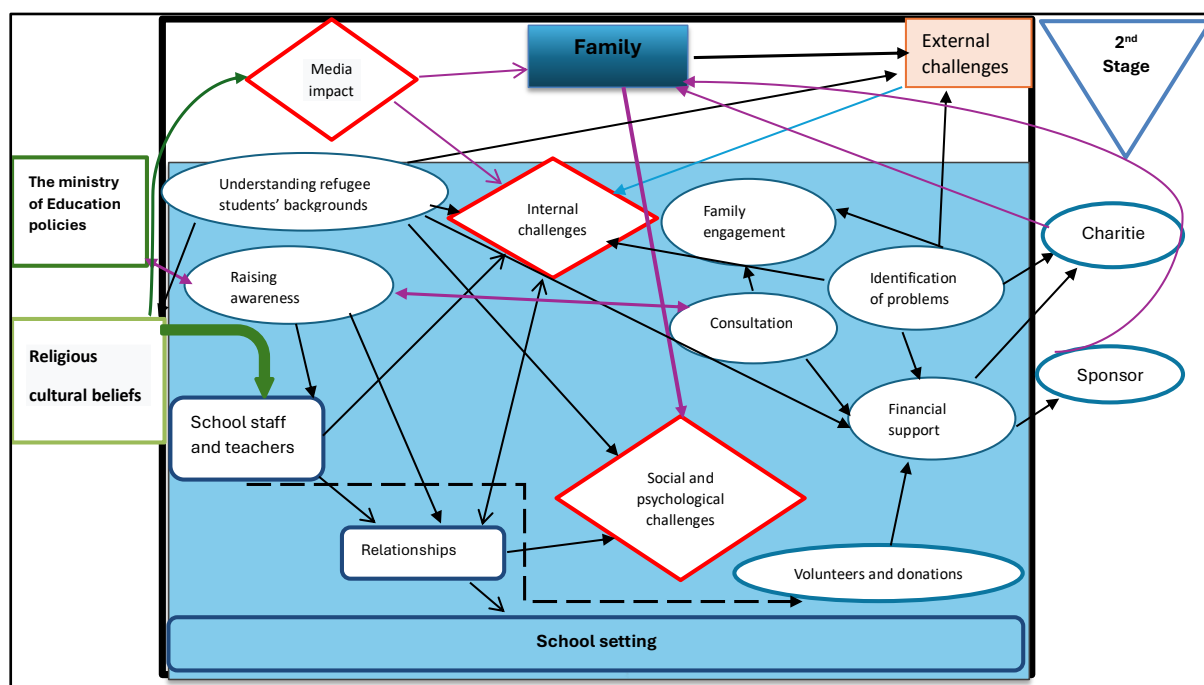


Figure 6-1 School support

6.2 Understanding the students' backgrounds

School social workers focused much attention on understanding Syrian students' cultural and social backgrounds, as an initial factor to assist in providing services. Such understanding could facilitate school social workers' practices intended to help new students to accept their new situation and environment. This understanding is obtained by carrying out an assessment of students' needs and general situation, which includes collecting the necessary information about the circumstances surrounding the students, and

discovering the challenges that might prevent newcomers from integrating. School social workers dealing with the new influx need to understand the pupils' previous experience to determine the extent to which students are affected by the changes in their lives. Furthermore, school social workers must understand the cultural background of Syrian refugee students, which is different from that of the majority of school students with whom they work. This is because each student has their own characteristics, shaped by their previous environment. Consequently, needs and challenges vary from one student to another, requiring a specific practice approach for certain students.

Syrian students who sought refuge in Saudi Arabia came from a different background to that of local students, or even other Syrian students born in Saudi Arabia, or arriving in Saudi Arabia without being forcibly displaced. Male school social worker (MSSA2) stated:

Every student has their background that links to the environment of their origin. For example, in Saudi Arabia, we have students from different groups in society with their unique characteristics, so what do you think about students arriving from outside Saudi Arabia? They came with different experiences and culture.

However, recognising these differences may help practitioners to be wiser and more patient, adapting to achieve the required skills to guide newcomers' behaviours in line with the Saudi -school context. Several school social workers reported the importance of positive dialogue with newcomers as a necessary skill in order to understand such a background, and to create the professional relationships that lead to providing essential support.

Moreover, school social workers (as mentioned in theme 2) benefited from external opportunities by interacting with other Syrians who lived in Saudi Arabia before the crisis, resulting in the practitioners' familiarity with the Syrian cultural background. According to school social worker MSSA2:

See, I am talking about the Syrian nationality; it remains Arabic...The Saudis do not see Syrians as new nationalities that live in Saudi Arabia. All schools have students, whether they are Syrian refugees or residents. We are not surprised to live with them in the neighbourhoods; there is sometimes only a slight difference of culture and values.

Thus, living with Syrians was, to some extent, helpful for school social workers in understanding some of the Syrian culture. Still, due to previous experience and different backgrounds, Syrian refugee students require specific efforts, especially upon first arriving at Saudi schools, since the influx of displaced Syrians is a new experience.

6.3 Identifying problems and needs

School social workers agreed that one of their most important duties is to determine the internal and external difficulties faced by Syrian refugee students at an early stage of their enrolment in Saudi schools, to ensure their easy integration. Female school social worker FSSB2 indicated 'My role, as I mentioned to you, my role is to detect problems at an early stage and solve them'. With school social workers taking this into consideration in providing services to all students, Syrian refugee students would benefit in particular, especially in the early stage of their attendance at Saudi schools. However, exploring and identifying problems at the early stages cannot be achieved without promptness and careful observation.

School social workers stated that the first and most important process was to conduct an assessment for each student when they arrive in school. This includes investigating social, health, and financial status, with the same procedure as applied for Saudi students. Additionally, to ensure that assessments were conducted properly, it is necessary to arrange a meeting with new students, due to the importance of observing a student's behaviour and receiving information. Therefore, meetings with students are conducted in two different forms, either private sessions or together with other students. Combining the observation of students during activities and the conducting of assessments helps school social workers to comprehend the challenges facing new students, in order to inform subsequent intervention, and to overcome obstacles that inhabit Syrian refugee students' integration into the school environment.

Break times and their associated activities present the best opportunities for school social workers to explore newcomers' school-related challenges. By taking advantage of such occasions, social workers could observe students' behaviour and interaction with other pupils. Observing behaviours and interaction also initially required a good relationship with students, in which school social workers could talk informally to these students. For

example, during breaks, students who suffered as a result of poor financial status, and were unable to pay for breakfast, could be identified.

Nevertheless, for school social workers, distinguishing Syrian students might be challenging, as they are physically similar to other students. Male school social worker MSSA3 stated 'Even at recess, I go around the schoolyard to capture and observe situations. I get to know students, and I try to enhance their good behaviour and situations. We commend them; my role is to go to the field and interact with students.' Thus, school social workers needed to interact with students everywhere continuously and actively in schools to create opportunities to serve newcomers in the best possible way. School principal MSPA2 confirmed the school social workers' perspective by explaining the importance of observing students during activities and breaks. However, while observing students' external appearance provides some evidence of difficult circumstances, such observations are not limited to Syrian students, but may they benefit more than other students from such practices. For instance, during breaks school social workers observed that some of the new students could not afford to buy breakfast for three days or attended school with torn shoes. In addition to the previous context, the strongest likelihood of identifying the difficulties faced by newcomers was during winter, since students would come to schools wearing inappropriate clothing; for example, some were not wearing jackets.

Furthermore, the process of identifying problems necessitated an ongoing, active collaboration between school social workers and other school staff, notably teachers. Since teachers have frequent interactions with students, they are well-positioned to discern the challenges encountered by Syrian refugee students through thorough observations of their behaviour. For instance, if Syrian refugees exhibit signs of fatigue or fall asleep during class teachers promptly refer them to the school social workers for assistance. In addition, some students do not perform well in class because of circumstances falling outside of the purview of the school, such as family matters. Some will often borrow things such as pens from other pupils; such incidents help school social workers to identify the vulnerable students and provide them with the necessary services. A school principal (MSPA1) confirmed:

Sometimes I noticed a student attend wearing worn shoes, and sometimes, on cold days, he come to school without a jacket. His condition is evident; sometimes he asks for something, or even borrows a pen from his classmates, which is not expensive. So, if I see him borrowing pens, it indicates that he cannot afford the value of the pen; it reflects the financial circumstances of him and his family.

It is important to note that teachers enhance this process of discovery by creating good relationships with students and interacting closely with them, especially the Syrian refugee students with a different background. Therefore, school social workers in Saudi schools confirmed that teachers represent an important factor in identifying the challenges faced by Syrian students.

One of the most important factors that led school social workers to detect the challenges faced by students was their discussions with other students, namely class captains. A male school social worker (MSSA1) stated: 'I personally have three captains in each class for keeping classes' discipline, and one of his duty is to detect problems if he notices something, he comes to my office and tell me about situations.' Some students encountered social, behavioural and verbal problems in class, and found it difficult to talk to teachers or social workers, due to the fear of other students' bullying. Another female school social worker FSSA2 relied on a young counsellor, a student with a profile of good behaviour, who was a leader, accepted by, and close to, the other students, who collaborated with the social worker to help other students in class. Regardless of nationality and ethnic background, all students have the opportunity to be a young counsellor, as long as they exhibit psychological and mental readiness.

These elements are significant for newcomers attending Saudi schools. Early issues like bullying and discrimination arise frequently. The unfamiliarity of Syrian students with new school regulations and weak relationships with staff and local students present challenges for school social workers. This is a new experience for many Saudi school social workers, who may not fully grasp the unique issues faced by Syrian refugee students. Effective collaboration with other parties is therefore essential to address the primary and early problems these students encounter.

6.4 Raising awareness of Syrian students' rights

School social workers agreed on the importance of raising awareness of Syrian students' rights in Saudi schools. The Ministry of Education allowed Syrian refugee students to enjoy the same benefits as Saudi pupils. Among their rights were free education, free books, and equal opportunities in regard to participation in school activities and competitions.

However, as mentioned by school social workers and principals in both cities, a minority of the school staff were not aware of these rights, especially teachers, due to this being an unfamiliar experience or due to their own lack of educational experience. Consequently, some school social workers and school principals, during the first week of the school term, introduced workshops for school staff and teachers in order to explain the Syrian refugee students' situation, background and needs. This helped to ensure that those students were treated equally to their peers, and, at the same time, helped to prevent several challenges during the early stages, such as discrimination and bullying. One school principal (MSPB1) stated:

As I told you, some teachers do not know how to deal with Syrian students, they do not have the experience to deal with this group... We meet with these teachers and explain to them the situation of our Syrian brothers or students. Whatever it means, they must be careful even in joking with them, because some words hurt and affect them psychologically. They must be made welcome, but the social worker conducts meetings at the beginning of each semester to clarify the students' rights to the teachers who accept and follow the outcomes of the workshops. They are collaborative.

Similarly, although most Syrian students establish good relationships with other local students after spending a period of time in school, first-time local students are not aware of the rights of Syrian refugee students. As a result, several school social workers aid local students in understanding the situation and rights of the Syrian refugee students by creating a positive relationship between them. This is intended to create a suitable and welcoming environment for newcomers.

This is achieved by introducing cultural activities to allow Syrian refugee students to engage with other social groups, especially in the first few weeks of term, which are dedicated to

receiving and welcoming new students, and introducing them to their school and its students (as we will see in the next theme about the benefits of extracurricular activities to create a welcoming environment). This allows other students to form a first impression of the Syrian refugee students, resulting in the acceleration of their integration with regard to the school and its students. Thus, raising awareness of refugee students' rights has been one of the most important practices implemented by school social workers to support newcomers. While most social workers were able to apply these practices effectively, a few noted that the large number of students made it difficult to implement certain activities. These exceptions highlight a barrier to integration efforts and suggest that smaller group sessions or additional support may be needed to ensure that all students benefit from these activities.

The majority of school staff agreed that newcomers needed to engage with other students, so as not to become isolated, or to be perceived as a different group or independent category. Such a view of those students as a separate category, or as somehow different from other students, might lead to their isolation. Instead, practitioners involved them in all activities, the same as any other pupils.

Nevertheless, in school, all social workers and school staff agreed that the records of Syrian refugee students should be treated with priority in terms of providing services, due to their different background, which was linked to war experience and challenges in Saudi Arabia. However, most school social workers agreed that allocating a specific programme for Syrian refugee students, separating them from the other students, affected them both inside and outside of school. By doing so, other students looked at them differently, and this impacted the refugee students' perception of themselves in their new environment, which in turn impacted their interaction. In this case, social workers were required to be more flexible and patient to understand the students' previous and current circumstances.

6.5 Consultation and guidance services for Syrian refugee students and their families

Although Saudi school social workers were motivated by religion and culture, they relied on their professional background in providing services for the new influx. One of the most important professional services to support Syrian refugee students was consultation and

guidance, which involved general support directed to helping students in a new environment. This task commenced with a professional relationship based on support, acceptance and empathy. Second, social workers explored the social and psychological status of newcomers, and their surrounding circumstances, with a view to preparing an appropriate atmosphere for them to accept their new situation and environment, and to overcome any difficulties. Such work required school social workers to investigate other related aspects linked to the students' schooling, which could potentially have a huge impact, such as financial status. In addition, consultation services involved intensive counselling sessions provided for students in order that they could face challenges in the new environment, such as an initial lack of harmony for newcomers. A male Syrian refugee student (SMB1) mentioned that 'a school social worker advises and gives me tips that will benefit me in school and life'. Most Syrian refugee students said that they were in need of this service in order to be supported in their new surroundings. Another female student (SFA2) confirmed:

For example, the school social worker helps girls who are often absent; they even ask about their performance in school. Afterward, they say things like, We heard something about them. Even those who used to be absent from school a lot — for instance, if I had a friend who was often absent — they would ask me, why isn't she attending? and they would speak with her family.

In Saudi school, there was no specific service directed to Syrian refugee students, or designated for newcomers, due to the counselling programmes being offered to all students. Syrian refugee students were treated as Saudi or other students, because the guidelines on which school social workers relied applied to all nationalities, whether students were Syrian, Saudi or another nationality. Male school social worker MSSA1 revealed: 'if an Egyptian student confronts a problem in school, I provide the same service that I provide to his Saudi or Syrian peers'. Another male school social worker (MSSA2) stated the following:

If I understand my role as a social worker or a student adviser correctly, the nature of my work is to provide consultation and guide all students, whether they are Syrians or others. My role is not, for example, like that of a teacher, to follow-up

students in class. I only follow up students at the beginning. Sometimes when you receive news about some students' behaviour, your role begins as a student guide and counsellor, because many of them need advice about new things.

However, many students revealed that they experienced some hardship in Syria or during the transition to Saudi Arabia. Moreover, as a new situation with new challenges, it was evident that newcomers required consultation and guidance services. Hence, Syrian students received the same consultation services as other pupils, with school social workers exploring problems in the early stages to facilitate the students' integration into their school.

School social workers agreed that one of the duties linked to their practice was guiding students, and, due to the presence of refugee students, practitioners assisted in enrolling newcomers in schools, which required them to determine the extent to which Syrian refugees were adapted to the Saudi school environment. This included investigating the previous educational levels, and the psychological and social readiness of newcomers. A female school social worker (FSSA2) confirmed that 'courses in counselling, and intervening in times of crises, helped in providing consultation services for newcomers and their families'. Such courses assisted some of the school social workers to understand and become aware of the impacts of the Syrian crisis on children before their transition to Saudi school. Male school social worker MSSB2 shared the same experience:

We were involved in some courses. I mean, during my service in counselling, every year I was involved in three or four courses, so these courses helped me to cooperate greatly with Syrian refugee students. I mean, we could sympathise with them a lot, because of circumstances and the political and social conditions.

School social workers in Saudi schools were also keen to involve parents in consultation services to ensure that students enjoyed a suitable environment outside of school. For example, Syrian students' parents were sometimes separated, which affected their progress in school, including continuous absence or arriving late. Consequently, school social workers guided these students to enable them to adapt to their new social situation. In addition, this guiding programme included communication with parents, and explaining the effects of separation on the child. One school social worker (FSSA1) pointed out that 'I have taken

courses in counselling and intervention at times of crisis that have helped me. We began to feel their crisis, and their background conditions. So containment, as a strategy, is successful with them. I meet the mothers and guardians, so I offer them guidance and help them in solving their problems’.

In addition, some of the most significant guidance that school social workers provided concerned helping newcomers regarding school achievement. This involved, for instance, reminding Syrian refugee students about the importance of academic achievement and continual studying, especially for high school students. This was because Syrian refugee high school students must achieve high grades and GPA to ensure their free admission at Saudi universities, which was one of the challenges facing newcomers in high school, linked to stress and anxiety. This situation also linked to students’ working outside school, as some fathers forced students to work while studying. As a result, school social workers advised and guided Syrian refugee students’ fathers to encourage students to concentrate on studying, rather than working. School social workers’ awareness of the newcomers’ surrounding circumstances benefited them in school, as challenges were addressed.

Additionally, consultations with the external Counselling and Guidance Committee of the Ministry of Education were crucial in guiding school social workers during this new experience. As discussed in Chapter 1, Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools face several challenges, including bullying and discrimination. School social worker FSSA1 highlighted that one of the most effective solutions to achieving justice for these students was the elimination of bullying and discrimination. A key strategy for addressing these issues and creating a supportive environment for new students involved consultations between school social workers and the guidance committee. These consultations not only helped eliminate discrimination but also raised awareness among educational staff regarding the rights of Syrian refugee students. Consequently, the support provided to Syrian refugee students, in collaboration with external institutions, was significantly enhanced by the efforts of school social workers. A detailed discussion of this role will be provided in Chapter 9.

6.6 Parental engagement

Principals, social workers and students interviewed confirmed that parental engagement was of paramount importance. There was no doubt that the families of Syrian refugee

students could not be separated from the process of integrating these new students into Saudi schools. It is important to note that such engagement could not have been obtained without the practices of school social workers. This was because the school social workers were aware of the substantial role to be played by families in terms of the integration of refugee students. According to school social worker MSSA1:

It is possible that a Syrian student could be exposed to bullying and he does not speak at school, but he can speak to his family, who then reveal the matter, and the guardian comes to school to discuss this with school social worker, but problems occur within families, and weak relationships might prevent the dialogue between students and their families.

Schools can support the child, and discover any challenges facing the refugee student at their new school, by listening to their parents. Consequently, the consultation and advice of school social workers helped to ease the difficulties that could potentially damage relationships between children and their parents. In addition, the sharing of responsibilities between families and school social workers was important in identifying problems preventing students from integrating into their school. Accordingly, several school social workers established workshops and a connection programme, which aided students in creating good relationships with their families.

Several school principals confirmed that workshops, such as 'Benevolence to Parents', established and led by the school social workers, created relationships between children and their parents, which in turn were reflected by their achievements and integration. Furthermore, even though Syrian refugee students' parents were involved with the schools through providing official documents during the enrolment process, some uneducated parents were not aware of the policies of education at Saudi schools.

As a result, school social workers advised and explained the new policies to those parents in terms of how to follow up the child after school, activities regarding the school curriculum, as well as the duties and rights of the child. According to a school social worker (MSSA3), 'I provide advice and approaches that Syrian refugees can use with their children, so that they can better integrate with society and provide them with everything related to the educational systems in the kingdom'.

Additionally, through parental engagement, school social workers informed the parents of newcomers about new school systems. For example, while the Saudi school system requires a student to wear the school uniform (Thuoop for boys and Abaya for girls), some parents, due to their different cultural background or low income, neglect to provide children with a suitable uniform, which in turn makes the child different to the other pupils in school, resulting in numerous challenges in the form of bullying or discrimination. While addressing these differences is important, the emphasis should not solely be on ensuring that refugee children conform to external norms, but rather on fostering a school environment that embraces diversity and actively combats bullying through inclusive practices and support systems.

Neglecting to advise students' parents in this regard, at such an early critical stage in a new environment, can result in newcomers' failure to integrate into their school, or at the least leaves them exposed to outside risks after school which includes specific dangers such as sexual harassment and other negative activities that students might encounter outside the school environment. Consequently, when parents or school social workers fail to ensure engagement between the school and the home, the protection of Syrian refugee students in an unfamiliar environment is compromised.

In addition, parental engagement includes parents' meetings organised by school social workers. Although the parents of newcomers, especially fathers working long hours outside of the city in which they live, are less likely to engage in such activities, school social workers are keen to meet those fathers during twice-yearly parents' meetings. Some Syrian refugee parents have no available time due to their work activities. For example, some work in restaurants or car maintenance, resulting in long hours in the workplace from morning until late at night, meaning that they are not willing or able to attend such meetings.

School staff agreed that these meetings were important in integrating the child, because during the meetings teachers explain to parents how the child is performing in school, with reference to his/her behaviour, and how they interact with others. Furthermore, as mentioned by the majority of school staff, some parents believed children's academic achievement in schools was sufficient for their well-being, and felt that such meetings were not important for those students, the family's livelihood being more important.

Similarly, parental engagement was a strategy used by school social workers to address the external and internal problems of newcomers. For example, in cases in which students faced difficulties in interacting and integrating well into school were found to be experiencing violence within the home, school social workers asked families to visit the school to discuss the reasons behind this violence. Most of the Syrian families were stressed due to their new situation and low financial status, and, as a result, some children might have become victims. School social workers agreed that in cases in which parental engagement was used as a strategy to address a student's problems, this helped in overcoming psychological issues related to violence at the home. Specifically, when parents were actively engaged, they were able to offer emotional support, stability, and guidance, which contributed to the student's recovery from the trauma. Parental involvement also helped to create a more supportive home environment, which is crucial in addressing the psychological effects of abuse, such as anxiety, depression, and trust issues.

The majority of interviewed school social workers revealed that most cases of parental engagement occurred in cases involving a student's continuous or frequent absence, low school achievement and/or behavioural issues in school. One of the school social workers (MSSA1) stated 'if there is a need to communicate, we talk to parents to involve them if there is an absence, and the reason for that is to allow them to provide an excuse or explain problems facing the student'. At the critical early stages of their children's time in Saudi schools, the majority of parents lost control and supervision of their child outside of school (or at least their control was compromised), due to severe family circumstances, such as poverty. School staff agreed that newcomers suffered from three challenges related to outside influences. For example, following investigations it transpired that students who were often absent or arrived late at school, and slept in the classrooms, were students who were also engaged in income generating work. A male student (MSA4) confirmed the use of parental engagement in the case of a problem 'the school contacts my parents if there is an absence or something'.

The first step schools performed in solving such problems involved contacting the guardians of newcomers. It was clear that the majority of Syrian students, due to their poor financial status and high level of responsibility, would work after school. Thus, parents were advised by school social workers to encourage students to attend school. This engagement is

intended to assist students to integrate into school, due to the explanation of school social workers to the parents regarding the different environment in the host society.

Regardless of financial status impacting the relationship between home and school, parents' meetings offered potential benefits for the children in Saudi Arabia. For example, school social workers believed that meeting parents was a beneficial strategy for integrating the new students into the schools, since these engagements provided the Syrian families with the feeling that they were accepted in their country, which was achieved by the messages sent by schools to the families, increasing their sense of belonging to a safe new place. Engagements were intended to develop trust between the family and the school, consequently helping the child. The level and depth of trust allowed school social workers to investigate and discover challenges at an early stage, and to ascertain to what extent these challenges impacted the newcomers in their new environment.

Schools considered the communication and engagement between the school and the home to be particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a beneficial strategy to support newcomer, relying on the use of social media applications to keep parents informed about students' achievement in schools. For example, some schools used the WhatsApp application, even outside of school hours, to allow parents to inquire about problems or shortcomings concerning the student. Other schools relied on other applications, such as Zoom, Twitter, Telegram and Microsoft Teams, which became significant and reliable in creating active linkages between schools and parents. This application replaced the traditional parents' meetings which would normally occur twice a year. Such an approach was important for the newcomers' parents, who arrived in Saudi Arabia from a different background, due to the fast and readily available facilitation of communication between school and home at any time. In addition, according to school staff, working fathers who could not visit the school, due to their long working hours or unfamiliarity with the new education system, found this to be a useful means to contact the school at various times. Thus, schools supported students by using non-traditional means to allow students and parents to be linked to the school most of the time.

6.7 Financial support

The data showed that Saudi schools supported Syrian refugee students and their families due to their difficult financial circumstances, which impacted the students' school performance and attendance. This support was helpful in eliminating the differences between these students and native students, assisting newcomers and their families to face hardships in their new lives in Saudi Arabia. This support was provided in many ways, including volunteer work and donations by school staff, community sponsors and charities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became evident that Syrian refugee students were in greater need of support.

Most school social workers and principals agreed that the Syrian refugee students were facing hardships, including poverty, especially when they began attending the schools. Indeed, the lives of these refugees were unlikely to be without problems; as is the case for most refugees around the world, and perhaps the most pressing issue was their economic situation. However, several school social workers mentioned that Syrian families had recently managed to achieve a better quality of life due to their hardworking attitude and the assistance of other family members or relatives. While several cultural differences were evident between the Saudis and the majority of Syrian students, the most obvious difference was the extreme poverty being faced by newcomers, caused by separation and difficulty family circumstances. These Syrian refugee students were also impacted by the financial responsibilities of their families with regard to other family members in Saudi Arabia and Syria, in the form of payments for health and accommodation costs. Such difficulties impacted the children's ability to attend and perform well, resulting in their dropping out of school or working while studying to support their families, which damaged their academic progress.

6.7.1 Volunteer contributions from school staff

While schools' limited budgets could not provide refugee students with formal financial support, they offered support in the form of volunteer contributions from school staff. Here, it is important to note that such support tends to be organised by school social workers. In addition, school social workers were keen to maintain the anonymity of those who

benefited from this support in order to protect the students' dignity at school, which, in turn, helped to avoid bullying and discrimination. A school social worker (MSSA2) explained:

I had a student who was suffering from difficult financial circumstances, so I talked to people who wanted to help, so he was helped financially, and the electricity bill was paid without anyone in the school knowing. Only the school principal knows about this assistance – to preserve the student's dignity inside the school.

By providing this form of support, the Saudi schools tried to reduce the differences between the Saudi and Syrian refugee students, and facilitate positive relationships between the two groups of students. However, due to the Syrian families' poor financial status, they were often unable to provide their children with suitable school uniforms, which represented a significant and clear difference from the other students. Although support in the form of vouchers, to be exchanged for school-related items such as uniforms, was available to all students, school social workers found this type of support to be one of the most accessible and reliable means of assisting the newcomers.

The school staff became keenly aware that the financial status of Syrian refugee families significantly influenced Syrian students' integration. To overcome this, several practitioners endeavoured to solve this challenge during the initial influx. This barrier to integration, however, was only reduced to a minimal degree in terms of its impact on the self-perception of refugee students in Saudi schools, which is linked to the differences between the Syrian refugee students and the native students in terms of appearance, such as unsuitable school uniforms. Clothing coupons provided by the staff, at their own expense, were beneficial in helping the Syrian families and their children in their new environment.

Collaboration between school staff and school social workers was vital to ensure the provision of such support. In regard to paying the electricity bills of refugee families, school social workers collected the money by requesting donations from school staff. School social workers and principals also found that some Syrian refugee students could not afford to pay for breakfast at the school canteens. Consequently, school social workers covered such costs from the school budget, as was sometimes done for Saudi students in similar circumstances. In addition, one of the most crucial ways in which services were provided by volunteers involved collecting funds to pay refugee students' fees for university admission

tests. Paying such educational fees was one of the most challenging and stressful issues facing both the refugee students and their families. The ability of the school to pay such fees likely benefited the students by allowing them to better focus on their studies, as well as benefiting the families by removing this financial burden.

The schools made efforts to preserve the dignity of vulnerable refugee students by offering support in the form of clothing and food coupons. This assistance was provided through school competitions, such as maintaining clean classrooms or participating in the school football league, aiming not only to meet their basic needs, but also to enhance their academic performance. Prizes and coupons were provided by school staff and organised by school social workers. In addition, these indirect efforts helped students integrate into their new schools by addressing financial challenges while preserving their dignity and improving their overall well-being. This was crucial because if refugee students felt they were being singled out for special assistance, it could make them feel isolated from their peers. Such feelings of isolation could lead to challenges such as low self-esteem, depression, and social withdrawal. According to both school staff and students, the recognition of such achievements also raised the profile of students within school, which led to the creation of friendship networks.

6.7.2 Sponsors

Furthermore, school social workers benefited from the contribution of sponsors, who were motivated to support Syrian refugee students due to their cultural and religious backgrounds. Though it was difficult to find supporters willing to provide such support for the schools, their help was considered a great resource for Syrian refugee students and their families in terms of alleviating poverty. School social workers were required to find community supporters and maintain a good level of trust with them. This was achieved by keeping sponsors updated, and providing them with proof, such as copies of the coupons and invoices. Ensuring transparency helped in finding stable informal support resources to minimise poverty, which was one of the main challenges facing the refugee students and their families. Although receiving refugee students was a new experience for almost all of the ten participating school social workers, they were able to use resources of this nature to improve the well-being of Syrian refugee students at Saudi schools. Male school social

worker MSSA1 shared his experience of a Syrian refugee student whose family was in urgent need of support:

This is a true story that happened two years ago. There was one particular Syrian student I remember who used to come to my office where I had a first aid cupboard. He came so that I would ask him what he needed; I did not ask him for the first two days. On the third day, he came to see me and said he would like to tell me something. He told me that his family had not paid their electricity bill. I spoke to his mother; apparently, his father was in prison and the boy was very sad. So I talked with other sponsor outside of school to help this family.

School social workers reported that without establishing good relationships with students, providing such support would not be possible.

6.7.3 Charity organisations

School staff emphasised that most Syrian refugee students benefited from support in collaboration with charitable organisations. Additionally, school social workers became mediators, with charities offering support to the Syrian families and children who attended Saudi schools for the first time. By doing so, the school social workers sought to minimise the stresses on families caused by poverty. According to female school social worker FSSB2, 'the financial status of the Syrian refugee families impacted the children at school psychologically. We tried to solve their financial issues by offering donations from charities in order to improve their social status in the community'.

Such efforts were also designed to protect the children from encountering outside risks, such as exploitation and work hazards. Charities also provided the families with necessities during periods of cold weather, such as clothing, blankets, and food. This is reflected by the comment of a male student (MSA5): 'when we first arrived in Saudi Arabia we went to a charity; they gave us some blankets and food'. While some of this assistance was insufficient, non-formal organisations and schools made extensive efforts to assist those in need.

6.7.4 Saudi schools' response to supporting Syrian refugee students during the COVID-pandemic

The direct and indirect effects of COVID-19 reached every home around the world, with vulnerable groups, including Syrian refugee students, being particularly affected due to their socioeconomic status. Integration into Saudi schools deteriorated as many students could not attend remotely because their parents could not provide laptop computers and tablets. Saudi schools responded by using their resources to mitigate the crisis's impact on these families. School social workers played a key role in assisting students who struggled with accessing online learning platforms due to the high costs of Internet access and electronic devices. This assistance included relying on school staff and charities to provide the necessary resources, enabling Syrian refugee students to continue their education. School social worker MSSB2 stated:

For example, many Syrian students did not have a device, a mobile phone or the Internet access, so teachers came up with the idea of an optional and voluntary way of providing these school materials. I mean, we made donations so that any student who did not have these devices, or the Internet access, was provided with them in an informal way.

Some of the most significant support provided by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic involved giving permission to students, especially Syrian refugee students, to use school resources, such as computer printers and scanners, by reserving a time slot. School staff revealed that such efforts supported students, and prevented isolation and depression. Apart from this, the provision of such learning materials positively influenced the relationships between families and schools by ensuring that the families felt supported in their time of need.

6.8 Appropriate school environment for integration

This theme concerns the actions that schools implement to facilitate the integration of newcomers who have enrolled in Saudi schools since the Syrian crisis in 2011. It is important to note that school social workers are the practitioners who guide schools in this new experience. The last theme that emerged from the interviews includes three main sub-

themes. First a welcoming atmosphere, which includes six further -sub themes as follows: school social workers' efforts concerning enrolment and good relationships with Syrian students, flexibility in dealing with students' challenges, the importance of school buildings and facilities, transportation for female Syrian refugee students, discipline and collaboration between school staff and school social workers, and extracurricular activities to create a welcoming environment. The second is relationships and includes three aspects: relationship with students, places outside school where friendships can be established, and lastly relationships with teachers. The third sub-theme is belonging (see Table 6-2). Taking all of these themes together will help build the model of integration as a whole (see figure 6-2).

Table 6-2 The appropriate school environment for integration

Theme	Description	Sub-Themes	Sub-Sub-Themes
5) Appropriate school environment for integration	This theme explores the various actions and strategies schools use to help integrate Syrian refugee students who enrolled in Saudi schools since the 2011 crisis. School social workers play a key role in guiding these efforts.	(a) Welcoming atmosphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Efforts by school social workers concerning enrolment and building good relationships with Syrian students. 2. Flexibility in dealing with students' challenges. 3. Importance of school buildings and facilities. 4. Transportation for female Syrian refugee students. 5. Discipline and collaboration between school staff and school social workers. 6. Extracurricular activities to create a welcoming environment.
		(b) Relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relationship with students. 2. Places outside school where friendships can be established. 3. Relationships with teachers
		(c) Belonging	N/A

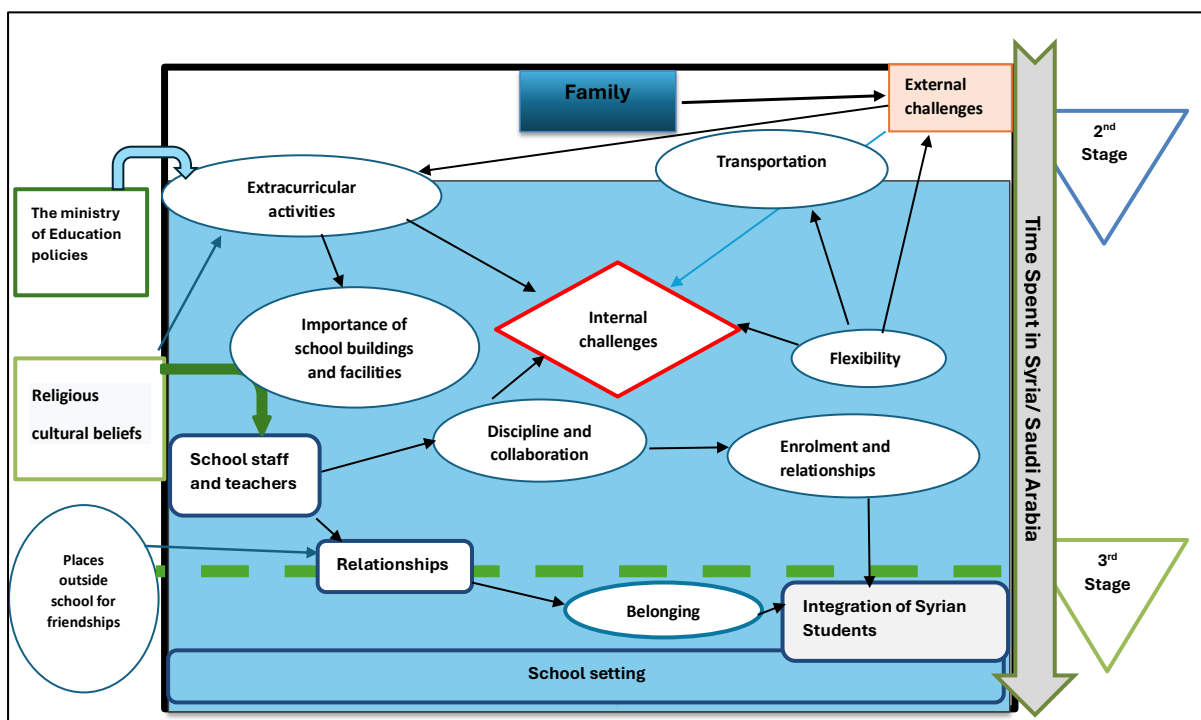


Figure 6-2 The appropriate school environment for integration

6.8.1 The welcoming atmosphere

Despite the challenges Syrian students faced at an early stage in schools, and the nature of this influx as a new experience for school staff (especially school social workers), the staff made a great effort to ensure a suitable environment for the newcomers' integration. Although discrimination, bullying and other challenges became less frequent as Syrian students spent more time in school and society, schools' welcoming and discipline supported the newcomers' integration into their new environment.

6.8.1.1 School social workers' efforts concerning enrolment and good relationships with Syrian students

Syrian refugee students endured challenges after enrolling in Saudi school. School social workers guided the support process for newcomers and, with regard to enrolment, sought to collaborate with school staff and the Ministry of Education committee. School social worker MSSA2 stated: 'I remember once I facilitated a Syrian refugee student's enrolment in mid-semester; when the principal asked me, I say this is the least duty that we facilitate their enrolment and try to help them'.

School social workers agreed that a welcoming school environment was one of the significant factors that helped Syrian students to integrate into Saudi schools. School social workers confirmed the importance of creating good relationships with newcomers once they had arrived in schools, for example, by meeting them during their enrolment. Although school social workers tended not to involve students in this process, the students' first impressions helped them to accept schools and the school social workers supporting them. This was because such relationships allow Syrian refugee students to discuss early internal or external challenges. Despite this a minority of students could not express their feelings and the challenges they faced, due to shyness or fear of stigma. A school social worker (MSSB2) stated:

Some students do not want to explain to you. I mean, they are ashamed. First thing, I try to make them feel relaxed, in a private session to remove barriers; I was like their brother. One day, a student came to my office and closed the door; he explained his problem by talking about his circumstances that the student cannot buy something. So without good relationships with students, I cannot know this problem; they are not afraid of telling me anything. The school social worker is always the student's friend. But this does not mean that I am against other students or against teachers, but the student feels that I am with him as a lawyer, when he is right.

Therefore, according to this worker, trusting relationships with students help in solving early stage issues at schools.

6.8.1.2 Flexibility in dealing with students' challenges

Another important factor in creating a welcoming environment was flexibility in addressing students' problems, especially during their initial period at school. For example, the schools found that some students arrived at school after 7:00 AM, or were absent for more than one day due to work responsibilities. Schools attempted to advise students to focus on school, and contacted their parents instead of applying punishments, such as deducting grades, which is important for students, especially high school students. School staff mentioned that they occasionally allowed students to leave school early because of their families' circumstances. Students might view this flexibility as a way of being treated with

respect, and, at the same time, a means of creating a suitable environment to interest them in school. Thus, dealing with students' challenges with a flexible approach helped school social workers to build trusting relationships with refugee students.

6.7.1.3 The importance of school building and facilities

To ensure an attractive school environment for children, the cleanliness of the classroom and school in general, as well as chairs, tables and educational materials such as projectors are significant. Once children have arrived at school, the school building catches their eye. A school social worker (MSSA1) confirmed this as follows: 'I will give you an example. Whenever the school environment is professional ... when you enter the school, the cleanliness and decoration, you feel it, and the prestige of the school, unlike the other schools.' Such an environment made new students love, accept, and think positively about their schools. Furthermore, an attractive school environment also served Syrian refugee students by preparing teachers to provide the highest quality of education. Therefore, children with war experience, facing various challenges, might find this to be a strong foundation for a clear and positive future.

Syrian refugee students pointed out the importance of school facilities, which assisted their education. Although there were similarities between Syrian and Saudi schools, technologies such as smart boards and projectors assisted in improving the quality of teaching for newcomers. Students agreed that the advanced education and new style of learning were different from what they were used to in Syria. School social workers indicated that during extra classes or non-class activities, students used the computer laboratory and other facilities to learn new skills, which eased their integration. Due to Syrian families' poor financial status, students were not able to access such facilities and devices at home. Additionally, by understanding the differences between students' experiences in Syrian and Saudi schools, school social workers used all available resources in the schools to assist students' integration.

One school principal mentioned that one of the most obvious barriers was overcrowding in some classes, with as many as 40 students in the classroom, which impacted the interaction between students and teachers. Most school social workers revealed that the appropriate number of students is around 30 or fewer, a class size which they attempted to implement

in schools. Although such barriers impacted the school environment for students of different nationalities, Syrian refugee students were in greater need of suitable classes to facilitate their integration, due to the differences and challenges they encountered in their new environment, whether external or internal challenges.

6.8.1.4 Transportation for female Syrian refugee students

Female school staff agreed that transportation was one of the most important factors in ensuring a welcoming environment for female Syrian refugee students. Like their peers, all female Syrian students used free transportation once they were enrolled in schools. This was very significant for girls whose families lived far away from the school, as this service protected girls from outside risks, such as sexual harassment. In addition, this helped girls to become used to their new environment, and interact with local students, which led to minimising the impact of their differences. Free transportation also helped families to avoid financial difficulties, especially newcomer families in Saudi Arabia.

6.8.1.5 Discipline and collaboration between school staff and school social workers

According to one of the school social workers (MSSA1):

This is the rule if the school is disciplined and has a clear system. Even if some students show bad behaviours, the system will adjust these behaviours. We are individuals. If you live in a neighbourhood where there is backwardness, and there are many unsuitable practices and without discipline, the result is the degradation of our behaviours, because surroundings have a great influence on us – the situation of students in schools is like that. If students experienced unclear systems, guides, undisciplined school staff, for example, when they come and leave schools, or students at [whatever] time come to or leave class, these incidents impact students and they do not respect the place, whether they are Saudi or Syrian.

School staff agreed that discipline creates a suitable school environment, because the students are affected by surrounding circumstances. The importance of discipline stemmed from the fact that, during the first period in schools, the students formed an impression about the school and their new environment. Discipline also addressed several problems faced by Syrian refugee students. For example, local students at the early stages of the

influx of refugees showed negative behaviours such as bullying towards newcomers, but school regulations and policies were intended to manage such behaviour. Supporting the creation of a welcoming and suitable environment requires school staff to apply and follow a clear and consistent approach.

This required schools to implement holistic and clear regulations; most school staff agreed that equal punishments and rewards for students would help to ease the interaction and minimise differences among students. According to school social worker MSSF2, 'It helps a lot, because there is no differentiation, the regulations that apply to all non-Saudi and Saudi students, it applies to all whether in terms of misbehaviours, attendance, violations, etc. I mean, they are all inclusive.' Additionally, clear and equal regulations created a sense of freedom that ensured students' rights in schools. A male Syrian student (SMB5) shared the same experience:

The school here, I study with complete freedom. I mean, there is no such thing as this in Syria. Here in Saudi Arabia, I follow a certain system. How do I tell you? In Syria, for example, employees controlled me, but here in Saudi Arabia the whole school system controls me. There is no specific person controlling me from the school administration, or anyone controlling you.

Equality of treatment built a sense of justice within students, which led to the creation of a suitable environment.

Furthermore, school social workers strongly agreed about the importance of the collaborations among teacher and administrators to ensure a welcoming environment for newcomers. Most schools have a yearly plan that school staff contribute to through observation and feedback regarding barriers to progress. These plans are updated every year to discuss emerging problems and the situation of newcomers and the support they need. School social workers emphasized that joint work and continuous meetings with teachers to solve newcomers' problems were significant. Teachers' continuous interaction with Syrian refugee students allowed them to identify unsuitable behaviours and challenges in classes that impacted newcomers' educational journeys such as sleeping and lateness. Without collaboration and holistic work, challenges inside the school would remain undiscovered resulting in an unsuitable environment for new students.

6.8.1.6 School extracurricular activities to create a welcoming environment

For Syrian refugee students, attending Saudi schools for the first time is not a comfortable experience due to the differences and the unfamiliar nature of the school. This was a new experience for school staff as well, and the welcoming programme, implemented on the first day, was intended to be beneficial for Syrian refugee students, due to the school staff's explanation about the school and its regulations. Students of all nationalities took advantage of this programme. During this programme, new students would gather in the schoolyards, where returning students would welcome them and distribute flowers. After that, school social workers and other teachers would take students on a tour to show them the school buildings and facilities.

Schools do not consider this a school day; instead, it is a celebration day for new students, because they are guests, enjoying the hospitality of returning high school students. On this day, students usually form an impression of their new school, and, as mentioned before, good buildings and facilities may help them to accept and like their new school. A school social worker MSSA3 shared his experience: 'At first, my colleagues and I try to get newcomers involved in the activities, and give them some advice in dealing with differences in the new environment and schools, the difference between schools in Saudi and Syria'. Although this programme was not implemented in all schools, the majority of Syrian refugee students approved of the welcoming programme, which facilitated the process of integration and becoming acquainted with the new environment.

Moreover, school social workers found that extracurricular activities were important for newcomers in terms of encouraging and promoting positive behaviour. For example, school social workers encouraged newcomers to participate in volunteer programmes, including such duties as cleaning schools and classes. Such activities bring students together and allow newcomers the opportunity to interact with local students, learning from them. Male Syrian student MSA4 stated 'I participated in physical activities at the middle of the week, or, if we do not have sport class, for example, we help the school, clean the classroom, tables and chairs.' Through such activities, Syrian refugee students had the opportunity to deepen relationships, and create new ones with other students outside of class, because the students would work together and borrow things from each other. In addition, teachers and

school staff come to know the new students, leading to local students' increased recognition of the refugee students in school.

Several schools faced the problem of restricted friendship groups among some Syrian refugee students, which isolated them from others. Undoubtedly, when Syrian students first began attending Saudi schools, problems between the new students and the locals occurred, such as bullying. The schools therefore encouraged newcomers to become involved in extracurricular activities, aiming to create good relationships between the students, minimising differences. One example involves newcomers in school sport classes, in which teams were composed of students of different nationalities, and the leader might be Syrian, and not a student from the dominant social group. This, in turn, promoted respect, inspiring confidence among refugee students and enhancing school belonging. In the view of participants, the activities that helped in developing friendships between students, which ultimately led to enhancing the school environment, included school broadcasting activities, in which all students shared the same opportunity to participate and discuss important subjects, such as violence and discrimination.

School staff, and especially school social workers, mentioned that extracurricular activities assisted in identifying the needs and addressing the behaviour of newcomers; collaboration with other school staff was important in this regard. Consequently, such a strategy was used by schools to improve the behaviour of Syrian refugee students. For example, some Syrian students, due to their different cultural background, used inappropriate words in school; however, the staff encouraged their involvement in activities to assist them to understand their new environment, and how they could behave properly. During these activities, students were guided and taught by school social workers, and if students showed positive behaviour, they were rewarded with praise, certificates, or small incentives to encourage continued good conduct. School staff agreed that Syrian students showed great levels of interaction and participation in extracurricular activities, and accordingly accepted the new culture.

Among the most important forms of these are cultural activities, which take place in most schools. For example, a mini mall extracurricular activity was conducted in schools every semester. For this activity, students would bring and sell food reflecting a popular dish from

their region. Schools implemented activities involving food and traditions from different Arab countries in appreciation of other Arab neighbours, and due to the new influx of refugee students. Syrian refugee students at the same time would bring their own traditional attire and items. These activities were important for all students, and to new students as they engaged in their traditions. The mini mall enabled students to mix cultures, which served the integration of visitor students in particular. In this way relationships between teachers, other students and newcomers improved and became stronger. A school principal (MSPA2) stated that:

We initiated a project in this school called the 'Mall'. This event occurs every semester and showcases popular dishes from various regions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The small mall highlights popular dishes from the Qassim, Northern, and Western regions. In appreciation of our Arab brothers, we introduced something new by encouraging non-Saudi students to participate and bring dishes from their countries, such as Sudan, Yemen, and Syria. We also requested them to attend in their official attire. The joy in the students' eyes was evident. Each country has its dedicated corner in this mall. This activity has been ongoing for years, improving with each passing year. It serves as a form of cultural exchange, urging participants to bring products from their respective countries. This fosters unity among the students, especially Syrian students, aiding in their integration. As a result of this activity, the relationship between teachers and students strengthens. The goal is to leverage the purchasing power of teachers. Some teachers enter a specific place, purchase several meals, and distribute them to high-achieving students, demonstrating support. Such activities existed before, and upon the arrival of Syrian students, we seamlessly integrated them into this activity.

These activities helped newcomers to understand the traditions of Saudi Arabia, which in turn helped in understanding its culture and dialect. Syrian student MS4B4 explained 'I got to know many students and deal with them as if I were Saudi, because I learned how to speak a Saudi dialect because at home, I speak Syrian dialect'. Such activities had previously existed, but after the arrival of the Syrian students, schools were keen to encourage newcomers' participation.

Furthermore, Saudi schools focused greatly on introducing Syrian refugee students to the external environment of the kingdom, through trips and community service activities, such as visiting development facilities and major companies, which allowed them to discover important parts of the country and exchange cultures with other students. Such activities prevented students from experiencing isolation in a new place. For example, visiting universities and other community institutions with school social workers helped, as students became aware of and developed a clear vision of their new country, and how individuals could take advantage of such resources, mitigating stress and anxiety regarding the future.

In addition, social workers organised visits to important places, which helped newcomers to understand external risks, and supported these students psychologically. For example, schools arranged for their students to visit drug control centres to learn about the dangers of drug use. And visiting mental health centres in Saudi Arabia provided information for students regarding the way they would benefit from interacting with others in the external environment, as well as interacting with family members in the home environment.

Although such programmes were directed at all students, school social workers revealed that they emphasised the participation of Syrian refugee students in these activities because they believed that students who had experienced conflict, war and other difficulties had an urgent need for such programmes.

6.8.2 Relationships with students and teachers

While relationships initially were not positive, due to discrimination and bullying against Syrian refugee students, problems were minimised over the course of refugees' time spent in Saudi Arabia through learning and adapting to the new culture. This was important for integration, due to the support that the relationships contributed to Syrian refugee students in their new environment. Their relationships with students and teachers will be discussed in the following sections.

6.8.2.1 Relationships with students

Most Syrian refugee students were able to build good relationships with Saudi students; however, at first, these relationships were not always positive. With increasing time spent in

Saudi Arabia, the relationships became stronger, and the students became like brothers and sisters to the newcomers. As one male Syrian student (SMB3) pointed out:

The teachers and administrators welcomed and received me, but from the point of view of some students, there was hatred, I mean, frankly, and there was bullying. I mean, there was envy from some students out of jealousy. At the beginning of school it was difficult, but in the high school, most students now are respectful – all the problems were in middle school.

Another student (SMB5) remarked:

When I arrived in school for the first time, I faced discrimination, but not from all students, because at that time, I did not know how local students talk and I did not know some of their words. There was a little difference about the culture, but not huge difference. After that we became friends.

School activities and support undoubtedly illuminated the similarities between students, resulting in the creation of positive relationships and friendships between newcomers and local students. Additionally, most students acquired the dialect of Saudi students, which in turn helped in creating friendships. Some students mentioned that the relationships were strong because they knew the culture of the Saudi students. Other students also found their relatives useful at the initial period of difficulty in forging relationships in school. Thus, relationships were significant for newcomers' integration into schools, due to the support they received from students, whether socially or academically.

Saudi pupils supported Syrian refugee students to adapt to the different curriculum, as teachers assisted newcomers by pairing them with the former during class activities. Through this, newcomers learned academically and built relationships with other students, which led to understanding some of the cultural practices required in this new environment. In addition, students developed good methods of communication with each other, even outside of school, by using applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram. Most Syrian refugee students also used these facilities to talk with local students and develop relationships. School social workers emphasised that such connections enabled students to understand the new aspects of their new school.

Strong relationships significantly supported students in school, as friends provided essential assistance. Most school staff and male Syrian students noted that Saudi friends often helped Syrian refugee students travel to school by picking them up from home, especially high school students with cars. This support not only facilitated school attendance but also fostered camaraderie. Encouraging relationship building early on can raise local students' awareness of Syrian refugee students' rights.

Syrian students found friendships beneficial both inside and outside school. Visiting each other's homes introduced Syrian refugee students to new cultural experiences, aiding their adaptation. For instance, they encountered different cultural practices and, through home visits, began to understand the reasons behind them. However, most female Syrian students were less likely to visit friends at home due to needing parental permission. Male students also benefited from camping trips and traveling together, which helped them understand their new environment and culture, enhancing their school experience and fostering positive friendships.

Schools' policies played a role in creating friendships, with the implementation of different activities, integrating Syrian students with local students, and unifying them as a group by mixing them together, so that refugee students were distributed among the classes and not placed in separate classes. A school social worker (MSSA3) confirmed that 'involving refugee students in both curricular and extracurricular activities, such as trips and competitions, encouraging their participation, and distributing them among classes instead of placing them all in one class, facilitates their integration with other students'.

Consequently, Syrian refugee students learned to accept the new environment and other students. Policies also supported new students by allowing them to interact with more Saudi students, which led to most Syrian refugee students actually having more Saudi friends than Syrian friends. Additionally, mixing students helped teachers who had less experience working with refugee students to provide a suitable quality of education. If Syrian students were all in one class, teachers might have failed to understand their educational needs, resulting in low achievement, contributing to the emergence of fundamental differences between students.

Relationships such as those discussed between newcomers and local students might not have been easily established if there had been significant differences between the students' cultures. One of the factors that led to the establishment of relationships was the similarity between the cultures, such as their language and beliefs. Most of the refugee students mentioned that their culture was similar to Saudi culture, which meant that the student was able to adapt to the culture quite quickly and helped in creating new friendships. This particularly applied to students who came from certain cities in Syria, whose culture and customs were close to those of Saudi students. Most refugee students, due to time spent in Saudi Arabia, learned and adapted to the culture. Male student SMB5 shared his experience:

Some students ask me 'What is your nationality?' I tell them I am Syrian; they were surprised because they thought I am Saudi. I mean, I have mastered their dialect, and I have not mastered it in a day or two days in the country. This is because of ten years living here. I mean, see, I grew up here from the fourth grade. I mean, I was raised here, from the age of ten years.

A female student (SFB2) also mentioned 'we are comfortable in Saudi Arabia, because we have understood the culture and become accustomed to it'. Therefore, relationships helped students to understand the existing culture in their new environment, and this eased their integration into school.

Long-term friendships were very beneficial in terms of support. Students faced some difficulty in gaining positive support without long-term friendships. Male Syrian student SMB3 stated 'I learned the dialect, and most of my Saudi friends studying with me in primary school are now with me in high school. I mean, three of them were studying at the same elementary school and continued to high school with me.' Despite the differences between students, Syrian refugee students were comfortable in creating friendships with Saudi students. Another female student, SFA1, mentioned 'we are neighbours, and I visit them. They are my friends. I have Syrian friends but most of my friends are Saudi girls, and even they have studied with me in the middle school. Now they are all my friends, I mean, they are all Saudi'.

6.8.2.2 Places outside of school for creating friendships

Syrian refugee students mentioned that they interacted with other Saudi, Egyptian and Sudanese friends outside of school. The most frequent places where newcomers formed friendships were on the football field in their neighbourhoods, especially for male students, and at mosques, for both male and female students, where they participated in competitions around memorising the Quran. As an indication of this, most Syrian refugee students had friends with whom they had not studied before. Such places led to the widening of newcomers' circle of relationships.

6.8.2.3 Relationships with teachers

As mentioned earlier by school staff in section 5.6.1 bullying and discrimination, a minority of teachers showed a sense of discrimination towards Syrian refugee students, which occurred due to the teachers' inexperience. One school principal (MSPB1) stated:

As I told you, some teachers do not know how to deal with Syrian students; they do not have the experience to deal with this group... We meet with these teachers and explain to them the situation of our Syrian brothers or students. Whatever it means, they must be careful even in joking with them, because some words hurt and affect them psychologically. They must be made welcome, but the social worker conducts meetings at the beginning of each semester to clarify the students' rights to the teachers.

Overall, students enjoyed good relationships with teachers, and received positive treatment in Saudi schools. Most Syrian refugee students agreed that teachers showed respect towards them. Such relationships required teachers' collaboration with school social workers, along with flexibility to address new students' challenges and needs.

Syrian refugee students' relationships with teachers formed a significant aspect of their integration into schools. However, such relationship building may be compromised, due to other factors influencing school staff and school social workers' practices in schools. For instance, teachers' collaboration with school social workers may ensure that students built good relationships with them, when social workers direct and advise teachers in working with students, and teachers' interactions with newcomers allowed them to discover

problems and challenges regarding visitor students. School social workers mentioned the importance of collaboration with school staff, especially teachers, who interact with refugee students continually. Teachers' guidance depended on social workers' advice and stimulus. This was because some of the activities and tasks were organised by school social workers and performed by teachers. School social worker (MSSA3) stated:

I am keen to find an active leader in school (to help school staff in implementing extra activities in schools), because I know his effects on the behaviour of students, and also art, because of its amazing role in lifting the school's pressures from students. This helps students to accept the school and integrate with their colleagues easily. I motivate the teachers. I participate with them in the activities.

Although some teachers were not interested in responding to school social workers' initiatives, most were keen to participate in such activities to serve both refugees and other students.

Additionally, social workers advised teachers to alleviate the burden on newcomers by not requiring Syrian refugee students to pay high costs for assignments or materials for school activities. All the school social workers were aware of the poor financial status of Syrian refugee families. While most teachers helped in supporting newcomers financially during certain activities, and through donations, some teachers were not immediately aware of the poverty of Syrian students. During the first week of the semester, school social workers and school staff discussed these issues with teachers. Flexibility shown by teachers with regard to newcomers' challenges contributed to building relationships.

Most refugee students agreed that teachers were flexible in addressing educational challenges. MSA1 stated:

The teachers are trying, for example, to make me follow lessons on YouTube in the same dialect and with the same recitation... for example, as Saudi students, and try to repeat the lesson once or twice until I get the idea of the lesson. They help the students.

Syrian refugee students faced difficulties in understanding some of their classes due to the differences in dialect. The previous quotation showed that the teacher was aware of the

students' educational needs, resulting in identifying supportive approaches to achieve a high quality of teaching to serve students' development. Another student explained that some teachers were available all the time, even after school hours, to answer students' questions.

Syrian refugee students' relationships with teachers were generally good, which led them to be open to talking to their teachers about their needs and challenges. According to one of the school social workers, MSSA1, 'if a problem happens in the family, for example, some Syrian students talk to their close teachers, who understand the child and has a good relationship with him'. A female student, SFB4, mentioned 'I always go directly and talk to my teachers; they were asking us to talk about any problem'. Most Syrian refugee students also agreed that supportive and flexible relationships with teachers were akin to those with a brother or father (for male students) or a sister or mother (for female students).

6.8.3 Belonging

'Even if the situation (conflict) ends in (Syria), I want to stay here (Saudi Arabia); I mean, I feel like it is my homeland'.

Regardless of the initial challenges Syrian refugee students experienced inside and outside of school after their arrival, most of them reported an extreme sense of belonging to their new place. Female Syrian student SFA3 said 'I swear to God, I do feel this school here (Saudi Arabia) is better. I mean, I feel that I belong here.' It seems that acceptance from the other students and the school play a crucial role in the development of such feelings in the newcomers. In addition, most of the students came to Saudi Arabia when they were younger and had been raised in the country. During this time, they understand the new culture, such as the Saudi dialect and traditional clothes. Importantly their relationships in schools assist them in such adaptation. Male Syrian refugee student SMA5 stated:

I feel that I got used to people, and the dialect, I know. If I go to Syria, I don't know what to do. I don't have many friends or anything. Oh God, the house is only there (Syria). But here (Saudi Arabia) is better for me. I learned here and grew up here. I consider myself a Saudi. I talk to them and see them. If I go to Syria, I don't have a problem, but I don't have many friends.

Most Syrian refugee students had studied with their friends since elementary school. This facilitated their gaining necessary tools, such as ways of talking and acting, which led to a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, due to acceptance from others and the safe environment, students preferred to stay in Saudi Arabia. Male student SMA5 pointed out that ‘because of safety and security, I did not see any problem in staying here. Because of the acceptance from the Saudis and others, I mean that they do not have a problem and there are friendships, and so on. My desire is to stay here.’ Most Syrian students mentioned that, due to the war and threats in Syria, returning to their country of origin is impossible, and most want to stay in Saudi Arabia even after the war ends. As MSA3 remarked, ‘Even if the situation ends, I want to stay here (Saudi Arabia); I mean, I feel like it is my homeland’.

Refugee students mentioned how the similarity between Syria and Saudi Arabia assisted in accepting their new environment. Female student SFA2 mentioned the separation between boys and girls in Saudi schools: ‘We were studying together, boys and girls, but I felt more belonging here (Saudi Arabia)’. Other students referred to learning the Saudi culture, which helped to evoke a sense of comfort and acceptance. For example, some girls had not worn an Abaya and Hijab in Syrian school, but, following their arrival, they became used to wearing such attire; it made them feel comfortable, and they would follow this tradition even outside of school.

However, infrequently Syrian refugee students lacked a sense of belonging and adaptation to their new place because of the unfamiliar environment they find themselves in, despite it being a safe environment with free services. One school social worker (MSSA1) stated:

Personally, I met a lot of Syrian students, those who arrived after the war and had experienced war. When they came here, the students felt the blessing, the security, the blessing of the services and the things that were provided to them. I even remember one student standing up in front of the other students and saying, “Oh guys, I will tell you something. When I came here, you welcomed me. You were my family, and I never lacked anything, but the water (in Saudi Arabia) is different from the water (in Syria), and the air is different from the air (in Syria), but you

supported me. Everything (in Saudi Arabia) is free; do not corrupt your country. His experience was harsh, and he gave advice to students’.

Finally, most school staff pointed out that one of their duties in working with refugee students was to provide newcomers with a feeling of belonging. By explaining the services of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in solving the problems faced by Syrian refugees during activities, they felt families and students would gain a feeling of belonging that would assist them to integrate into school, and, at the same time, help other students to understand the rights of the newcomers. According to several school social workers, National Saudi Day was one of the most important events in providing Syrian refugee students with information about Saudi Arabia, which helped them to value and feel acceptance towards the country. School staff agreed that if Syrian refugee students accepted and belonged to the place or to the country, then they behaved properly in school. As a result of this acceptance, schools had been able to maintain a level of discipline that has benefited the educational environment.

6.9 Summary

The sixth chapter of the thesis discussed the last two themes that emerged from the interviews, school support and appropriate school environment for the integration of Syrian refugee students in schools. The school support theme has its sub themes which shed light on the support that schools provide in order to integrate the Syrian refugee students. The focus of this theme, however, is on how school social workers use the resources available to them to support newcomers in school and to a certain extent outside school. Understanding the student’s background is the first step school social workers need to take and to do so they rely on conducting assessments for all students to identify their weaknesses and the challenges they face in their new school. This helps the school to assist each student and avoid the impact felt by both the schools and the families. When working with Syrian refugee students, the schools are aware of the students’ rights and, in order to fulfil those rights, school social workers ensure that local students and teachers understand how they can alleviate some of the challenges faced by refugee students, such as bullying and discrimination. In this scenario, it is noteworthy that school social workers appear to unconsciously apply the ecological model in their practices, demonstrating a clear

awareness of the significant environmental factors related to school children. Moreover, this theme highlights consultation and guidance practices as one of the most powerful supports for Syrian refugee students, which takes place on three levels, with students themselves, with their families, and with the institution. Such consultation takes place with school social workers services in the Ministry of Education.

Social workers also rely on parental engagement when Syrian refugee students are first enrolled in Saudi schools. Such involvement provides another means of support for the children in and out of school to tackle the challenges surrounding those students. When a school staff member is aware of the financial issues faced by most Syrian students and their families, school social workers are able to support those in need in collaboration with school staff, sponsors in the neighbourhood, and non-governmental organisations. This form of support was particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The appropriate school environment for the integration of Syrian refugee students introduces the approach that schools and school social workers strive to ensure that the school environment is appropriate for integrating Syrian refugee students, through a welcoming atmosphere and also by discipline which requires the most collaborative school staff to ensure integration can be achieved. In order to ensure that school social workers provide beneficial support, they implement the necessary extracurricular activities to bring about similarities and eliminate differences between students. Establishing positive relationships with local students and teachers is another theme considered to be a significant factor in helping Syrian refugee students to integrate into schools. This theme points out several places outside of school for creating friendships such as mosques. The last theme concludes that promoting a sense of belonging is essential in helping Syrian refugee students to integrate into Saudi schools. After investigating the perspectives of school social workers, principals, and Syrian refugee students' perspectives from a qualitative perspective regarding integration, the next chapter will present the quantitative findings from the school teachers' surveys which included open-ended questions which were analysed thematically using the approach of analysing qualitative data.

Chapter 7 Quantitative findings

7.1 Introduction

The main purpose of using the quantitative method in this study was to address the following question: What are the problems faced by schools and teachers when receiving and teaching Syrian refugee students? This chapter discusses the findings from the survey of school teachers, starting with a descriptive analysis of the participating teachers' ages, cities, gender, work experience, and teaching subject. I also identify similarities and differences between teachers in the two cities, according to gender, and experience in teaching Syrian refugee students. Finally, the chapter presents emergent themes from open-ended questions: i) the new social environment and ii) the different school environment.

7.2 A descriptive analysis of the demographic information:

7.2.1 Teachers' location, gender and teaching level for study sample

Table 7-1 Teachers' location, gender and teaching level for study sample

City	N	Percent	Sex	N	Percent	Teaching level	N	Percent
A	42	52.5	Male	52	65	Middle school	52	65
B	38	47.5	Female	28	35	High school	28	35
Total	80	100	Total	80	100	Total	80	100

As indicated in Table 7-1, slightly more (52.5%) teachers were based in City A than City B. Almost two thirds of the teachers were male and almost two thirds worked in middle schools, with just under a third working in high schools.

7.2.2 Distribution of study samples' ages

Table 7-2 Distribution of teachers' ages

Age	N	Percent
<= 25	1	1.3
26 - 31	7	8.8
32 - 38	26	32.5

39 - 44	28	35
45 - 51	13	16.3
52+	5	6.3
Total	80	100

Table 7-2 shows the age profile of the teachers with the majority aged between 32 and 44 years, with a frequency of 28 individuals (35% of the sample), followed by 26 teachers aged 32–38 years (32.5%), and 13 individuals aged 45–51 years (16.3%). Only one respondent (1.3%) is aged less than 25 years, while the age category of 26–31 years included 7 teachers (8.8%). Finally, 5 teachers are 52 years old or above (6.3%).

7.2.3 Distribution of study sample according to the variables of work experience and the educational qualification

Table 7-3 Teachers' work experience and qualifications

Years of Experience	N	Percent	Qualification	N	Percent
<= 2	3	3.8	Bachelors	70	87.5
3 - 10	22	27.5	Master	9	11.3
11 - 18	33	41.3	Ph.D	1	1.3
19 - 25	17	21.3	Total	80	100
26 - 33	4	5.0			
34+	1	1.3			
Total	80	100			

The category of 11–18 years of experience had the highest frequency, with 33 teachers (representing 41.3% of the total sample of the study). Teachers with 3–10 years of experience are ranked second among the categories, with 22 teachers (27.5%). The category of 19–25 years of experience includes 17 teachers (21.3%), and 4 teachers fall into the category of 26–33 years of experience (5%). Only three teachers with experience of 2 years or less contributed to the study (3.8%). Finally, the last category of +34 years of experience included only one teacher (1.3%).

Moreover, the table shown above indicates that the vast majority of the sample hold a bachelor's degree, with 70 teachers (representing 87.5% of the total sample). This was

followed by master's degree holders, with 9 teachers (11.3%). Lastly, only one teacher holds PhD certification (1.3%).

7.2.4 Distribution of study sample according to the variable of the teaching subject

Table 7-4 Subjects taught by teachers

Teaching subject	N	Percent
Religion	14	17.5
Arabic	12	15
English	15	18.8
Computer	7	8.8
Sciences	9	11.3
Social sciences	3	3.8
Art	1	1.3
Sport	1	1.3
Mathematics	6	7.5
Chemistry	2	2.5
Biology	5	6.3
Family education	2	2.5
Special needs	1	1.3
Health education	1	1.3
Psychology	1	1.3
Total	80	100

Table 7-4 above shows that the largest number of the teachers in the study teach English, and comprise 15 individuals (representing 18.8% of the total sample of the study). This is followed by those who teach Islamic education (religion), 14 individuals (17.5%), and Arabic teachers, 12 individuals (15%), followed by 9 science teachers (11.3%). In addition, there are other subjects taught by teachers contributing to the study, such as mathematics, chemistry and biology. Art, sport, special needs, health education and psychology were each taught by one teacher in the sample (1.3%).

7.3 Descriptive statistics of the results of the study

The second section of the questionnaire comprised six closed-ended questions requiring respondents to provide 'yes' or 'no' answers. The analysis of these responses involved descriptive analysis based on percentages. These statistical measures allowed for an extensive examination of the study sample's (in this case, teachers) perspectives and

experiences related to the subject under investigation. Table 7-5 presents the aggregated results of this analysis, offering a clear presentation of the collective responses from the participants.

Table 7-5 Teachers' experiences with Syrian refugee students

No	Statements	Frequency		Percent	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	I feel that I have experience in working with Syrian refugee students.	48	32	60	40
2	I attended a training program to work with Syrian refugee students.	1	79	1.3	98.8
3	I understand the needs of Syrian refugee students.	50	30	63.8	36.3
4	I understand the culture of Syrian refugee students.	51	29	62.5	37.5
5	I can deal with Syrian refugee students.	74	6	92.5	7.5
6	I gain new tools in dealing with Syrian refugee students.	48	32	60	40

It is important to note that all the teachers who responded to the survey had been involved in teaching Syrian refugee students, but some felt experienced in this regard while others felt relatively inexperienced¹⁰. Most teachers in the survey indicated that they felt experienced in working with Syrian refugee students, as 60% (n=48) of them answered ‘yes’ to the question. The results also reveal that the majority of these teachers (98.8%) did not attend a training programme in relation to working with Syrian students, but they indicated that they could understand the needs of Syrian students (63.8% answered ‘yes’). Similarly, teachers generally considered that they understood the culture of the Syrian students, as the majority answered ‘yes’ (63.8%). Moreover, they felt that they could deal appropriately with Syrian students, with table showing that teachers answered ‘yes’ at a rate of 92.5%. Similarly, the table shows that they considered themselves to have the ability to acquire new tools in dealing with Syrian students, as 60% of teachers answered ‘yes’ regarding this question.

¹⁰ Teachers who indicated that they felt more experienced in working with Syrian refugee students will be referred later in section 7.5 to as ‘ME’. Those who felt relatively felt less experienced will be referred to as ‘LE’.

7.3.1 Four main dimensions of the questionnaire

The third section considers the four main dimensions of the questionnaire (needs and programmes directed to students, behavioural problems for students, social and school problems, and personal problems and family relationships).

7.3.1.1 Students' needs and interventions to address them:

Table 7-6 Students' needs and interventions to address them

No	Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	School curricula help integrate Syrian refugee students into school.	N	27	32	13	8	0
		%	33.8%	40%	16.3%	10%	0%
2	The school social workers implement social programmes to overcome the problems faced by Syrian students.	N	19	20	18	13	10
		%	23.8%	25%	22.5%	16.3%	12.5%
3	The school social workers prepare the school environment for the integration of Syrian students.	N	18	22	18	13	9
		%	22.5%	27.5%	22.5%	16.3%	11.3%
4	The school social workers inform teachers about the needs of Syrian students.	N	26	23	20	7	4
		%	32.5%	28.8%	25%	8.8%	5%
5	The school social workers implement counselling programmes to overcome the problems faced by Syrian students.	N	19	20	18	14	9
		%	23.5%	25%	22.5%	17.5%	11.3%
6	Syrian refugee students participate equally to their peers in the activities designed by the school.	N	53	16	6	4	1
		%	66.3%	20%	7.5%	5%	1.3%
7	The school social worker collaborates with teachers to help Syrian students.	N	39	20	13	6	2
		%	48.8%	25%	16.3%	7.5%	2.5%

As indicated in Table 7-6, 90% of the teachers (n=72) responding to this survey questionnaire felt that the Saudi school curriculum was always, often or sometimes helpful in the process of integrating Syrian refugee students into the schools, and 71% agreed that they sometimes, often or always implemented programmes to overcome the problems facing Syrian students, referring specifically to counselling programmes. A similar picture

emerged in terms of teachers' preparation of the school environment to receive Syrian students.

The valuable role of school social workers emerged with nearly 90% of teachers acknowledging that school social workers always, often or sometimes informed them about the needs of the Syrian students with nearly three quarters referring to collaboration with social workers always or often, and only ten percent suggesting there was only rare, or no , collaboration with social workers.

Arguably as a result of the efforts of teachers to support Syrian student integration, and their strong collaboration with school social workers, over 90% of teachers indicated that Syrian refugee students participated to the same extent and in the same way as their (non-refugee or Saudi) peers in activities designed by the school. The collaboration with social workers is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 9.

7.3.1.2 Students' behavioural challenges:

Table 7-7 Students' behavioural challenges

No	Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
1	Teachers face problems in communicating with Syrian refugee students.	N	5	20	25	17	13
		%	6.3%	25%	31.3%	21.3%	16.3%
2	Syrian students exhibit unacceptable behaviour in the classroom.	N	3	19	22	19	17
		%	3.8	23.8%	27.5%	23.8%	21.3%
3	Syrian students use unacceptable words in the classroom.	N	5	16	23	20	16
		%	6.3%	20%	28.8%	25.0%	20%
4	Syrian students seek additional help from teachers when needed.	N	12	15	30	15	8
		%	15 %	18.8%	37.5%	18.8%	10%
5	The teachers maintain good relations with the Syrian students.	N	30	26	14	8	2
		%	37.5%	32.5%	17.5%	10.5%	2.0%
6	Syrian refugee students have more behavioural problems than other students.	N	10	16	21	16	17
		%	12.5%	20%	26.3%	20%	21.3%

As indicated in Table 7-7, 62.6% of teachers surveyed reported that they always, often, or sometimes experienced challenges in communicating with Syrian refugee students, while

37.6% stated that these issues occurred rarely or never. This suggests that while communication barriers are relatively common, a notable portion of teachers encounter such difficulties infrequently.

The previously mentioned communication challenges may be linked to classroom behaviours, with 55.1% of teachers observing that Syrian students always, often, or sometimes exhibited unacceptable behaviours, whereas 44.9% felt that such behaviours were rare or non-existent. Similarly, 55.1% of teachers indicated that Syrian students always, often, or sometimes used inappropriate language in the classroom, while 44.9% noted this was a rare or never occurred. These findings reflect a diverse range of experiences among teachers, with a slight majority reporting behavioural challenges, while a minority are less affected.

Regarding the seeking of help, 71.3% of teachers noted that Syrian students always, often, or sometimes sought additional assistance when needed, while 28.8% indicated that this occurred rarely or never. This suggests that many Syrian students are active in seeking support, possibly indicating their adaptability and willingness to engage with their education. It may also point to the effectiveness of school social workers or other support programmes designed to assist these students.

A similarly positive trend emerged in teacher-student relationships, with 87.5% of teachers indicating that they always, often, or sometimes maintained good relations with Syrian students, while only 12.5% reported rarely or never having such relations. This strong positive relationship is essential for the successful integration of Syrian students, as it fosters a supportive learning environment, possibly enhanced by the efforts of school social workers and other integration programmes.

7.3.1.3 Social and school challenges:

Table 7-8 Social and school challenges

No	Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Syrian refugee students face verbal violence from other students in class.	N	4	7	25	31	13
		%	5.0%	8.8%	31.3%	38.8%	16.3%

2	Syrian refugee students face physical violence from other students inside the classroom.	N	0	5	18	28	29
		%	0%	6.3%	22.5%	35.0%	36.3%
3	Syrian refugee students suffer from discrimination in their treatment by other students.	N	1	7	24	26	22
		%	1.3	8.8	30.0	32.5	27.5%
4	Syrian refugee students interact with their non-Syrian peers with confidence.	N	25	27	19	6	3
		%	31.3	33.8	23.8	7.5	3.8
5	The level of interaction of Syrian refugee students with their colleagues is low due to their different cultural background.	N	3	15	23	24	15
		%	3.8	18.8	28.8	30.0	18.8
6	Syrian students communicate with teachers in the event of a problem in the classroom.	N	27	27	18	6	2
		%	33.8	33.8	22.5	7.5	2.5
7	Syrian refugee students are committed to educational regulations and policies.	N	25	21	26	3	5
		%	31.3	26.3	32.5	3.8	6.3

As we can see in Table 7-8, 45.1% of teachers reported that Syrian refugee students always, often, or sometimes faced verbal violence from other students, while 54.9% noted that such violence occurred rarely or never. This suggests that while verbal violence is a significant issue for many Syrian students, a considerable number experience this less frequently.

Regarding physical violence, 28.8% of teachers observed that Syrian students always, often, or sometimes encountered physical violence in the classroom. In contrast, 71.3% reported that physical violence was rare or never. This indicates that physical violence, although less common than verbal violence, remains a significant concern for some Syrian students.

In terms of discrimination, 60% of teachers indicated that Syrian students often or sometimes suffered from discriminatory treatment by their peers, with 40% suggesting this was rare or never occurred. This highlights that discrimination is a frequent issue impacting a majority of Syrian students, contributing to their overall challenges in the classroom.

A more positive aspect is seen in peer interactions. 88.9% of teachers reported that Syrian students always, often, or sometimes interacted with their non-Syrian peers with confidence, while only 11.3% observed this confidence as rare or never. This suggests that

despite facing challenges, many Syrian students manage to engage with their peers positively.

However, 62.6% of teachers noted that Syrian students' interactions with peers were limited due to cultural differences, with 37.6% feeling this was rare or never. This indicates that cultural barriers still impact social integration somehow, despite the observed confidence.

Regarding communication with teachers, 90.1% of teachers reported that Syrian students always, often, or sometimes communicated with them when problems arose, while only 9.9% noted this communication as rare or never occurring. This strong communication reflects the students' willingness to seek support, which is crucial for addressing their challenges.

Finally, 90.1% of teachers observed that Syrian students were always, often, or sometimes committed to educational regulations and policies, with only 9.9% noting a lack of commitment. This high level of adherence demonstrates the students' ability and dedication to their education as well as the effort from school social workers and teachers, despite the difficulties they face.

According to the teachers surveyed, the experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools are marked by a mix of challenges and successes. Teachers observed issues such as verbal and physical violence, discrimination, and cultural barriers as significant obstacles, yet noted that Syrian students often show confidence in their peer interactions, suggesting their potential to integrate and succeed. However, teachers emphasised that addressing the challenges of violence, discrimination, and cultural differences will require ongoing efforts from teachers, social workers, and school principals to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

7.3.1.4 Personal problems and family relationships:

Table 7-9 Personal problems and family relationships

No	Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Syrian students face family problems.	N	6	26	35	11	2

		%	7.5%	32.5%	43.8%	13.8%	2.5%
2	Parents of Syrian students help their children with their homework.	N	12	19	32	16	1
		%	15.0%	23.8%	40%	20%	1.3%
3	Families of Syrian students communicate with teachers about their children's problems.	N	8	22	31	12	7
		%	10%	27.5%	38.8%	15.0%	8.8%
4	Teachers maintain good relationships with the families of the Syrian students.	N	26	22	16	13	3
		%	32.5%	27.5%	20%	16.3%	3.8%
5	Teachers refer the families of Syrian refugee students to the school social workers at the school.	N	36	22	15	5	2
		%	45%	27.5%	18.8%	6.3%	2.5%

Table 7-9 shows teachers' perceptions of students' personal problems and family relationships of Syrian students. The statistics provide a detailed view of personal problems and family relationships of Syrian students. 83.8% of teachers reported that Syrian students always, often, or sometimes face family problems, while 16.3% observed these issues as rare or never occurring.

Similarly, the parental homework assistance, 78.8% of teachers noted that parents always, often, or sometimes help with homework, whereas 21.3% indicated this support occurs rarely or never. This shows that many Syrian students benefit from parental help with homework, though the level of support varies due to the problems that link to their parents in their new land such as working for long hours or poverty, as confirmed by 83.8% of teachers regarding the problems of Syrian families.

However, 76.3% of teachers found that families always, often, or sometimes communicate about their children's problems. 23.8% observed this communication occurs rarely or never. This highlights that while many families engage with teachers regarding their children's issues, there is variability in the frequency of this communication.

Positively, 80% of teachers maintained good relationships with families always, often, or sometimes, while 20.1% reported these relationships as rarely or never positive. This indicates that while many teachers build strong relationships with families, consistency in these relationships varies.

Teachers are aware of the critical role of social workers in addressing the needs of Syrian students and their families with 91.3% of teachers always, often, or sometimes referring families of Syrian refugee students to school social workers, with only 8.8% doing so rarely or never.

As indicated above, the data reveals a nuanced picture of the support systems for Syrian students. While family problems and flexibility in parental support and communication are evident, the general trend shows significant efforts to engage and assist. Teacher-family relationships are generally positive, though not always consistent. The frequent referrals to school social workers highlight their essential role in providing additional support. Overall, the commitment to addressing the diverse needs of Syrian students is clear, though enhanced consistency and engagement across these areas could further improve their educational experience and finally their integration into their new schools.

7.4 Data analysis of the similarities and differences between the responses of teachers based on the variable of city

Table 7-10 Teachers’ responses based on their city

City	N	Percent
A	42	52.5
B	38	47.5
Total	80	100

To establish a more in-depth and clear understanding about teachers’ experience in working with Syrian refugee students, and the problems teachers endure while teaching those students, a comparison between teachers’ responses based on their city will be described (City A – n=42 and City B – n=38, as shown in Table 7-10). This description concerns some of the most important statements from the four dimensions of the questionnaire answered by teachers. A comparison using cross-tabulation might uncover the levels of similarity and difference in teachers’ responses relating to the different two cities, which in turn would help in understanding the experiences of school staff and refugee students. Moreover, such a comparison will assist the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as the understanding of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire.

7.4.1 Students' needs and interventions to address them:

Table 7-11 Teachers' responses to dimension 1 based on city (A and B)

No	Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	School curricula help to integrate Syrian refugee students into school.	City					
		A	31%	33.3%	23.8%	11.9%	0%
		B	36.8%	47.4%	7.9%	7.9%	0%
2	The school social workers implement social programmes to overcome the problems faced by Syrian students.	A	21.4%	28.6%	19%	19%	11.9%
		B	26.3%	21.1%	26.3%	13.2%	13.2%
3	The school social workers prepare the school environment for the integration of Syrian students.	A	26.2%	21.4%	23.8%	19%	9.5%
		B	18.4%	34.2%	21.1%	13.2%	13.2%
4	The school social workers inform teachers about the needs of Syrian students.	A	31%	26.2%	23.8%	14.3%	4.8%
		B	34.2%	31.6%	26.3%	2.6%	5.3%
5	The school social workers implement counselling programmes to overcome the problems faced by Syrian students.	A	23.8%	23.8%	19%	21.4%	11.9%
		B	23.7%	26.3%	26.3%	13.2%	10.5%
6	Syrian refugee students participate equally to their peers in the activities designed by the school.	A	69%	16.7%	4.8%	7.1%	2.4%
		B	63.2%	23.7%	10.5%	2.6%	0%
7	The school social worker collaborates with teachers to help Syrian students.	A	45.2%	19%	21.4%	14.3%	0%
		B	52.6%	31.6%	10.5%	0%	5.3%

Table 7-11 (above) shows the percentage of teachers' responses to each of the response categories for each city (A and B) of the seven statements. As we can see from the table, the seven statements relate to the needs and programmes directed to Syrian refugee students. A comparison using the cross-tabulation technique in SPSS indicated that the rate of response of the two groups of teachers to the statements was very similar, and there were no substantial differences. For example, the first statement, which stated that school curricula help to integrate Syrian refugee students into school, showed that the option 'never' was not selected by a single teacher in either the City A or City B group of teachers.

For the same statement, around 31% of teachers from City A selected the option ‘always’, with the corresponding percentage of 36.8% of teachers from the City B group. A notable difference appears only for the option ‘sometimes’, for which the highest percentage is allocated to teachers from City A (23.8%), while the lowest percentage (7.9%) is represented by teachers from City B. Another example is Statement 3 – when asked if school social workers had prepared the school environment to facilitate the integration of Syrian students, there was a convergence in teachers' responses according to city. For example, 23.8% of City A teachers selected the option ‘sometimes’, as compared to 21.1% for the other group of teachers (see Table 7-11).

It is evident that most teachers in City B held a more positive perception of programmes regarding the needs of Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools. For instance, teachers in City B often expressed confidence in school social workers' preparation for the school environment to facilitate the integration of Syrian refugee students, in contrast to their counterparts in City A, who tended to select 'sometimes' and 'rarely' in response to this statement. While these variations in responses were not substantial, these findings suggest differences that could guide future research to investigate these variations more deeply.

7.4.2 Students’ behavioural challenges:

Table 7-12 Teachers’ responses to dimension 2 based on city (A and B)

No	Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Teachers face problems in communicating with Syrian refugee students.	City					
		A	7.1%	26.2%	33.3%	23.8%	9.5%
		B	5.3%	23.7%	28.9%	18.4%	23.7%
2	Syrian students exhibit unacceptable behaviour in the classroom.	A	7.1%	21.4%	40.5%	23.8%	7.1%
		B	0 %	26.3%	13.2%	23.7%	36.8%
3	Syrian students use unacceptable words in the classroom.	A	7.1%	16.7%	42.9%	26.2%	7.1%
		B	5.3%	23.7%	13.2%	23.7%	34.2%
4	Syrian students seek additional help from teachers when needed	A	14.3%	16.7%	50.0%	14.3%	4.8%
		B	15.8%	21.1%	23.7%	23.7%	15.8%
5		A	31%	40.5%	19.0%	9.5%	0%

	The teachers maintain good relations with the Syrian students.	B	44.7%	23.7%	15.8%	10.5%	5.3%
6	Syrian refugee students have more behavioural problems than other students.	A	14.3%	26.2%	28.6%	21.4%	9.5%
		B	10.5%	13.2%	23.7%	18.4%	34.4%

Dimension 2 contained six statements designed to explore the teachers' opinions on the behavioural problems they experienced in relation to Syrian refugee students. Similar percentages are observable for both groups of teachers in regard to all available response options for the category statements. For instance, for Statement 3 (Syrian students use unacceptable words in the classroom), the results indicate that responses were similar, i.e. the option 'often' was selected by around 16.7 of the City A teachers, and the percentage of their colleagues from City B was higher (23.7).

A marked difference is only apparent in the selection of the option 'sometimes', which was selected by 42.9% of city A teachers, but only 13.2% of City B teachers. More similarity between the two groups appears with regard to Statement 4 (Syrian refugee students seek additional help from teachers when needed), which can be seen in Table 7 12. The response percentages for all options align closely, suggesting a notable consistency in teachers' responses. For example, for the response 'always', close to 15% chose this option for both groups of teachers, and the responses for the option 'often' were similar also – 16.7% for the City A group and 21.1% for their colleagues from City B. However, with these similarities in response, only a few variations among the responses remain. In a similar trend to dimension 2, the above comparisons still tend to suggest that teachers in City B tend to form a more positive view of Syrian refugee students and their families in Saudi Arabia than their colleagues from City A.

7.4.3 Social and school challenges:

Table 7-13 Teachers' responses to dimension 3 based on city (A and B)

No	Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1		City					
		A	4.8%	11.9%	35.7%	38.1%	9.5%

	Syrian refugee students face verbal violence from other students in class.	B	5.3%	5.3%	26.3%	39.5%	23.7%
2	Syrian refugee students face physical violence from other students inside the classroom.	A	0%	4.8%	26.2%	42.9%	26.2%
		B	0%	7.9%	18.4%	47.4%	26.3%
3	Syrian refugee students suffer from discrimination in their treatment by other students.	A	2.4%	9.5%	38.1%	28.6%	21.4%
		B	0%	7.9%	21.1%	36.8%	34.2%
4	Syrian refugee students interact with their non-Syrian peers with confidence.	A	19%	45.2%	26.2%	9.5%	0%
		B	44.7%	21.1%	21.1%	5.3%	7.9%
5	The level of interaction of Syrian refugee students with their colleagues is low due to their different cultural background.	A	4.8%	21.4%	35.7%	31.0%	7.1%
		B	2.6%	15.8%	21.1%	28.9%	31.6%
6	Syrian students communicate with teachers in the event of a problem in the classroom.	A	23.8%	40.5%	21.4%	14.3%	0%
		B	44.7%	26.3%	23.7%	0%	5.3%
7	Syrian refugee students are committed to educational regulations and policies.	A	14.3%	31.0%	40.5%	7.1%	7.1%
		B	50.0%	21.1%	23.7%	0%	5.3%

The data concerning responses to Statement 1 in dimension 3 (Syrian refugee students encountered verbal abuse from other pupils in class) showed that 38.1% of City A teachers chose 'rarely', as did a similar proportion of City B teachers at 39.5%. In addition, 'sometimes' was chosen by many teachers, with 35.7% of City A teachers choosing this option, while 26.3% of City B teachers chose it. As we can see from 7-13, the lowest percentage is for 'always', which was chosen by 4.8% of group A teachers, with the corresponding percentage for their colleagues from the other group at 5.3%. Furthermore, similar percentages are apparent for the option 'often', with City A teachers responding at a rate of 11.9%, and City B teachers 5.3%. For Statement 2 (Syrian students are exposed to

physical violence inside the classroom), teachers from city A selected 'rarely' with 42.9%, while their colleagues answered similarly, at a rate of 47.4%.

When assessing teachers' responses to Statement 3 (Syrian refugee students suffer from discrimination in their treatment by other students), Table 7-13 (above) showed that 38.1% of City A teachers chose 'sometimes' in response to this statement, making it the most common response among the options, while a lower percentage at around 21 % is apparent for City B teachers. Moreover, following the same trend, for the option 'never', 34.2% of City B teachers chose this option, while 21.4% of City A teachers chose it. However, other options indicate close percentages with regard to the two groups of teachers. For instance, around 2.4% of City A teachers chose the option 'always', while not one teacher from the City B group chose this option (0%). Accordingly, for the option 'rarely', around 28.6% of City A teachers selected this option, compared with 36.8% of the City B group. These statistics show nuanced differences in perspectives between the two groups of teachers, which may underline the necessity of a comprehensive understanding of variations between the two cities in addressing issues relating to Syrian refugee students in school.

Similarities in the two groups of teachers' responses were also evident for Statement 4. Table 7-13 (above) showed that 26.2% of teachers in City A agreed that Syrian refugee students 'sometimes' interacted with their non-Syrian peers confidently, and around 21% of teachers from City B selected this option. Similarly, for the options 'rarely' and 'never' in response to the fourth statement, around 9% of teachers from city A selected 'rarely' while 5.3% of their colleagues chose this option, along with 0% of City A teachers selecting the option 'never', as compared to around 8% from the City B group. While there are variations in the responses between the two groups (A and B) for Statement 4, the differences appear to be relatively marginal, suggesting a degree of similarity in the perspectives of teachers regarding the interaction and confidence levels of Syrian refugee students with their non-Syrian peers in schools.

For Statement 5, Table 7-13 indicates that approximately 35% of City A teachers and 21% of City B teachers articulated that the level of interaction of Syrian refugee students with their peers was 'sometimes' low due to their different cultural backgrounds. Expressing a similar viewpoint, 21.4 % of teachers in City A reported that the level of interaction of Syrian

refugee students with their peers was ‘often’ low due to their different cultural backgrounds, and around 15% of their colleagues from City B testified that this was the case. Correspondingly, 4.8% of teachers from City A and 2.6% from City B selected the option ‘always’ for this statement. Likewise, around 31% of City A teachers agreed that the level of interaction of Syrian refugee students with their Saudi peers was ‘rarely’ low due to their different cultural backgrounds, while around 29% of teachers from City B chose this option.

7.4.4 Personal problems and family relationships:

Table 7-14 Teachers’ responses to dimension 4 based on city (A and B)

No	Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Syrian students face family problems.	City					
		A	9.5%	28.6%	50%	9.5%	2.4%
		B	5.3%	36.8%	36.8%	18.4%	2.6%
2	Parents of Syrian students help their children with their homework.	A	7.1%	23.8%	47.6%	19.0%	2.4%
		B	23.7%	23.7%	31.6%	21.1%	0.0%
3	Families of Syrian students communicate with teachers about their children’s problems.	A	4.8%	21.4%	47.6%	16.7%	9.5%
		B	15.8%	34.2%	28.9%	13.2%	7.9%
4	Teachers maintain good relationships with the families of the Syrian students.	A	26.2%	33.3%	14.3%	23.8%	2.4%
		B	39.5%	21.1%	26.3%	7.9%	5.3%
5	Teachers refer the families of Syrian refugee students to the school social workers at the school.	A	42.9%	23.8%	21.4%	7.1%	4.8%
		B	47.4%	31.6%	15.8%	5.3%	0%

This dimension consisted of five statements exploring the relationships between families, teachers, and schools, as well as how the teachers experienced these relationships and the new situation. As shown in Table 7-14 above, concerning the first statement (Syrian students face family problems), 9.5% and 5.3% of teachers from City A and City B, respectively, agreed that Syrian refugee students ‘always’ faced family problems. Meanwhile, exactly half of the teachers from City A believed that Syrian refugee students

'sometimes' faced family problems, and around 37% of City B teachers agreed with this option. The responses to the third statement (Families of Syrian students communicate with teachers about their children's problems) reveal similar results, as shown in Table 7-14. Here, 4.8% of City A teachers and around 16% of City B teachers reported that families of Syrian students 'always' communicated with teachers about their children's problems. Taking these results into account, teachers are aware of the challenges experienced by families of Syrian refugee students, and understand the unique situations they face. Teachers express confidence in discussing these challenges, relying on consistent communication channels with families. This suggests in general a collaborative approach among school staff towards addressing the diverse needs of Syrian refugee families within the educational setting.

7.5 Data analysis of the similarities and differences between the responses of teachers, by gender and experience, regarding the problems they face while teaching Syrian refugee students

To achieve a better understanding of the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi Arabian schools, the problems teachers face while teaching Syrian refugee students, and how the qualitative and quantitative data are related to these issues, I also investigated the similarities and differences between two groups of respondents: (1) male and female teachers; (2) teachers who indicated that they felt more experienced in working with Syrian refugee students (60% of the sample), and those who indicated that they felt less experienced when working with Syrian refugee students (40% of the sample). This was required due to the notable variations between the teachers' responses to statement 1 (I feel that I have experience in working with Syrian refugee students), in the second section of the questionnaire. Therefore, it was worth investigating the similarities and differences between these teachers in terms of their responses to the questionnaire statements. The findings showed substantial similarities between teachers' responses, and this comparison was limited to statements that showed obvious similarities or differences to be further explored alongside the qualitative findings. For the same reason, the teacher gender variable was also taken into account to explore the differences and similarities between male and female teachers' responses. The overall aim of this analysis was to investigate this relatively new phenomenon in Saudi schools. Accordingly, to achieve this, cross-tabulation

was used to compare the percentages with regard to responses to each statement, as discussed below.

7.5.1 Students' needs and intervention to address them:

This dimension was designed to investigate teachers' and school social workers' experiences of Syrian refugee students' needs, as well as the efficacy of the programme designed to offer practical support. This dimension consisted of seven statements, which were answered similarly in terms of the responses selected by both male and female respondents; 60% reported who indicated that they felt experienced in working with Syrian refugee students while 40% did not. One of the most important results concerns statement 1; the participants strongly believed that the school curricula had helped the Syrian refugee students to integrate into schools. The figure below shows the similarities between the teachers' responses to statement 1. For instance, none (0%) of the respondents chose the option 'never' when asked if the school curricula had helped to integrate Syrian refugee students into school. At the other end of the spectrum, 25% of female teachers and 38% of male teachers believed that the school curricula 'always' helped to integrate Syrian refugee students into schools. In nearly equal proportions, male teachers and their female counterparts selected the option 'often', with approximately 40% of male teachers and 39% of their female counterparts opting for this response. The most notable distinction is evident in the selection of the 'rarely' option, with 21% of female teachers favouring this choice, in contrast to the 3.8% of male teachers who selected this option (see Figure 7-1).

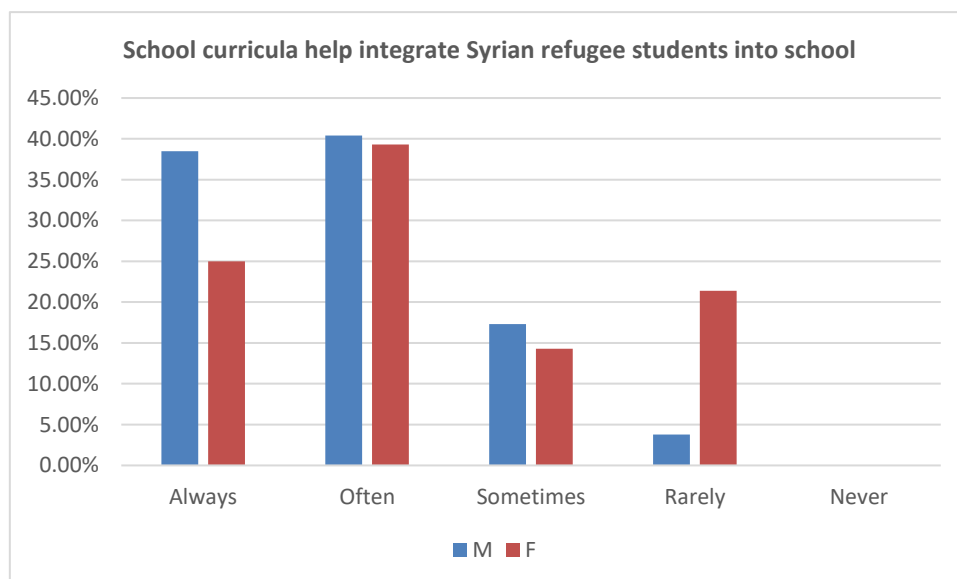


Figure 7-1 Group 1. The school curricula help to integrate Syrian refugee students into schools

Key – M: male, F: female, ME: who felt more experienced, LE: who felt less experienced.

In Figure 7-2, which represents Group Two teachers who felt experienced in working with Syrian refugee students and their colleagues who indicated that they felt less experienced when working with Syrian refugee students, variations in responses are observable; nevertheless, these variances are not substantial. For instance, regarding Statement 1, approximately 37% of teachers who felt more experienced in working with Syrian refugee students selected 'always' option, while 28.1% of those who felt less experienced made the same choice. The clearest disparity in responses emerges with the selection of 'sometimes', with 6.3% of experienced teachers selecting this option, as compared to 31.3% of their inexperienced colleagues.

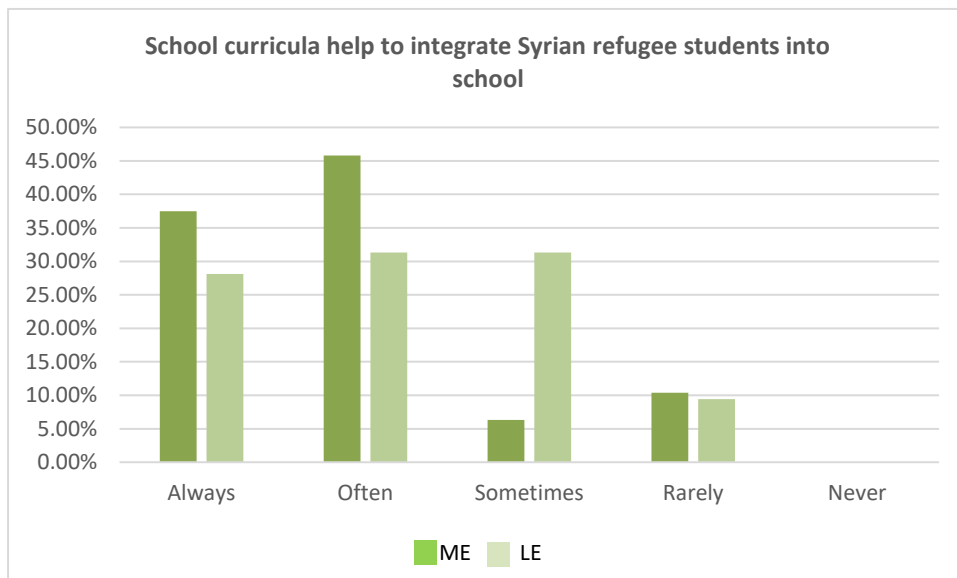


Figure 7-2 Group 2. The school curricula help to integrate Syrian refugee students into schools

For statement 3, when asked if school social workers had prepared the school environment to facilitate the integration of Syrian students, there was a convergence in teachers' responses. For example, a similar proportion of teachers chose the option 'sometimes' in each of the four groups, with their percentages for the option ranging from 21.4% to 23.1% (see Figures 7-3 and 7-4 below). A notable difference only appears for the option 'always', with around 26% of male teachers selecting this choice, as compared to 14.3% of female teachers.

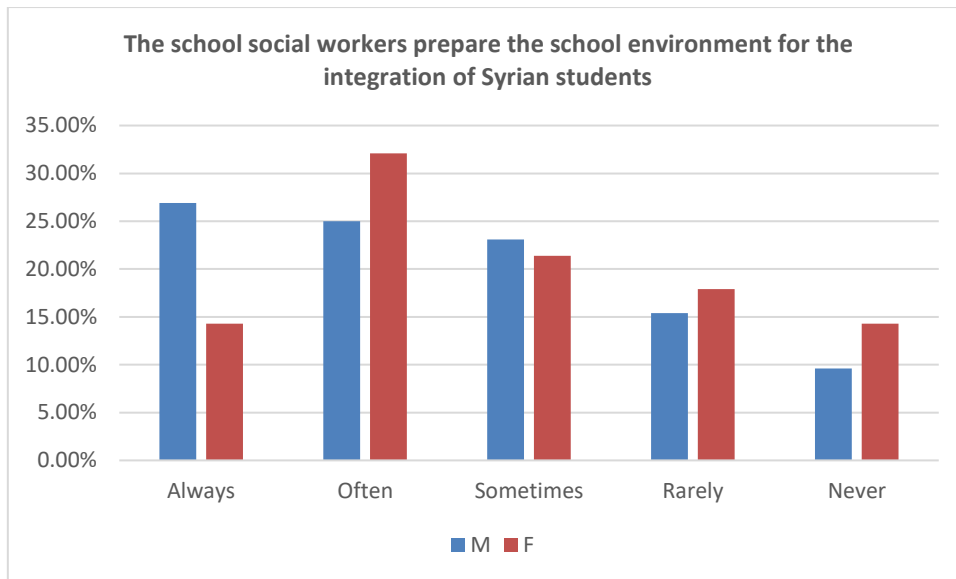


Figure 7-3 Group 1. School social workers prepare the school environment to facilitate the integration of Syrian students

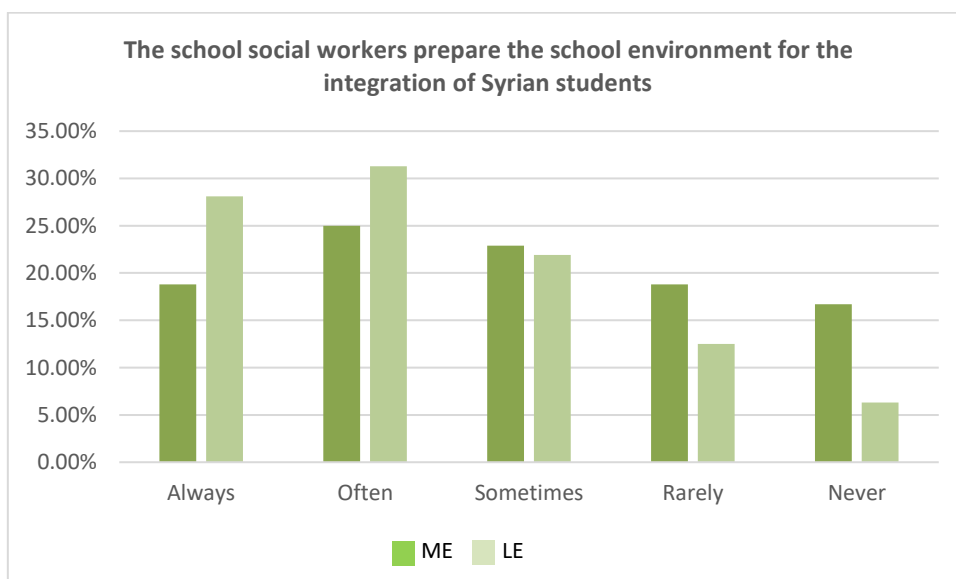


Figure 7-4 Group 2. School social workers prepare the school environment to facilitate the integration of Syrian students

7.5.2 Students' behavioural challenges:

Dimension 2 featured six statements designed to explore the teachers' opinion on the behavioural problems they experienced in relation to Syrian refugee students. Similar percentages can be seen for all four groups of teachers in regard to all available response options for the category statements. For example, for statement 3 (Syrian students use unacceptable words in the classroom), the results show that the responses were similar, i.e.

for the options 'often', 'sometimes' and 'rarely', the percentages range from 16.7% to 28.8% (see Figures 7-5 and 7-6 below). The clearest difference in responses concerns the option 'always' for Group number 1, with 1.9% of male teachers selecting this option, as compared to around 14% of female teachers.

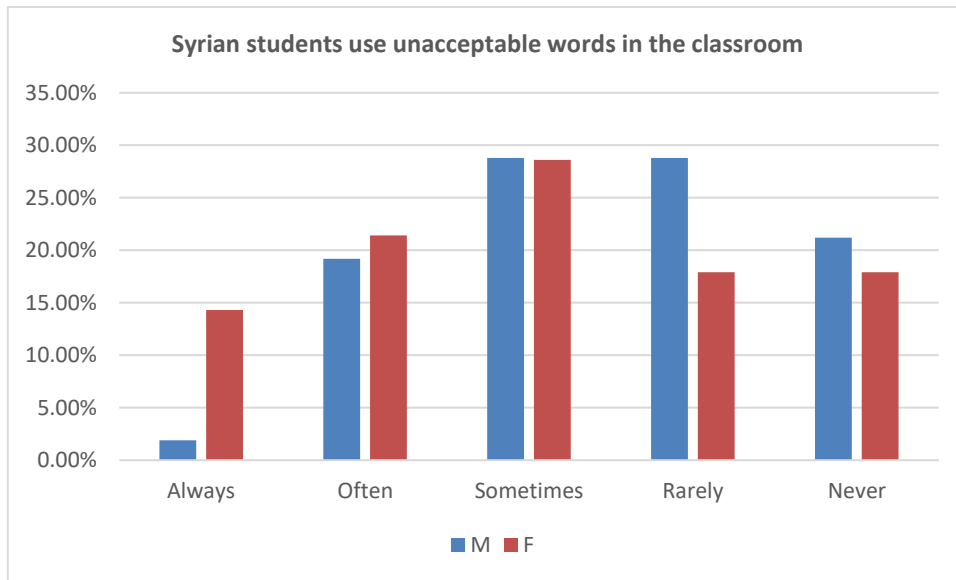


Figure 7-5 Group 1. Syrian students use unacceptable words in the classroom

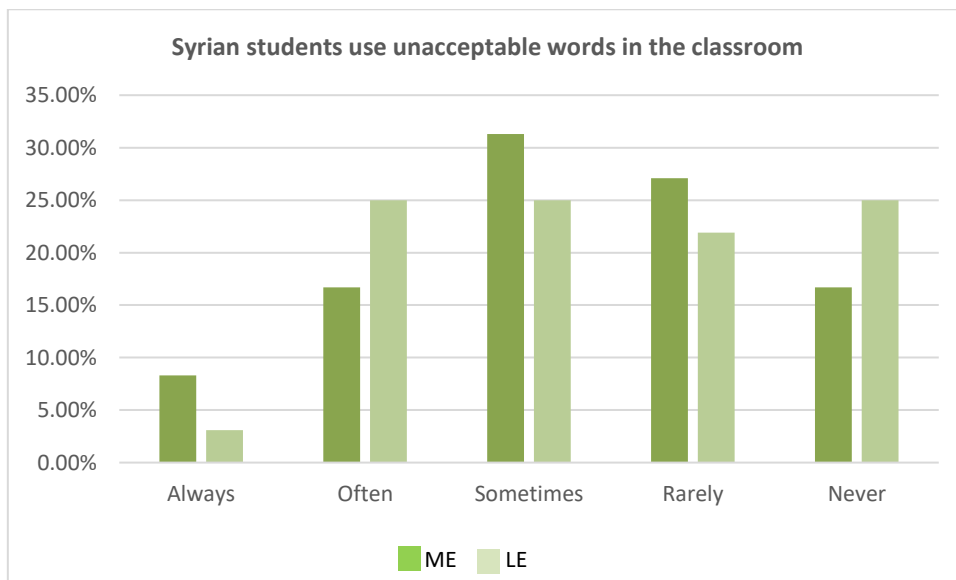


Figure 7-6 Group 2. Syrian students use unacceptable words in the classroom

Another example in dimension 2 can be seen in figure 7-7 and 7-8 (below), in the similarities between teachers' responses to statement 4 (Syrian refugee students seek additional help from teachers when needed). The percentage responses for all options are closely aligned,

indicating minimal variation among them. For example, for the responses ‘always’ and ‘rarely’, the teachers’ response percentages range from 11.5% to 21.4% for the former and from 16.7% to 21.9% for the latter.

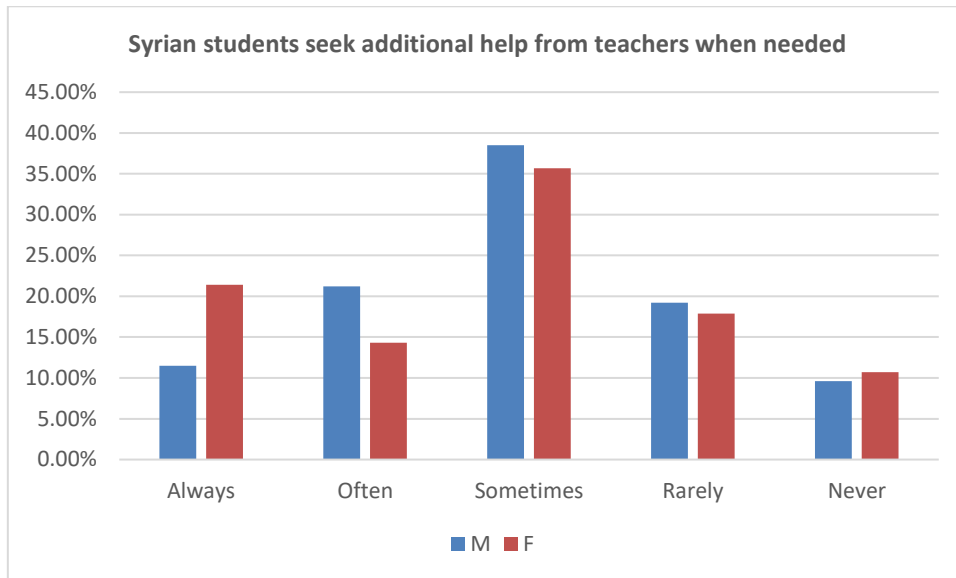


Figure 7-7 Group 1. Syrian refugee students seek additional help from teachers when needed

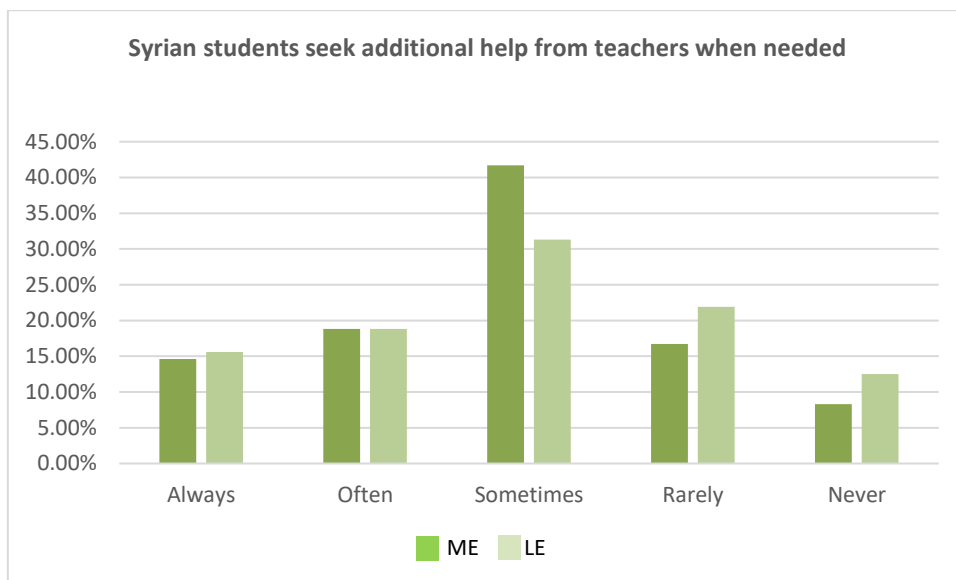


Figure 7-8 Group 2. Syrian refugee students seek additional help from teachers when needed

7.5.3 Social and school challenges:

Similarly, the statements in dimension 3 related to the Syrian refugee pupils’ social and school-related concerns. Although it was crucial to investigate the contrasts and similarities

between the teachers' responses, the following descriptive analysis is limited to the most important findings.

The data concerning responses to statement 1 in dimension 3 (Syrian refugee students encountered verbal abuse from other pupils in class) shows that 42.9% of female teachers chose 'rarely', as did 36.5% of male teachers. In terms of the teachers' feeling of their experience, Figure 7-9 (below) shows that 37.5% of teachers who felt more experienced chose 'rarely'; similarly, a high proportion of teachers who felt less experienced also chose 'rarely' (41%). Regarding gender, 'sometimes' was the option chosen by the highest percentage of respondents, with 35.7% of female teachers choosing this option, while only 28.8% of male teachers chose it. Meanwhile, the group of both teachers revealed a similar response percentage of approximately 31% for the option 'sometimes'. The clearest variation concerned the option 'often' for Group 1 teachers; as we can see in Figure 7-9, while not a single female teacher chose this option, 13.5% of their male colleagues selected it. Likewise, 'always' was chosen by 8.3% of teachers who felt more experienced, while it was not selected by a single of teachers who felt less experienced in working with Syrian refugee students (see Figure 7-10).

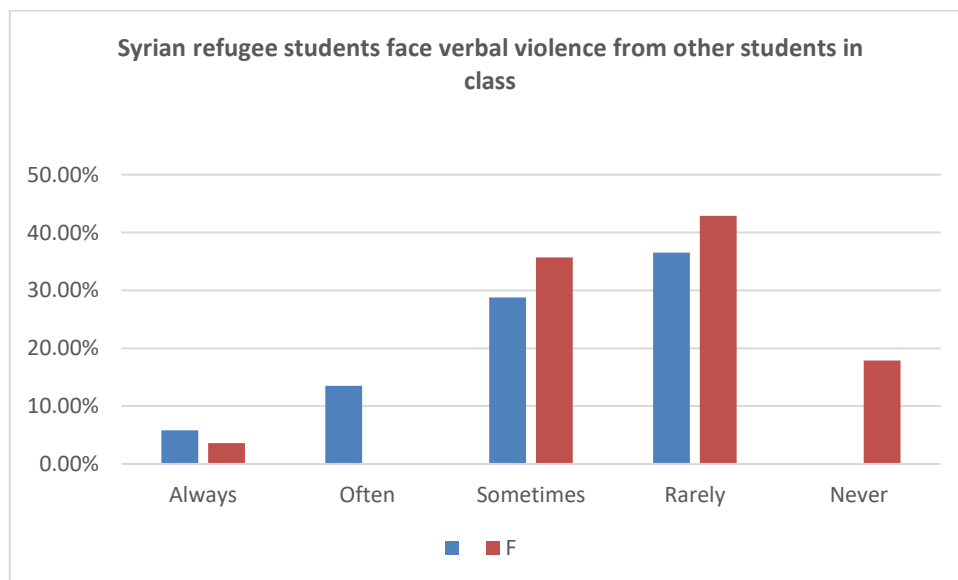


Figure 7-9 Group 1. Syrian refugee students face verbal violence from other students in class

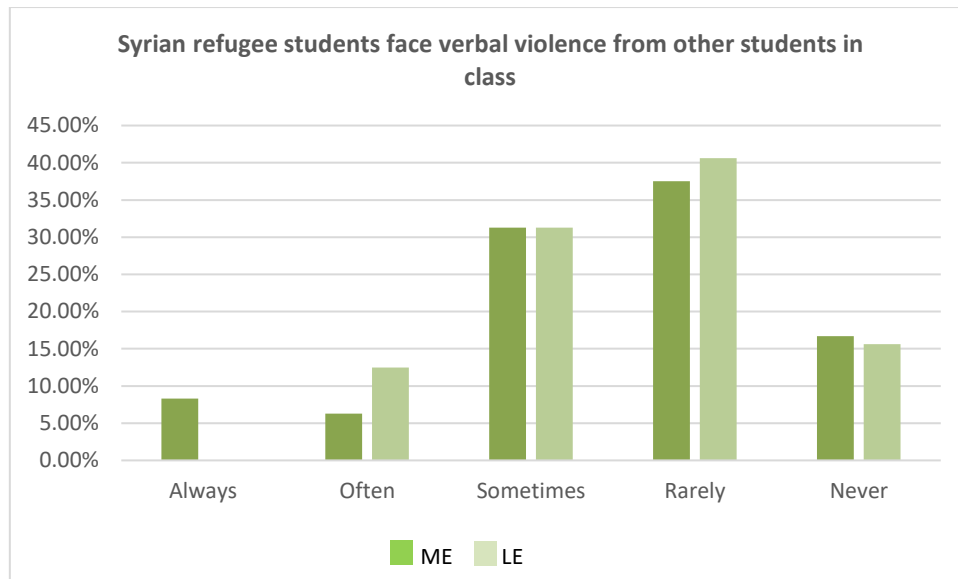


Figure 7-10 Group 2. Syrian refugee face verbal violence from other students in class

The male teachers largely account for the agreement between the participants in regard to the second statement, with 40% reporting that Syrian students were ‘rarely’ exposed to physical violence in the classroom, while only around 25% of the female teachers agreed on this option. In a similar trend, 57% of female teachers agreed that physical violence was ‘never’ experienced in the classroom by female Syrian refugee students. In contrast, a smaller percentage of male teachers also chose ‘never’ for this statement (25%). For the option ‘often’, 10% of male teachers selected this option, while no female teachers selected it. It is important to note that not a single respondent suggested that male and female Syrian refugee students were ‘always’ subjected to physical violence in the classroom by other students (see Figure 7-11). Building upon the figures and statistics, there seems to be a perception of increased violence among male schools as compared to female schools. This observation will be further explored and integrated with qualitative evidence in the discussion chapter, highlighting the substantial presence of bullying and violence within male schools.

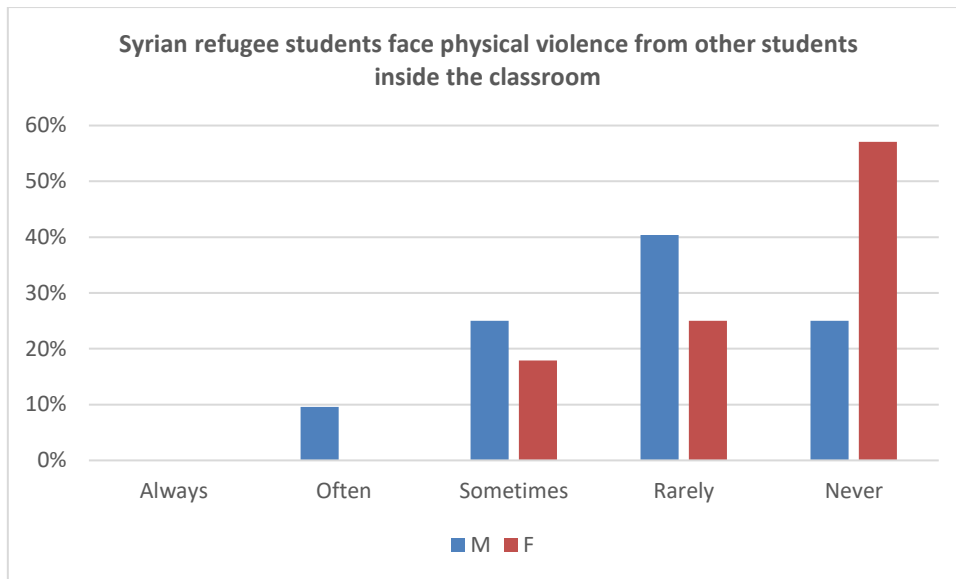


Figure 7-11 Group 1. Syrian refugee students face physical violence from other students inside the classroom

It is evident from Figure 7-12 that 39.6% of teachers who felt more experienced in working with Syrian refugee students selected the option 'rarely', a higher percentage than the 28% of teachers who felt less experienced choosing the option. Notably, this option (of the five options on the Likert scale) was most commonly selected by teachers who felt more experienced. Remarkably, similar proportions of teachers who felt more experienced (35%) and who felt less experienced (37.5%) selected 'never'. Similarly, both groups of teachers selected the option 'often' equally, at a percentage of 6.3%.

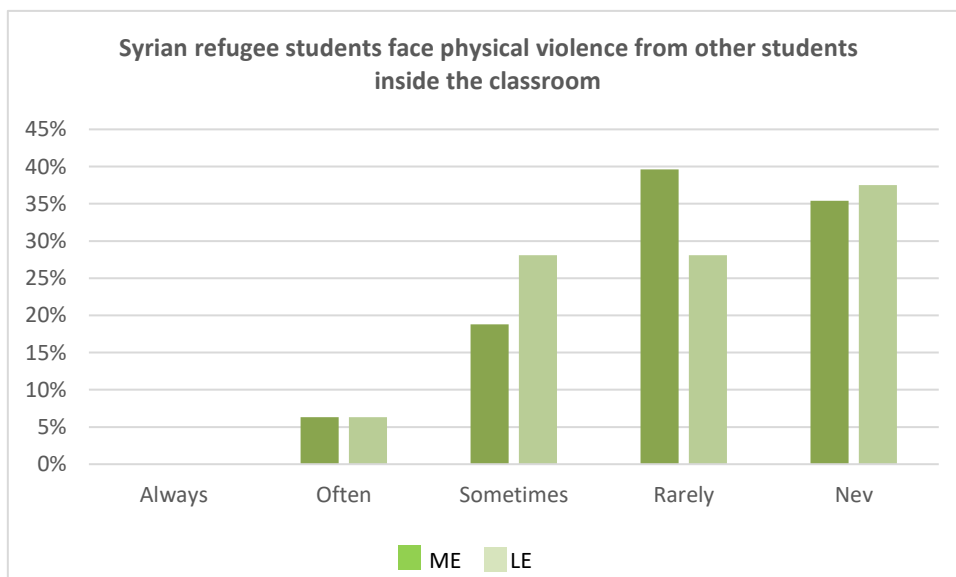


Figure 7-12 Group 2. Syrian refugee students face physical violence from other students inside the classroom

When assessing teachers' responses to Statement 3 ('Syrian refugee students suffer from discrimination in their treatment by other students'), we can see in Figure 7-13 (below) that most participants chose 'sometimes', 'rarely' and 'never' in response to this statement. Figure 7-13 shows that female teachers represent the highest percentage in choosing 'rarely' (39.3%), as compared to around 29% of male teachers. For the option 'sometimes', similar percentages of male and female teachers (31% and 28.6%, respectively) selected this option. Similarly, 28% of female teachers expressed that Syrian refugee students 'never' suffered from discrimination in their treatment by other students, while a slightly lower percentage of male teachers (26.9%) selected this option. The only differences between male and female teachers' responses concerned the options 'always' and 'often', as none of the male teachers stated that Syrian refugee students were 'always' discriminated against in school by other students, but a small percentage of female teachers (3.6%) selected this option. In contrast, none of the female teachers considered that discrimination was 'often' experienced by them, as compared to around 14% of male teachers who chose this option.

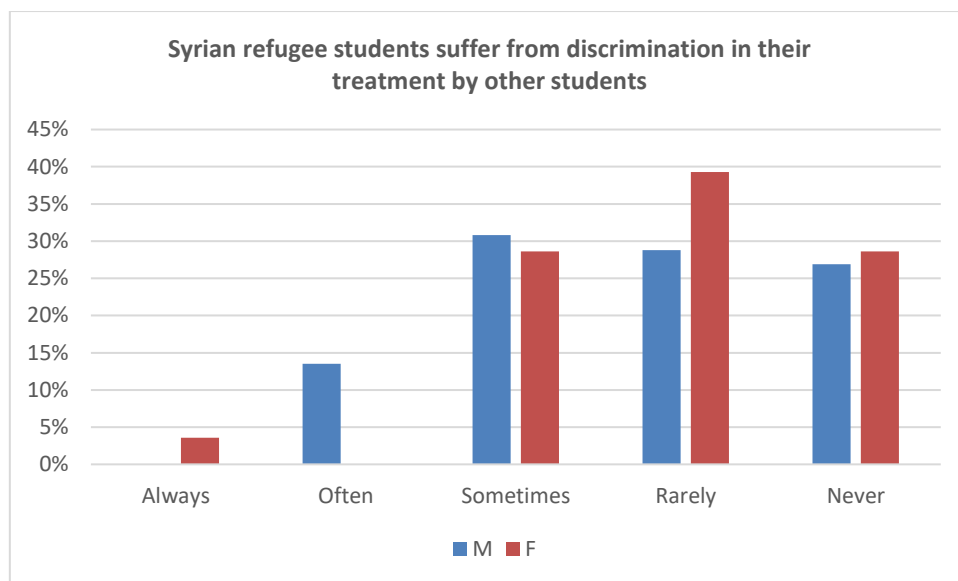


Figure 7-13 Group 1. Syrian refugee students suffer from discrimination in their treatment by other students

Regarding the groups of teachers who felt more and less experienced, had similar responses in their 5-point Likert scale choices in regard to Statement 3 in the third dimension. For example, 35.4% of teachers who felt more experienced chose the option 'rarely', as compared to 28% of teachers who felt less experienced. Following the same trend, 34.4% of teachers who felt less experienced teachers in working with Syrian refugee students

reported that Syrian refugee students ‘sometimes’ suffered from discrimination in their treatment by other students, while 27.1% of teachers who felt more experienced reported that this was the case. Teachers also chose the option ‘always’ at a similar rate, regardless of their experience, with around 2% of teachers who felt experienced selecting this option, and not a single teacher who felt less experienced selecting it (see Figure 7-14). Hence, the slight differences in teachers’ responses show an overall agreement in perspectives, indicating the importance of further exploration to understand the factors behind these small variations.

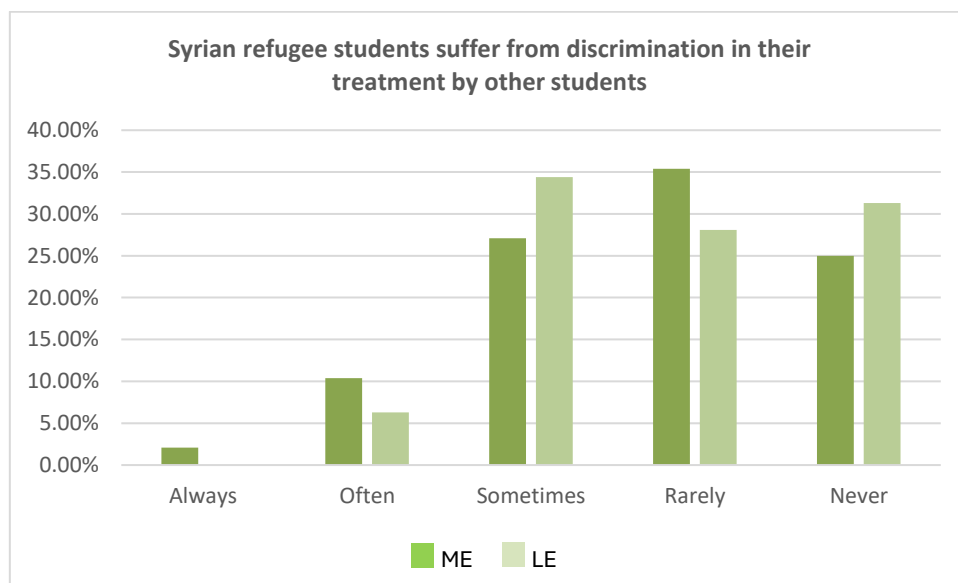


Figure 7-14 Group 2. Syrian refugee students suffer from discrimination in their treatment by other students

The similarities among female teachers’ responses were evident for Statement 4. Figure 7 15 (below) shows that 21.4% of them agreed that Syrian female refugee students ‘always’ and ‘often’ interacted with their non-Syrian peers confidently, while 10.7% of them chose ‘rarely’ and ‘never’ in response to the fourth statement. On the other hand, more than a third of male teachers (40.4%) agreed that Syrian refugee students ‘often’ interacted with their non-Syrian peers with confidence, and, similarly, around 36% asserted that this was ‘always’ the case. However, the options ‘rarely’ and ‘never’ accounted for less than 6% of male teachers’ responses. The views of male and female teachers become very clear when comparing their choices regarding the five options, especially when examining the first three options. For instance, around of 31% of male teachers agreed that Syrian refugee students ‘always’ interact with their non-Syrian peers with confidence, as compared to 21.4% of female teachers. Similarly, a greater proportion of male teachers chose the option

‘often’ (40.4%), as compared to around 21% of female teachers. More female teachers (35.70%) selected the option ‘sometimes’ than male teachers (17.3%). These variations suggest that, overall, female teachers may perceive Syrian refugee students' interactions with non-Syrian peers more neutrally, while male teachers express a more positive perspective, as reflected by the more frequent selection of the 'always' and 'often' categories.

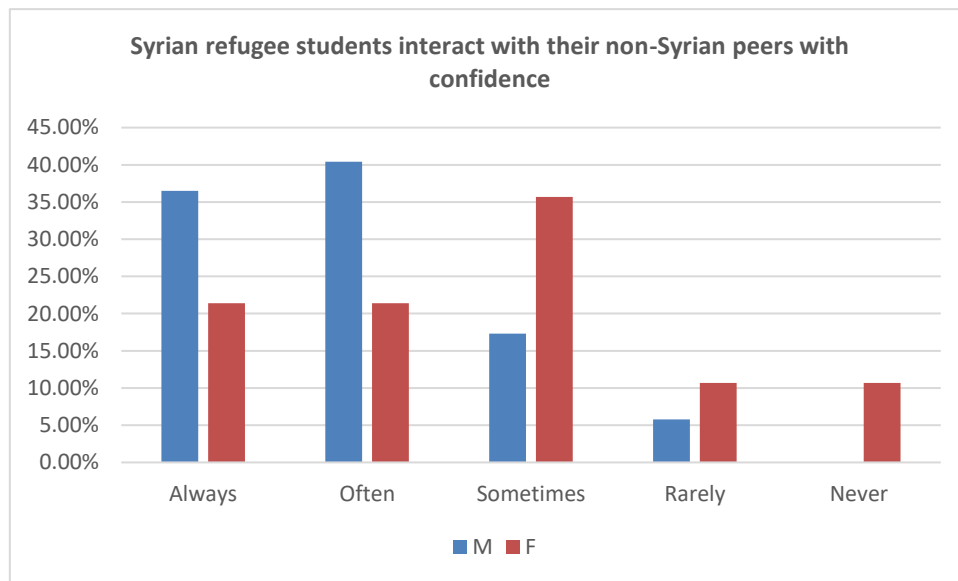


Figure 7-15 Group 1. Syrian refugee students interact with their non-Syrian peers with confidence

Regarding experienced teachers, 37% of them chose ‘always’, and 21% of teachers who felt less experienced chose the same option. For the option ‘often’, 40% of teachers who felt less experienced teachers chose this option, as compared to around 29% of their colleagues who felt more experienced. Notably, in response to this statement, only 2.1% of teachers who felt more experienced indicated that Syrian refugee students ‘never’ interacted with their non-Syrian peers with confidence, while 6.3% of teachers who felt less experienced declared that this was the case (see Figure 7-16).

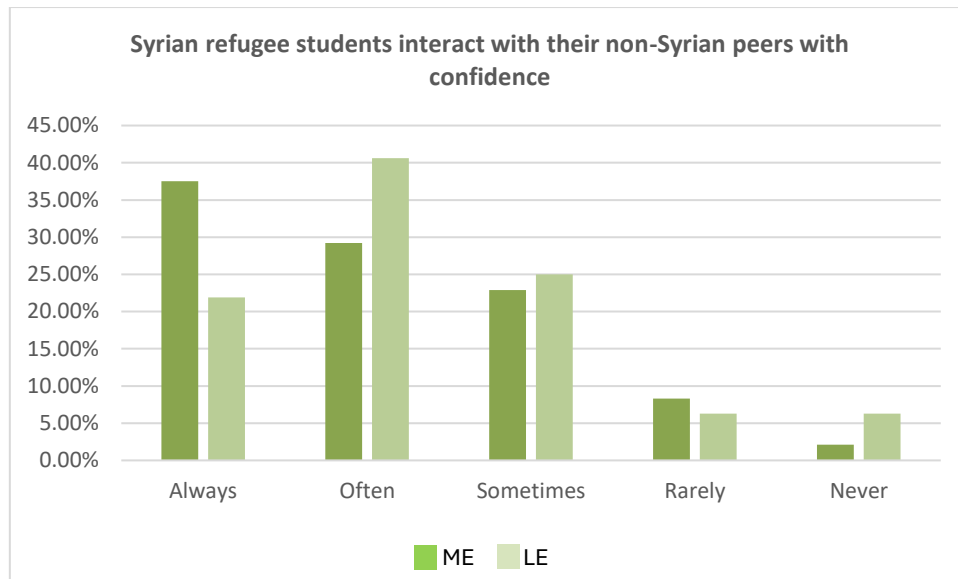


Figure 7-16 Group 2. Syrian refugee students interact with their non-Syrian peers with confidence

In terms of gender, only 3% of male and female teachers agreed that the level of interaction of Syrian refugee students with their Saudi peers was ‘always’ low due to their respective different cultural backgrounds; this represented the lowest percentage for this statement. Additionally, 26.9% of male teachers and 32.1% of female teachers, respectively, considered that the amount of interaction of Syrian refugee students with their Saudi peers was ‘sometimes’ and ‘rarely’ low due to their different cultural backgrounds. A notable difference is evident only for the option ‘often’, with 25% of male teachers selecting this option, as compared to only 7.1% of female teachers (see Figure 7-17), suggesting some variation in how often teachers perceive cultural differences affecting interaction. The statistics indicate a generally positive trend for Syrian refugee students in their interaction with Saudi peers. A low percentage of both male and female teachers (only 3%) believe that the interaction is at a consistently low level due to cultural differences. Most teachers, both male and female, consider the interaction to be occasional ('sometimes' and 'rarely'). Overall, the view of both cities’ teachers seems positive regarding the interaction between Syrian refugee students and their Saudi peers.

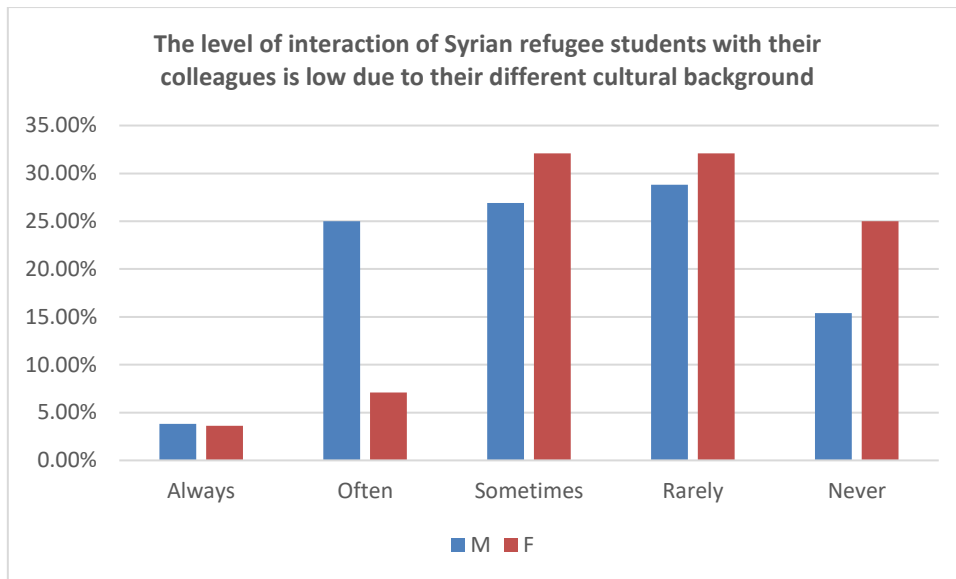


Figure 7-17 Group 1. The level of interaction of Syrian refugee students with their colleagues is low due to their different cultural backgrounds

Figure 7-18 (below) illustrated that 44% of teachers who felt less experienced expressed that these students' interaction with peers was 'sometimes' low due to their different cultural backgrounds. In contrast, only 18.8% of their experienced colleagues selected this option. Therefore, these percentages reveal a notable variation among this group of teachers (whether they possess experience or not) in terms of their selection compared to the other options. Similarly, presenting a different viewpoint, 19% of teachers who felt less experienced teachers reported that the interaction of Syrian refugee students with their peers was 'rarely' low due to their different cultural backgrounds, while 37% of their colleagues who felt more experienced reported this to be the case. On the other hand, approximately 6% of teachers who felt more experienced and none (0%) of those who felt less experienced selected the option 'always' in response to this statement. Based on the variations in the data, teachers who felt more experienced tend to have a more positive view regarding the impact of different cultural backgrounds on the interaction between Syrian refugee students and their peers, as compared to teachers who felt less experienced.

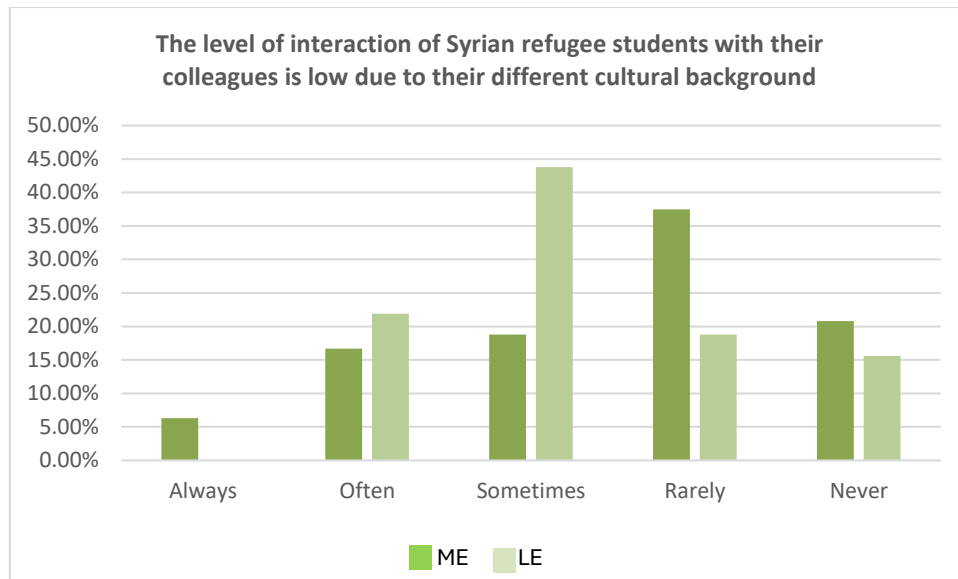


Figure 7-18 Group 2. The level of interaction of Syrian refugee students with their colleagues is low due to their different cultural backgrounds

7.5.4 Personal problems and family relationships:

This dimension consisted of five statements exploring the relationships between families, teachers, and schools, as well as how the teachers experienced these relationships and the new situation. As shown in Figure 7-19 below, concerning the first statement ('Syrian students face family problems'), 5.8 % to 10.7% of teachers from Group 1 (male and female) agreed that Syrian refugee students 'always' faced family problems. Meanwhile, 53.6% of female teachers believed that Syrian refugee students 'sometimes' faced family problems, while around 38% of male teachers agreed with this option, indicating a slight difference from the view of female teachers. Similarly, regarding the option 'often', more male teachers (38.5%) selected this response than female teachers (35.6%). These patterns suggest that the recognition of teachers regarding Syrian family problems is part of the students' experiences. The nuanced differences in responses may stem from individual perspectives, experiences, or other factors. In terms of qualitative evidence, most participants (school social workers, principals, and students) confirm the idea that most Syrian students experience some family problems while they are in Saudi Arabia.

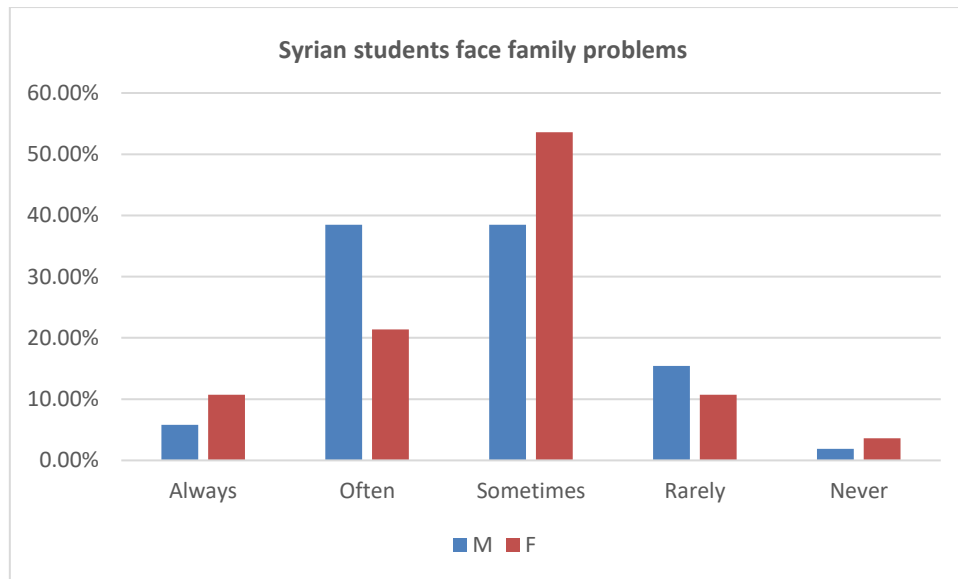


Figure 7-19 Group 1. Syrian students face family problems

Regarding Group Two teachers, 'sometimes' was the most frequently chosen option, with 37.5% of teachers who felt more experienced responding in this manner. In contrast, 53.1% of teachers who felt less experienced selected this option. Correspondingly, for the option 'often', teachers who felt more experienced tended to choose this option more often (37.5%) than their colleagues with less experience (25%). The differences appear to be around 15 percentage points between the two groups of teachers for the option 'sometimes', and 12.5 percentage points for the option 'often'. For the options 'always' and 'never', the percentages range between 2% and 10%, showing no substantial difference. There is only a 2% variation for the option 'rarely' between teachers who felt more experienced and teachers who felt less experienced (see Figure 7-20). Overall, these small variations indicate that experienced teachers tend to confirm the perspective of teachers who felt less experienced teachers. This may suggest that teachers spending more time and forming good relationships with students, and holding positive communication with Syrian families, might be able to identify their problems.

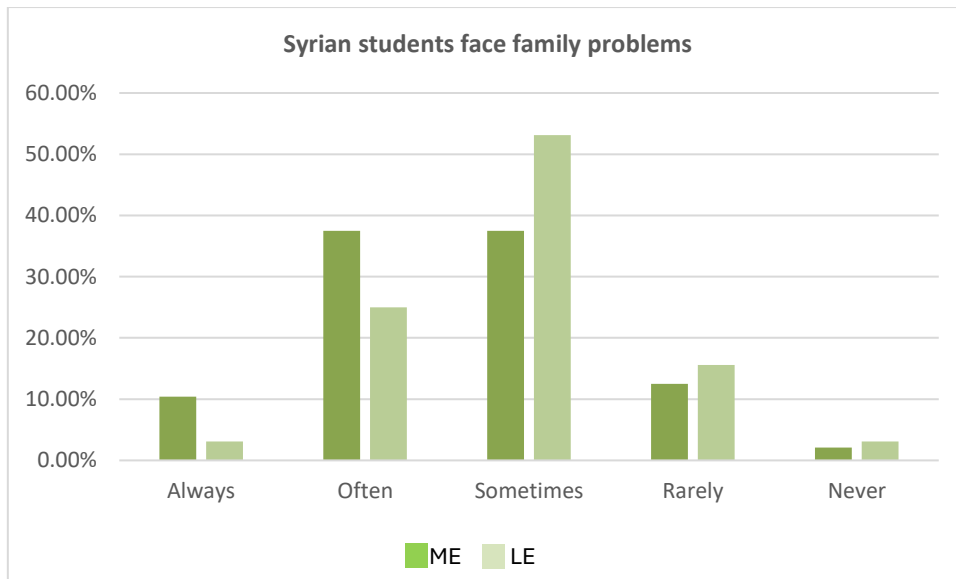


Figure 7-20 Group 2. Syrian students face family problems

The responses to the third statement ('Families of Syrian students communicate with teachers about their children's problems') indicate similar results, as illustrated in Figure 7-21. The option 'always' was selected by 10.7% of female teachers and 9.6% of male teachers. Likewise, 10.7% of female teachers and 7.7% of male teachers indicated that families of Syrian students 'never' communicated with teachers about their children's problems. A variation of 10 percentage points can be observed for the option 'sometimes', with approximately 42% of male teachers selecting this option, as compared to 32.1% of female teachers. Similarly, for the option 'often', female teachers (32.10%) tended to choose this option more frequently than their male counterparts (25%). In terms of nuanced variations, female teachers tend to hold a more positive view than male colleagues regarding the communication of Syrian families with teachers when students encounter problems.

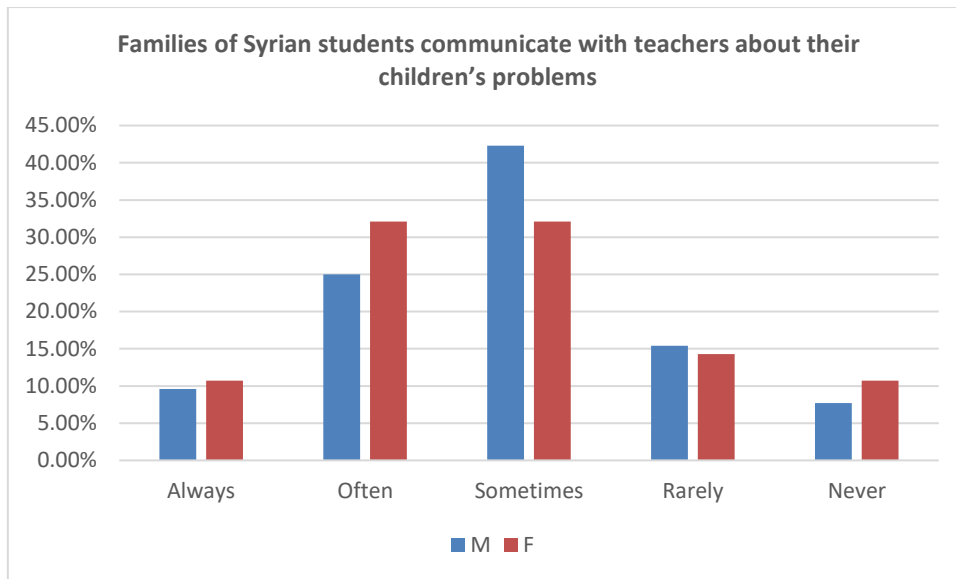


Figure 7-21 Group 1. Families of Syrian students communicate with teachers about their children's problems

A similar percentage resulted among Group Two teachers for the 'always' option, with 8.3% of teachers who felt more experienced, and approximately 12% of teachers who felt less experienced, reporting that the families of Syrian students always communicate with teachers about their children's problems. Similarly, for the 'never' option, as shown in Figure 7-22, 8.3% of teachers who felt more experienced selected this choice, while a slightly higher percentage of 9.4% resulted among less experienced teachers. The options 'often' and 'sometimes' exhibit slight variations among this group of teachers' responses, with 22.9% of experienced teachers selecting the former, as compared to approximately 34% of their less experienced colleagues. Regarding the latter option, 'sometimes', around 43% of teachers who felt experienced selected this choice, as compared to 31.3% of less experienced teachers.

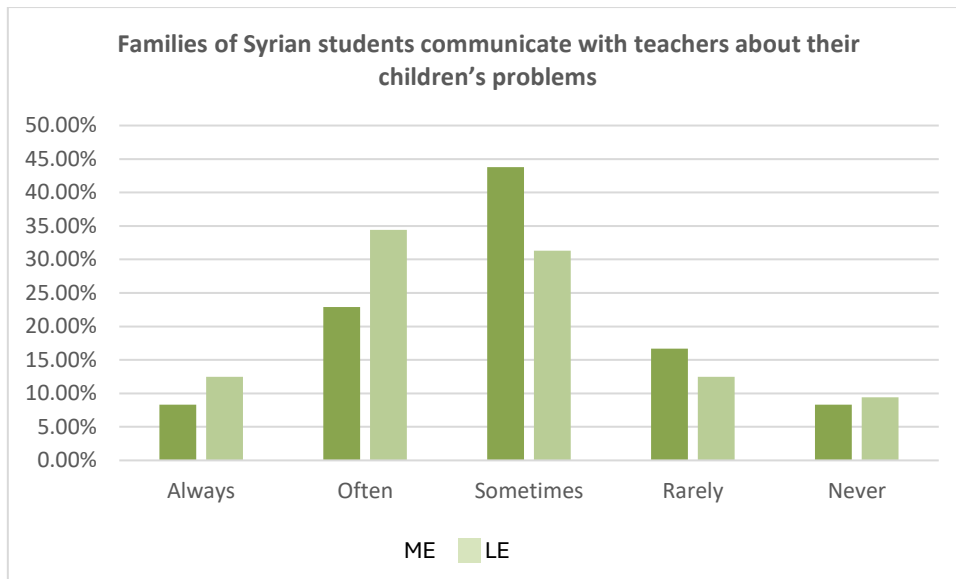


Figure 7-22 Group 2. Families of Syrian students communicate with teachers about their children's problems

7.6 Questionnaire open-ended questions findings

The fourth section of the online questionnaire survey, directed to 80 Saudi teachers in middle and high schools, aimed to identify their perception about the Syrian refugee students in terms of their integration into and challenges in schools. This section consisted of three open-ended questions concerning the problems facing Syrian refugee students, whether teachers had particular concerns about the Syrian refugee students, and any comments which teachers wished to add. It is important to note that these questions contributed to the findings, along with the closed-ended questions in the questionnaire and the findings from the interviews, which included 20 Syrian refugee students, ten school social workers and five principals in the two major cities in Saudi Arabia. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and sub themes and to explore patterns of these in the data in ways that addressed the research questions.

Two main themes emerged through the use of this approach. The first theme is the new social environment, which includes teachers' perceptions of the new cultural background of Syrian refugees, and the difficulty of adapting. Teachers' perceptions of the new cultural background comprise the fear of the impact on Saudi society, and difficulty of adapting contains alienation and financial status.

The second main theme (The different School environment) involves more complex internal themes than the first main theme (the new social environment), due to the exploration of the significant new experience of teachers working with the Syrian refugee students. Teachers' responses contributed to the generation of this theme, the different school environment, which includes the new situation and the importance of integration, teachers' perceptions (with two sub- sub themes: teachers' perceptions, and welcoming and motivation), and internal barriers which covers three sub- sub themes: the enrolment process, psychological and behavioural challenges, and discrimination.

It is important to note that the themes are derived from Saudi teachers' perspectives about the situation and the challenges of Syrian refugee students, and are not solely limited to the students' experience in schools, but also further explore the connected surroundings: their cultural background and their new situation in Saudi Arabia, which includes families and neighbourhoods. These overlapping and interconnected themes show the perception of Saudi school teachers regarding the integration of refugee students, and the obstacles they faced during this process in the country of refuge, specifically concerning schools as shown in Table (7-15).

Table 7-15 Teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of refugee students and the obstacles they faced

Theme	Description	Sub-Themes	Sub-Sub-Themes
1) The new social environment	This theme explores the social and cultural challenges teachers perceive when working with Syrian refugee students, particularly the cultural differences and the difficulties students face in adapting to their new environment.	(a) Teachers' perceptions of the new cultural background	1. The fear of the impact on Saudi society
		(b) Difficulty of adapting	1. Alienation 2. Financial status
2) The different School environment	This theme focuses on the internal school dynamics and teachers' experiences with integrating Syrian refugee students, including their perceptions of the students' needs, motivations, and the barriers within the school system.	(a) New situation and the importance of integration	N/A

		(b) Teachers' perceptions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Syrian refugee students' new experience in Saudi public schools 2. Welcoming and motivation
		(c) Internal barriers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enrolment process 2. Psychological and behavioural challenges 3. Discrimination

7.6.1 The new social environment

Several teachers (n=26) answering the open-ended questions shared the assumption that the Syrian refugee students were living in a new and different society to that of their original cultural background. The thematic map of the new school environment theme is shown in the below Figure (7-23).

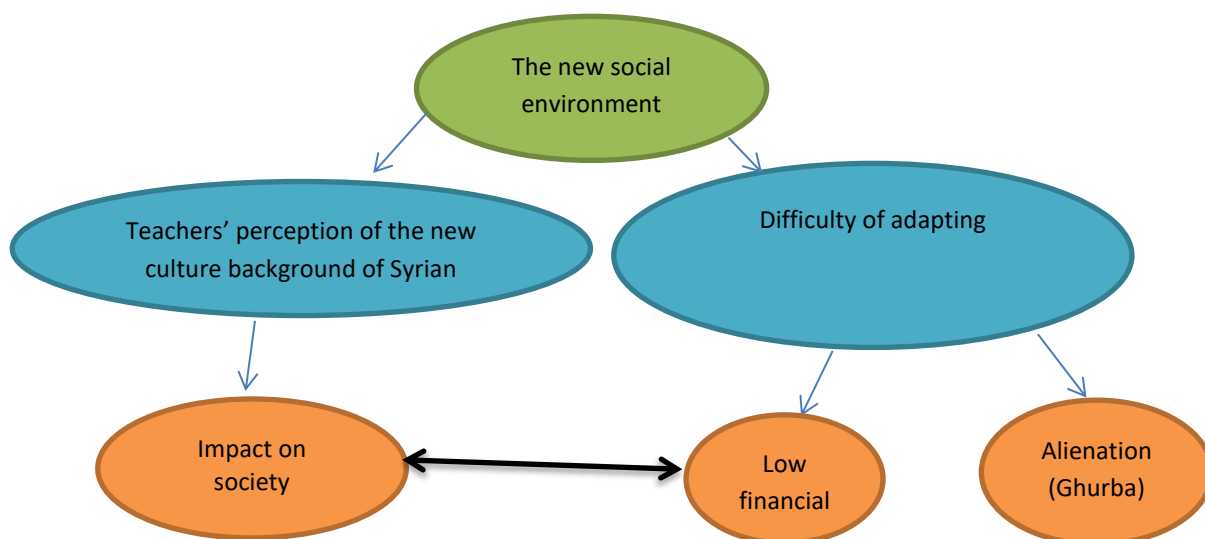


Figure 7-23 The new social environment

7.6.1.1 Teachers' perception of the new cultural background of Syrian refugees

According to the group of teachers, differences brought a negative impact to Saudi society, especially the school society. It is worth noting that this sub-theme emerged from the 26 codes which were allocated to teachers' responses. One of the issues teachers faced at school while working with Syrian refugee students was the element of cultural conflict between the Syrian community and Saudi society. As stated by the Saudi teachers, without prior knowledge of the culture and customs of Saudi society, Syrian refugee students'

adaptation process to their new environment decelerated. Consequently, existing differences segregated Syrian refugee students, preventing their integration into society, and into schools particularly. Teachers considered several differences to constitute inappropriate habits such as using profanity by Syrian refugee students, which threatened the school environment. One of the teachers confirmed this perspective by stating: ‘Some Syrian refugee students display bad behaviours in school that impact other students.’

7.6.1.1.1 Impact on society

In the same vein, another teacher remarked that Syrian refugee students brought new customs to Saudi society. For example, Syrian refugee students may use profanity in school when they talk to other students. Some school staff mentioned in interviews that several Syrian students used unacceptable words because they believed it was normal behaviour. As a result, teachers asserted the importance of the Syrian families in directing the child to follow guidance, and clarifying the school rules, while, at the same time, schools require the increasing awareness of Syrian families of the school system. In this regard, a teacher suggested that workshops were significant for Syrian refugee students and their families to ensure that they understood how to treat people in schools. It is important to note that maintaining a negative perception creates cautious attitudes in regard to socialising with newcomers, as mentioned by a teacher: ‘the interaction with Syrian refugees requires extreme caution’.

As mentioned by teachers the negative behaviour of Syrian refugee students, since they were not aware of the school’s system or discipline. As discussed earlier, some teachers indicated that Syrian refugee students were allocated to a new system, which differed from the system in Syrian schools, resulting in unfamiliar and different behaviours. As a result, teachers perceived these behaviours negatively; therefore, teachers required schools and families to educate students about the new system. A teacher highlighted: ‘Syrian refugee students must follow school discipline in order to change their bad behaviours that cause problems at school and impact the other pupils.’ However, such an issue, as discussed in the qualitative findings from the interviews, can be eliminated if Syrian refugee students study with their relatives who have spent a long time in Saudi Arabia, and are accustomed to the

culture. This is because their relatives are able to advise them regarding acceptable behaviours and guide their entry into Saudi schools.

7.6.1.2 Difficulty of adapting

The difficulty of adapting is divided into: alienation (Ghurba) and low financial status. The themes significantly focus on students and their intertwined circumstances, such as cultural background and the new situation in Saudi Arabia, including families and neighbourhoods.

7.6.1.2.1 Feeling of alienation (Ghurba)

The different cultural background of Syrian refugee students and their families led to the feeling of alienation in their new society, which is known in Arabic as Ghurba. According to teachers' perspectives, most Syrian refugees living in Saudi Arabia were more likely to gather and live in a specific neighbourhood with their family or relatives, preventing them from socialising with Saudi citizens, and, therefore, maintaining their isolation. A teacher mentioned that most Syrian refugees gathered in areas in the north of the city, resulting in dangerous activities that could compromise the security of the country. Although these living conditions were not the choice of the students, their families tended to choose these neighbourhoods for many reasons, including the support of relatives, who received them and provided finance and homes. However, other factors should not be neglected, as they play a significant role in shaping these circumstances, including the housing policy of the host nation, family poverty, and potential negative reactions from the host population (as discussed in the qualitative findings, and will be illustrated further in the discussion chapter).

Circumstances in the new environment produced other related noteworthy student behaviour, such as feelings of inferiority. Besides, family situations, such as living in certain neighbourhoods, resulted in a huge impact on the children in schools, differentiating them from other pupils due to the perceived absence of the required common, appropriate style of talking or living in Saudi society. Teachers who answered these three open-ended questions expanded their concerns to the negative influences of gathering and segregation. This was not merely because living without socialising or mixing with other local citizens led new Syrian refugee families and their children to be exposed to, and to engage in,

prohibited behaviours. The influence of this affected not only the Syrian refugee students, but also extended to other community members, including local students, thus constituting a threat to the school environment as a whole.

Furthermore, living away from others enhanced the lack of belonging of Syrian refugee students and their families to their new country (Saudi Arabia). Several teachers stated that some of the newcomers' bad behaviour was caused by the absence of a sense of belonging to Saudi Arabia. According to one of those teachers:

The country, represented by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, strives to provide a suitable environment for the Syrian brothers, but unfortunately some of them take advantage of this matter in a bad way, whether inside or outside schools, and this may damage facilities.

Another teacher asserted that 'I hope that some of them (Syrian refugees) value and appreciate the services provided by the Saudi government in terms of free education, health, support, and care'. Similarly, another teacher responded to the problem of Syrian refugee students by referring to alienation (Ghurba) and belonging to the country.

7.6.1.2.2 Low financial status

As previously discussed in the qualitative chapter, and specifically in the fourth theme, the challenges of Syrian refugee students, financial issues were commonly identified by school staff (school social workers and principals). Additionally, Saudi teachers revealed in the open-ended questions that one of the most substantial problems faced by Syrian students in school concerned financial issues due to the low income of their families. More than ten teachers placed particular focus on this issue in relation to difficulties in adapting due to different cultural background. Regardless, teachers mentioned the importance of schools in providing families, and especially students, with financial support to mitigate extreme poverty, in order to assist and integrate newcomers in schools. For instance, most school staff providing optional services assisted the Syrian refugee students to complete their studies, instead of dropping out of school, or leaving school at an early stage to fulfil familial responsibilities. These practices represent some of the flexible policies that most schools implement to assist newcomers in facing several challenges in their new environment.

Moreover, teachers mentioned that financial assistance benefited Syrian refugee students by minimising related psychological issues. A teacher stated that 'one of the concerns related to the Syrian refugee students is the urgent need and poverty causing psychological problems'. Another teacher indicated the following:

Financial problems of Syrian refugee students can be overcome with the help of teachers by setting up a small fund to meet the students' needs of clothes, school supplies and breakfast, so that students and their parents can devote themselves to the educational process.

As shown from the above quote, teachers shared volunteer responsibilities to help newcomers in their new schools, providing financial support. Furthermore, regarding the school staff's majority perspective on the theme of school support (previous chapter), teachers at schools with limited budgets made donations to ensure that children were provided with basic needs, assisting them to integrate into Saudi schools.

It is important to note that, due to the legal and financial situation of the Syrian families, teachers accepted that Syrian refugee students sometimes contribute income to their families in Saudi Arabia. A teacher mentioned: 'Some Syrian refugee parents prevent their children from coming to school in order to work with them in their business, which affects their academic level'.

Furthermore, some teachers revealed the impact of the low financial status of Syrian refugee families on their children in Saudi schools. For those teachers, students in general shared the same problems with their peers, but the most significant and apparent issue differentiating Syrian refugee students from others was their family's low income. One of the teachers suggested that 'students in general, with different nationalities, do not have any behavioural or psychological problems, unless they are financially suffering, which affects behaviours and self negatively', although one female teacher remarked: 'According to my experience, the situation of Syrian female students is the same as that of other students in education and behaviour'. Nevertheless, as discussed in the findings from the qualitative strand, financial issues related to Syrian refugee families were commonly recognised by school staff.

7.6.2 The different school environment

Most teachers' responses to the three open-ended questions suggested that Syrian refugee students experienced a different school environment from that in Syrian schools. In addition, simultaneously receiving such a huge influx of refugee students in Saudi schools was a new experience for teachers and students alike, generating unique challenges for both parties as shown in Figure 7-24, below.

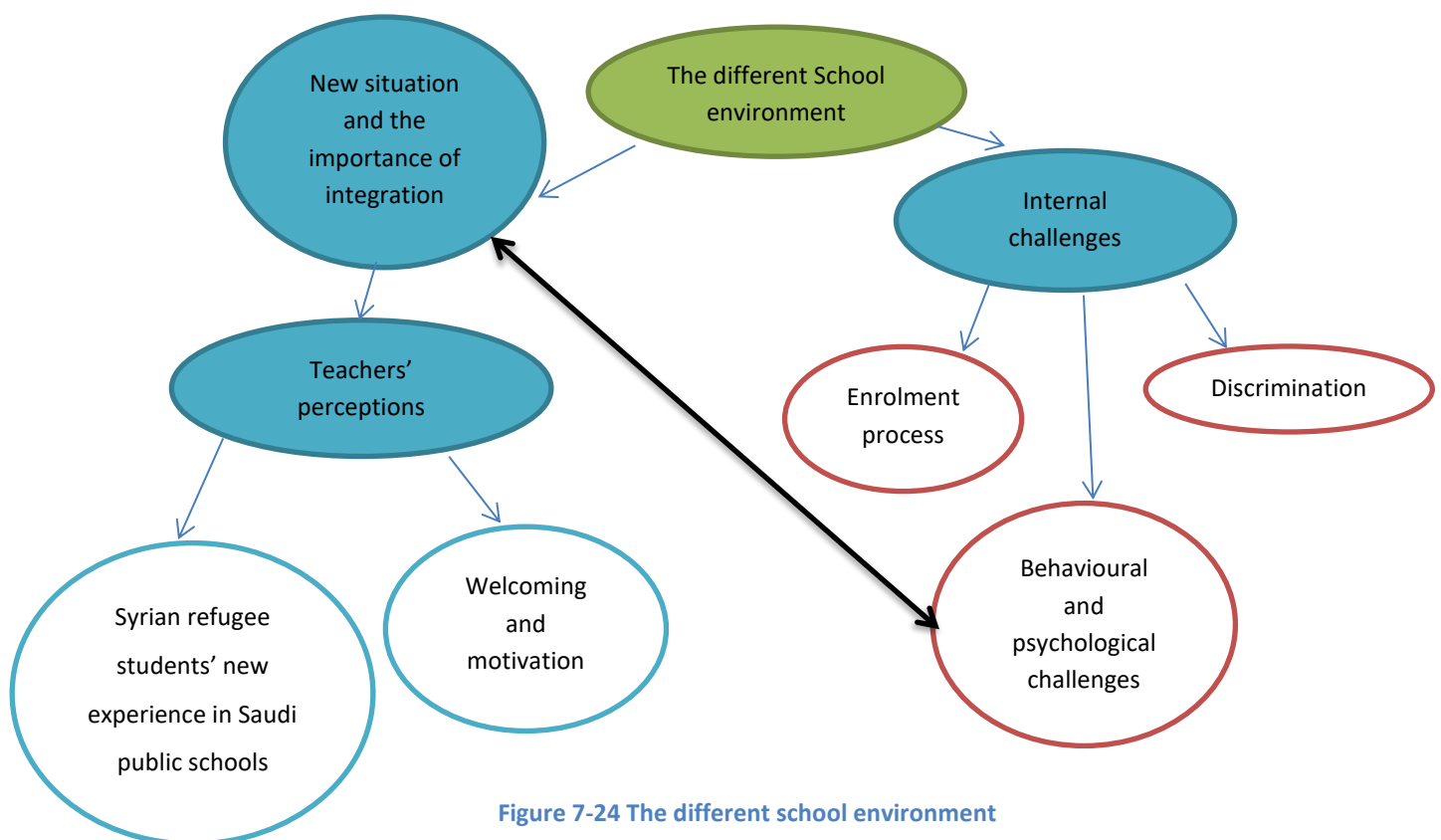


Figure 7-24 The different school environment

7.6.2.1 New situation and the importance of integration

Saudi school teachers who responded to the questionnaire confirmed that the integration of Syrian refugees was a new situation for them. Teachers highlighted that studying this situation was important because of their faith, as stated by one of the teachers: 'The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: 'Verily, the believers are like bricks of a building, each part strengthening the other, and the Prophet clasped his fingers together'. Thank you for this new topic.' From this quote, regardless of the teacher's

motivation, this topic (situation) was significant and understanding stemmed from the teaching of Islam. Teachers asserted that Syrian refugee students in their new schools need to be integrated and the teachers, for their part, must respond to this new influx in accordance with Islamic teachings.

In addition to the uniqueness of the integration of refugees as a situation in the educational field, teachers declared its sensitivity to be a matter of necessity, requiring intensive investigation into the experience of Syrian refugee students in the Saudi schools. Indeed, for the majority of teachers, integration programmes were considered to be necessary in the educational community, which required the creation of special initiatives related to the integration of minorities, especially refugees, given their difficult living conditions.

Reflecting on this emerging view of the importance of welcoming programmes, a teacher who responded to the questionnaire stated 'I thank the researcher for the interest in Syrian refugee students and the research idea, and may God help you'. Another teacher responded: 'Thank you for raising this important topic for the educational field in the Kingdom (of Saudi Arabia), and I ask God to grant you success'. Significantly, this perspective is commensurate with what was identified by school staff in the interview phase of this study. It became evident that the integration of refugee students was a new experience for teachers, and this constitutes a situation in urgent need of investigation and thorough exploration in the Saudi school system.

7.6.2.2 Teachers' perceptions

Teachers' perceptions will involve Syrian refugee students' new experience in Saudi public schools and welcoming and motivation.

7.6.2.2.1 Syrian refugee students' new experience in Saudi schools

The new experience of Syrian refugee students was recognised by Saudi school teachers working closely with those students. Although Syrian refugee student interviewees confirmed that the difficult school curricula in Syria, as compared to the simplicity of Saudi school curricula, helped them to achieve highly in new schools, several teachers doubted that this was one of the challenges faced by those students. However, according to those

teachers, this difficulty is linked to students studying at a different school level to that which they are supposed to study in Saudi schools. A teacher responded that the integration of Syrian refugee students with regard to new school curricula was one of the problems they faced when attending Saudi schools. In addition, teachers also believed that the nature of receiving Syrian refugee students, as a new experience, was apparent because some students at the beginning of the school year were not aware of the educational system. As a result, those students needed to comprehend the new educational system in order to avoid related issues, such as poor academic achievement. One teacher suggested that if Syrian refugee students had not previously attended Saudi school, they could experience difficulties in learning, which also generated other problems, such as integration issues with other students.

7.6.2.2.2 Welcoming and motivation

‘We must help the Syrian students with everything we can, given their harsh conditions and their displacement from their country because they are Muslim brothers, and the support is a religious duty.’

Teachers indicated the importance of welcoming as a factor that served the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi schools. As discussed in the findings of the interviews with school social workers and school principals, the motivation for working with refugee students stemmed from the religion and faith of Islam. A teacher, in supporting this viewpoint, explained that people must support each other, and all of us will return to God after death. Another teacher mentioned: ‘Syrian refugee students are our brothers in Islam, so we must welcome and support them, and we must support everyone who seeks refuge in this country, whatever his or her nationality.’ Such a welcoming environment for Syrian refugee students was perceived as an important factor in their successful integration into the Saudi schools. It is worth noting that teachers’ welcoming attitudes supported new children to accept the school new environment, as well as eliminating related psychological issues regarding the new situation of Syrian refugee students. In line with the qualitative findings emerging from the students’ interviews, this welcoming attitude creates and improves positive relationships between Syrian refugee students and their teachers, reflecting a suitable school environment for the students’ integration. (This perspective will

be considered further in the discussion chapter, including data from both data sets).

Therefore, teachers' sympathies with Syrian refugee families in Saudi Arabia, due to their lost homeland and new living circumstances, encourage them to assist the newcomers and support them to maintain their dignity while attending Saudi school.

7.6.2.3 Internal challenges

The internal challenges of Syrian refugee students will be discussed through the enrolment process, psychological and academic issues, and discrimination.

7.6.2.3.1 The enrolment process

The enrolment process was one of the challenges revealed by teachers in relation to Syrian refugee students, as Syrian refugee students must meet the conditions for enrolment into Saudi schools. These conditions and requirements depend hugely on official documents, such as a student's passport and school certification from the Syrian schools they had attended before seeking refuge in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, in accordance with the internal policies of Saudi Arabia, Syrian refugee students must hold either a visitor visa or residence permit.

As explored in the findings of the interviews with school social workers, school principals and Syrian refugee students reached agreement on this issue, which was evident for many reasons. For example, some Syrian refugee students revealed that losing their official documents, as they escaped their country of origin suddenly and without time to plan, resulted in their enrolment into Saudi schools being delayed.

Furthermore, a relatively small group of teachers (n=3) have concerns regarding the large number of Syrian refugee students at certain Saudi schools, which must be taken into consideration when enrolling new students. One teacher noted: 'Schools must not enrol more than 5% of Syrian students at each school'. Interviewed Syrian refugee students have explained that although there are many Syrian students in schools, Syrian refugee students are more likely to create friendships with Saudi students. Notably, some schools, located in certain neighbourhoods, tend to have a high proportion of Syrian students, whether they are refugees or have a residence permit.

7.6.2.3.2 Psychological and academic challenges

Psychological and academic challenges were mentioned by teachers as one of the issues they observed while working with Syrian refugee students. Such an issue, as discussed in the qualitative findings, links to the circumstances of the newcomers, pre- and post-migration. Additionally, some teachers considered that the psychological issues of the Syrian refugee students attending Saudi schools are caused by the urgent need and poverty they experience in Saudi Arabia. One teacher also observed that emotional reactions to peers during interactions in school were not acceptable. Such an issue led to their not being accepted by other pupils, expanding the distance between them, resulting in negative perceptions.

Moreover, the psychological challenges of the Syrian refugee students appeared due to their unclear future in Saudi Arabia; consequently, students experienced the loss or lack of motivation to learn or to finish school. A teacher indicated this by stating that 'the problem is lack of motivation to learn in the shadow of an uncertain future for Syrian refugee students, especially female students. In this regard, high school students participating in this study acknowledged their own fear of not enrolling in Saudi universities, which impacts their studying by triggering anxiety and stress during their time in school, even though, according to some teachers, the Syrian refugee students were eager to learn and show superiority in schools. Therefore, teachers were aware of psychological challenges related to the circumstances of Syrian refugee students.

7.6.2.3.3 Discrimination

Although some teachers believed Syrian refugee students discriminated against other students, they themselves faced discrimination in their new environment. According to several teachers, Syrian refugee students endured discrimination in the Saudi school which most likely linked to the changing environment and new culture. In this regard, a teacher observed the perception of the local students towards the newcomers (Syrian refugee students), which caused this inappropriate practice of discrimination. Findings from the interviews with the Syrian refugee students highlighted that, when they first attended Saudi school, they faced such practices from other students owing to their unfamiliar local dialect.

Teachers confirmed this perspective through the open-ended questions, mentioning that the dialect/linguistic issue was among the problems faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi school. In addition, the response of one teacher indicated that those Syrian refugee students were treated unfairly by other teachers as well: 'Discrimination from teachers happened to Syrian students, as teachers always exclude non-Saudi female students from activities, even if the other students are eligible (as I noticed during my work), and this is not fair'. It became apparent in interviews with other school staff that some teachers have practised discrimination, which may to some extent be attributed to their lack of experience in the educational field; and such an attitude can be addressed and minimised by raising the awareness of the new teachers.

7.7 Summary

This chapter has been principally devoted to reporting the data obtained from the questionnaire survey with teachers. This explored their experiences and views about Syrian refugee students': i) needs and interventions to address them; ii) behavioural challenges, iii) challenges in school and beyond, and iv) personal problems and family relationships. These findings were then examined alongside the qualitative data generated from interviews with Syrian students, school social workers and principals.

Both sets of data suggested that school staff in Saudi schools had not been formally and fully prepared to work with minorities in general, and refugee students in particular. However, all but one of the teachers indicated that even though they had not attended a training programme before working with Syrian refugee students, they were able to understand the needs of the Syrian students. Several school staff who participated in the interviews indicated that, due to the closeness of their culture, religion, and language, they were able to understand the needs of the newcomers and work with them. In this sense school staff had benefitted from earlier interactions with Syrians living and working in Saudi Arabia. While some of the school social workers argued that there was no need for specialist programmes to prepare them to work with refugee students, since they felt they faced similar problems in school to those of Saudi students, teachers' responses suggested that many were aware of the different or additional challenges faced by Syrian refugee

students, and they indicated that these students would seek help from them when facing difficulties.

It is evident from both sets of data that receiving refugee students with war experience was a new experience for all school staff. Facilitating the integration of refugee students requires understanding of their background and needs. School staff interviewed agreed that they had not expected such an influx and, as a result, they relied on their personal and practical experience in dealing with, and providing services for, newcomers. Here, it is important to underline that teachers, as well as school principals and social workers, benefitted from having worked with Syrian students who studied in Saudi Arabia before the Syrian crisis in 2011. This had helped them in understanding Syrian culture, style of thinking, and manner of speaking. The new experience of receiving refugee students with war experience had required school staff to learn and be prepared to provide services to ensure the integration of refugees, to maintain and improve their well-being in Saudi Arabia.

In terms of challenges faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools, the majority of students had experienced discrimination and bullying during their early days in school, the result of unfamiliarity with Saudi cultural norms and dialect. However, the overall message from school staff and students alike was that these problems reduced over time as the Syrian students gained confidence in interacting with others, understanding Saudi culture and forming friendships.

Further analysis revealed little difference in the views and experiences between teachers in cities A and B. between male and female teachers and those with more and less experience in working with Syrian refugee students.

Finally, the chapter presented teachers' responses to three open-ended questions concerning challenges faced by teachers when teaching Syrian refugee students, and inviting any further comments which they wished to include. Challenges were associated with understanding the cultural background of Syrian refugee students, their difficulties in adapting to life in Saudi Arabia, their low financial status and feelings of alienation. However, these challenges were counterbalanced by the strong motivation of teachers, supported by their Islamic faith, to welcome and support the incoming students, not only in school but in facing challenges at home and in the wider community.

The following chapter provides a fuller discussion of these findings in the context of evidence and argument from the wider literature discussed in chapter 2, and moves to engage directly with the four research questions concerning: i) the experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools; ii) the needs of Syrian refugee students and obstacles they encounter in schools; iii) difficulties encountered by teachers and schools when educating Syrian refugee students, and iv) the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students to integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools.

Chapter 8 Discussion of findings

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study has been to explore the role of school social workers in integrating Syrian refugee students into Saudi schools. Semi-structured interviews (school social workers, principals and Syrian refugee students) and open-ended questions in the survey of teachers revealed the current experiences in Saudi schools suggesting that Syrian refugee students' immediate needs are recognised and active attempts are made to address these by teaching and non teaching staff.

Over the past century, there has been a dramatic increase in displaced refugees' movements to neighbouring countries and further afield. Research in this field has been led by 'developed nations' focussing initially on the integration of refugees into their own societies. Such research has extended to the experiences of refugees and host countries in other parts of the world, and there is a body of research exploring the experiences of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, particularly Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. However, less is known about experiences in Saudi Arabia, a country that remains outside the reach of the UN Convention on Refugees, and conceptualises refugees as guests. In particular there is a gap in knowledge relating to the responses of social care and education professionals in the integration of refugee children into schools.

This discussion chapter provides an analytical overview of the findings, with discussion and integration of the major findings (both qualitative and quantitative), in the context of relevant literature and previous knowledge of the subject. The analysis will be organised as follows: **(i)** The importance of past and new experiences for Syrian refugee children in their new land including the impact of war, the role of fathers in engaging with schools, cultural similarities and challenges, and post-migration stressors affecting children and their families. **(ii)** Saudi schools and families of Syrian refugee students; and **(iii)** the practical and professional approach of Saudi school social workers to the integration of Syrian refugee students (presented in the following chapter).

Discussion of the findings and their significance is shaped by the following research questions:

- To explore the roles played by school social workers in Saudi Arabia, and how they are helping refugee students to integrate into the Saudi schools.
- To study the impact of the Saudi school environment on Syrian refugee students.
- To investigate the challenges of Syrian refugee students experience both inside school and outside of school.
- To identify the roles of Saudi teachers in the school environment in relation to refugee students.
- To identify the interventions, using school social workers' (school counsellors') professional services, that meet the needs of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia.

To achieve the above objectives, significant research questions arose as follows:

1. What are the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools?
2. What are the needs of Syrian refugee students and what obstacles do they encounter in schools?
3. What difficulties are encountered by teachers and schools when educating Syrian refugee students?
4. What is the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students to integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?

As the study findings have been revealed across the previous chapters, they have contributed to building up a model of integration based on the lived experiences of Syrian refugee students, school social workers, school principals and teachers in two Saudi Arabian cities. The model allows for an understanding of how these experiences relate to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted experiences of the Syrian students.

This model, divided into three primary stages: pre-migration, post-arrival, and longer-term residence in Saudi Arabia, highlights the role of school social workers in facilitating the refugee students' integration into schools. During the pre-migration stage, Syrian refugee students endured significant hardships due to the war in Syria that subjected them to trauma, loss, and instability. These hardships led to practical and psychological challenges

from the loss of essential official documents to difficulties in adapting to new life under constrained circumstances in a new environment. For many children this involved life without one or both parents. Upon arrival in Saudi Arabia, Syrian refugee students faced new sets of challenges both in and beyond school. The students' experiences, including poverty, school absences, lateness, and sleeping problems, also constituted challenges for school staff in their attempts to support the students' integration into school. These involved processes of enrolment and the development of relationships with peers and staff. Parents' involvement, considered essential to provide stability and support, could not always be relied on, and school social workers played important roles in navigating these challenges. During this stage, the role of school staff, sponsors and charities was also vital in providing necessary support and resources to facilitate the integration process.

In the third stage, having spent significant time in Saudi Arabia, the process of integration became easier as Syrian refugee students adapted to their new environment and built relationships with their peers, teachers, and school staff, fostering a sense of belonging that is crucial for their integration. School social workers played a central role during this stage, offering ongoing support and guidance. Their efforts included not only providing individualised assistance to students but also coordinating with various stakeholders in the education system to ensure a comprehensive support network. This collaboration enhanced the schools' ability to respond to students' evolving needs, including psychosocial challenges, academic adjustments, and cultural integration. Furthermore, external partnerships with local organisations, charities, and community services often supplemented the school's internal resources, providing additional layers of support. Such coordination helped to create a stable, supportive environment where students were able to thrive academically and socially. This collective effort was vital in maintaining students' sense of belonging and ensured they were fully integrated into the school community, allowing them to successfully navigate the challenges of their new lives in Saudi Arabia. Figure 8-1 illustrates this process of integration in its entirety and is explored further in this and the following chapter.

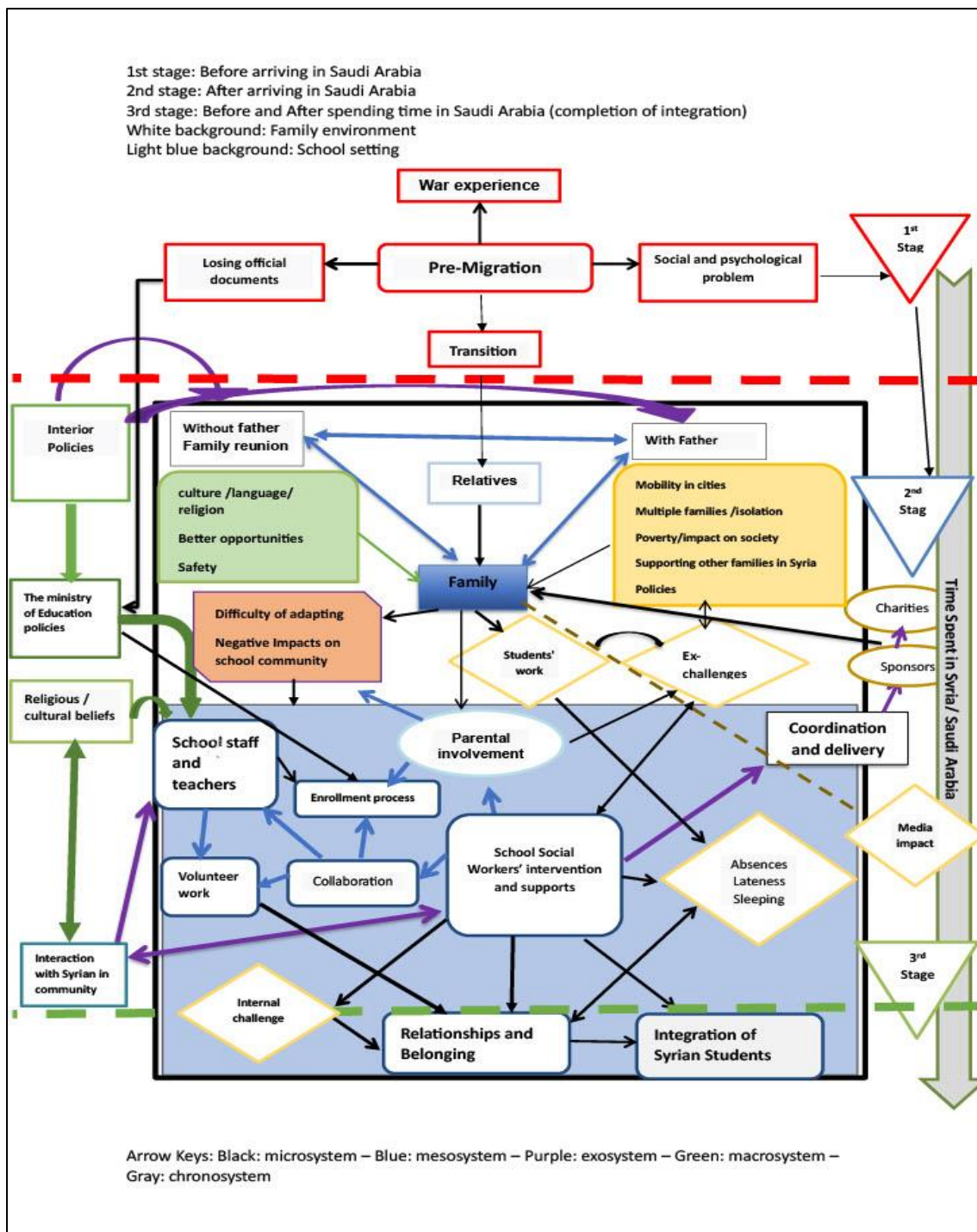


Figure 8-1 Integration model

8.2 Summary of the major findings

The study findings show schools' experiences receiving the unexpected influx of Syrian refugee students after the Syrian crisis in 2011. Schools and their staff were not fully prepared to receive and integrate the substantial numbers.

The participating school social workers and principals did not mention any specific programme that serves newcomers regarding integration aside from the programme that they received and implemented from the Ministry of Education for all students. They used the available resources to serve the newcomers in their new land and expected to treat them the same as other Saudi and non-Saudi students. However, the Syrian refugee students had specific needs and challenges. School staff confirmed that they relied on their past and practical experience regardless of specific programmes for the integration of Syrian refugee students into schools, and this experience was motivated by their religious and cultural beliefs as they assisted the Syrian refugee students.

School staff were aware of the background of Syrian refugee students, whose exposure to war impacted the students in their new schools. This is because most of the refugee students arrived in Saudi Arabia after the Syrian crisis with negative social, psychological, and financial situations. However, school staff tried their best to improve the well-being of the children. All groups of study participants mentioned that positive school and family environments help children integrate and improve their well-being. Such positive environments include the refugee students having positive relationships with school staff, local students, and their families to avoid isolation. However, the findings show that discrimination and bullying are experienced in schools due to the negative behaviour of some local students, but this behaviour seems to diminish in intensity once Syrian refugee students acquire the local dialect and form close friendships. The majority of interviewed Syrian refugee students, particularly the older, high school, students, indicated that they had not faced any bullying or discrimination (or had rarely faced it) compared to their early days or their first year in Saudi schools. Rather, they were able to create strong friendships with other students, especially local students, and formed bonds like those of brothers and sisters, providing substantial support to each other. The second reason for isolation was that the Syrian refugee families lived in particular areas in some neighbourhoods, and this did not provide good opportunities for the children to socialise and interact with local citizens.

Syrian refugee students and school staff identified different challenges inside and outside schools regarding the integration of Syrian students. For example, students suffer from lack of financial support as well as bullying and were at risk of maltreatment. School staff try to use the resources available to them to help the children overcome such challenges.

Although such services including consultation, guidance, parental engagement and financial aid are provided for all students, Syrian refugee students appear to be in more urgent need. Some challenges disappeared or were overcome by the Syrian refugee students as they spent more time in Saudi Arabia and through the support they received from their schools and families. Most students formed positive relationships and a sense of belonging.

8.3 The importance of past and new experiences for the children in their new land

This section discusses the findings in more detail and describes the integration process of Syrian refugee students into Saudi schools. It focuses on two key areas: the importance of past and new experiences for the children in their new environment—Saudi schools—and the experiences of the families of Syrian refugee students. The section will cover the first stage, pre-migration, and the second stage, post-arrival, of the integration model.

8.3.1 The impact of war on children and the new experience of Saudi schools

Syrian refugee students had to start the journey towards re-building their lives after leaving their country of origin, due to the forced migration related to the war and conflict in Syria; as they reached Saudi Arabia, the majority of them lacked suitable financial, psychological and social support, which naturally impacted their resettlement. Many Syrian refugee students sought refuge in Saudi Arabia with their fathers and other family members, such as mothers, brothers and sisters, while some were received by fathers who already worked in Saudi Arabia before the Syrian crisis. Syrian refugee students mentioned that the impacts of war included loss of family members due to the conflict in Syrian cities. This finding is strongly linked to other studies in the literature, indicating such traumatic situations among young refugees (Duman and Snoubar, 2017). Most of the Syrian refugee students in this study who had been impacted by their previous experience were not particularly young when they left Syria (i.e. 9 to 17 years old, ages at which they would attend middle and high schools), so would be likely to experience the full effects of trauma and loss.

Although Saudi schools did not expect to receive such a huge number of refugee students, school social workers were aware of the possibility and emphasised the idea of the best available intervention programme for mitigating the effects of previous war-related shocks and conditions. The demographics of Syrians in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia altered after

the conflict in Syria due to the arrival of a significant number of displaced persons. As a result, a large number of pupils arrived unexpectedly in Saudi schools. According to Osmandzиковic (2020), from 2011 to 2018 Saudi schools received 141.646 Syrian students who held visitor visas which led to overcrowding in some schools.

School social workers noted the backgrounds of the children in terms of culture and previous experience. In this scenario, school social workers were aware of the importance of holistic programmes that would serve the newcomers. Literature suggests that helping refugee students with challenges related to war experience must not neglect the background of the children (i.e., their previous experience) and their new situation, i.e., the current situation at the time of intervention; (Clancy, 1995; Rousseau and Guzder, 2008; Teator, 2014). The findings highlighted such plans, as teachers participating in the questionnaire reported that the school social workers were always or often implementing social programmes to overcome the problems faced by Syrian students helping to reduce their war-related problems.

The findings showed no specific programme linked to war related trauma, rather programmes were aimed at receiving and integrating refugee students into Saudi schools. Furthermore, school staff had not expected to receive huge number of refugee students, leading to a need to recognise the importance of a specific programme for newcomers. This is because the school staff's only personal experiences of familiarity with an influx of refugee students occurred during the Gulf War, at which time Kuwaitis sought refuge in Saudi Arabia. However, those school staff were students at the time, and not responsible for providing services for the Kuwaiti students. For school staff, their experience of refugees in Saudi Arabia prior to 2011 had this been personal rather than professional in the main.

To help newcomers, school staff's past experiences must be linked to the preparation programme to provide professional services to integrate newcomers and at the same time preserve their dignity and ensure their well-being. This is because for minorities, both refugees and immigrants, school is generally both a source of disruption and a place of aspiration and achievement (Cheetham, 1972).

The achievement of positive educational and personal experiences for refugees requires schools to be very disciplined (i.e., maintain positive student behaviours, encourage

students to respect one another, ensure they arrive on time, and apply any necessary sanctions), and to create good relations between newcomers and local school staff and students, which may involve facilitating positive communication between the parties.

Disruption for newcomers occurs when, for example, schools lack programmes involving parents in schools, or when weak relationships exist between school teachers and newcomers (Cheetham, 1972). Therefore, for Syrian refugees, schools which do not have formal programmes may either exacerbate the challenges they are facing, such as poverty and bullying, or pressure them to integrate to achieve advantages and improve their well-being.

Programmes are important in helping students adapt to new places, especially for those who have experienced war and crises which might lead to trauma (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007; Carlson et al., 2012; Duman and Snoubar, 2017). All School staff agreed that some refugee students have experienced difficult incidents, such as losing parents, and some students mentioned that they have lost a close family member, which means that school staff including social workers must be prepared to understand the necessary interventions to address such incidents among newcomers. According to ecological theory, other systems, such as the family and its structure, might negatively impact the child in school; therefore, applying such a model is significant in helping newcomers in their new schools. This is especially relevant for the 40% of participating teachers who felt less experienced.

Although school staff, especially school social workers were aware of the crises the Syrian refugee students experienced before and after arriving the country, some of them believed that a specific intervention programme for Syrian refugee students might separate them from other students, exposing those minorities to bullying and discrimination. The majority of school social workers interviewed mentioned that their first task after receiving Syrian refugee students is to conduct an assessment to understand the children's circumstances. Such tasks give school social workers and principals some information about Syrian refugee students which is then provided to teachers. However, assessments do not constitute a formal programme. They are undertaken by school social workers, who do not appear to have received specific training on working with refugee children. Although the efforts of school social workers reflect the importance of the ecological model, they may be unaware

of the model; rather acting instinctively from their intention to help newcomers to understand their new circumstances.

Each country that receives refugees has its own path and programme of integration (Snoubar and Duman, 2015), and the rules of the Ministry of Education are linked to the Saudi government's internal regulations, which control how Syrian refugees are enrolled in schools. The findings show the absence of formal programmes linked to the policies of the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia, from which practitioners in schools and school social workers receive their plans and guidance each year. Although the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a history of receiving refugees, (Al, 1994; Batrawy, 2017; KSRelief, 2017; Bastaki, 2018; Hitman 2019), caring for and supporting minorities or refugee children in schools is a new experience for most Saudi school and staff. Consequently, addressing the absence or lack of clarity of specific policies or programme is imperative to serve refugees.

In my view, the existing culture and policies around receiving refugees and their children may partly explain the absence of formal programmes. Receiving refugees as brothers and sisters is reflected in the way staff treat and serve the incoming children in schools, seeking to support the children equally with their peers. Although the treatment of Syrian refugee students by individual school staff is important, formal programmes might be expected to maximise the benefits to those students. This is because some school staff lack awareness about the refugee students' issues and might not provide positive treatment for newcomers, despite their good intentions.

8.3.2 Bureaucratic barriers to school enrolment'

The most striking finding to emerge from this study is that the working situations of fathers of refugee students shape the nature of Syrian refugee students' arrival at Saudi schools. Refugee students either arrived with their families in 2011, or later with visitor status, or were received by fathers who were already resident in Saudi Arabia and therefore had a valid Iqamah (residential permission) to work. Regardless, refugee students have the right to attend Saudi schools, with formal regulations for enrolment provided by the Ministry of Education.

In order to comprehend the interconnection between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education with regard to children's enrolment in schools, it is important to consider the overlapping systems. A key example of this is the requirement for fathers to possess a valid residence permit or visitor visa, which enables their children to enrol in schools. Consequently, if fathers are unable to obtain permission from the Ministry of the Interior (macrosystem), their children are unable to enrol and integrate into Saudi schools (microsystem). This administrative interplay helps to illustrate the crucial role played by interacting 'systems' in facilitating or hindering children's access to education.

Nevertheless, school staff participating in this study (school social workers and principals through interviews, and teachers through the open-ended question from the questionnaire) confirmed that the first obstacle which is commonly experienced by refugee students in schools is the loss of official documents, such as educational certification, which delays their enrolment into schools. Several students supported this finding due to the unplanned transition and the conflict, they lost or forgot to bring important documents to their destination. These findings directly align with the previous findings of Alhaj (2018) and Akram et al. (2015), which suggest that most Syrian refugee students are in this critical situation on arriving in their country of refuge. Consequently, Syrian refugees' integration is delayed, which impacts their development as children. Despite the flexibility in the enrolment process of Syrian refugee students, some of them fail to attend school for up to a year after arriving in Saudi Arabia. This highlights the relationship between the school environment and the policies and regulations in place, as they could significantly impact the successful integration of children (Hek, 2005).

This study found that some Syrian refugee students' fathers were unaware of such policies and challenges, whilst others were in a better position, as they obtained support from relatives who had lived in Saudi Arabia for a period of time and could help them understand the new situation (i.e., the student's enrolment policies). School staff confirmed that some fathers who are not themselves well-educated or are busy with their work might neglect the importance of understanding education policies.

In the initial phase, school staff recognised the potential stress faced by Syrian refugee students upon their arrival in a new country. To alleviate this stress, they believed in the

importance of not requiring these students to provide specific documents during the enrolment process. This approach aimed to create a sense of normalcy for Syrian refugee students, allowing them to integrate seamlessly with their peers. School staff, particularly social workers, understood that involving the child in such administrative processes could potentially trigger psychological and social issues, leading to feelings of being different from other students, and socially excluded. Therefore, they had designed a strategy that involves only responsible individuals such as parents or another adult within the school in handling these matters, ensuring that the dignity and privacy of Syrian refugee students are protected.

Although their approach seems to align with an ecological model, school social workers did not appear to be aware of the model's formal structure. However, they were clearly aware of the importance of various contextual factors (systems) that influence the children's well-being. They appeared to understand that if a child is impacted negatively (microsystem) by trauma, the effect might be mitigated (or exacerbated) by the school environment, which itself interacts with the child's family environment and circumstances (mesosystem). Significantly, each system affects and is affected by the other systems. In terms of integration of those students into the schools, if school or home environments are disrupted, this may contribute to the children's inability to integrate into their new schools (Clancy, 1995; Snoubar and Duman, 2015; Reynolds and Bacon, 2018).

8.3.3 Cultural advantages and disadvantages for school staff and Syrian refugee students

One interesting finding from the data of both school social workers and principals who participated in interviews (qualitative) and teachers who responded to the questionnaire and open-ended questions (quantitative) is that the motivation of most school staff due to the close shared culture, religion, and language, works as a tool to encourage school staff to help Syrian refugee students to integrate. Religion and the faith of Islam urges school staff to serve newcomers due to their extraordinary circumstance related to the war. This finding is consistent with those of Hasan et al. (2018), Lundberg (2020), Kirdar et al., (2022), who confirmed that social workers, educators and others working in the refugee field should be aware of and work to include such factors in their work with recently arrived Muslim refugees. All parties gain advantages from shared values, which further assists in integrating

newcomers. In this situation, the Islamic and cultural backgrounds of school staff and Syrian refugee students facilitate their interactions, understanding of everyday needs and ability to escape or confront challenges inside and outside schools. Ultimately, this helps in forming a suitable and welcoming environment for the newcomers.

However, some school staff, especially teachers, perceived some behaviours of Syrian refugee students to be inappropriate, posing a threat to the school environment and local students. Examples of this include the use of inappropriate words (profanity) and some female Syrian students failing to follow the school regulations in terms of wearing expected forms of clothing when leaving school, which, they believed, can potentially expose them to sexual harassment by other adolescents outside schools. It is worth noting that most instances of different attitudes and behaviours (than other local people who are not aware of the cultural background of Syrian refugees) arose during Syrian refugee students' initial stages in Saudi Arabian schools. This generated new challenges for both school staff and Syrian refugee students, leading to problematic relationships and the deceleration of the integration process.

These results reflect the research of Bacallao and Smokowski (2008), who also found that successful relationships help to eliminate the differences between immigrant adolescents and their school peers in the USA, resulting in successful integration. The findings show that teachers consider the level of interaction between Syrian refugee students and their peers to be occasionally low due to their different cultural backgrounds. This was reported by 20% of teachers, with some instances rising to 26%. Problematic behaviour occurs during Syrian refugee students' first years of attendance at their new schools; but this is likely to fade as children spend longer in Saudi schools. The participating school staff and Syrian refugee students confirmed this finding by explaining that simple cultural differences diminished with time.

It is important to note that even if there is a cultural affinity between peers or school staff and Syrian refugee students in schools, the presence of very small and subtle differences can lead to conflict between the two parties. For example, the existence of a difference in the local dialect can encourage the practice of bullying or discrimination against the newcomer who is not fluent in the local dialect or the host community. These insights stem

from the findings of this research. This cultural difference is a feature of the macrosystem which social workers need to take into account in their practice. Supporting this perspective, Guo et al. (2019) emphasized the role of cultural differences in shaping interpersonal dynamics within educational settings, while Sobitan (2022) pointed out that understanding the macrosystem is essential for effective social work practice with diverse populations. Together, these studies strengthen the necessity for social workers to consider the implications of local dialect differences in their interventions and support strategies.

Some school social workers did employ strategies that might prevent such issues. For example, raising the awareness of the local population in schools of the rights of other students, including refugees, and bringing about their acceptance by organising cultural activities to gain an understanding of differences. These differences spring from the macrosystem of all students may give rise to cause conflicts and difficult relationships between refugee students and their local peers. Therefore, interventions from school social workers can help resolve conflicts and improve various factors within the broader systems that influence both Syrian and local students. These factors, which may include family dynamics, peer relationships, and community support, play a key role in enhancing the integration and well-being of refugee students. This approach helps local students to welcome newcomers from different cultures into school communities and ensure successful integration (Paat, 2013).

It was also found that, due to cultural differences, more than one third of teachers occasionally faced problems communicating with Syrian refugee students. Although teachers were used to teaching and interacting with Syrian students whether they were born in, or as immigrants to Saudi Arabia, such difficulties appeared. A possible explanation for this might be that teachers lacked experience with and understanding of the background of Syrian refugee students. Another possible explanation is that those students had not been able to fully prepare for the new culture or place. Therefore, schools may need to introduce a formal cultural programme that prepares local citizens, including teachers and students, to understand the cultural backgrounds of refugee students and vice versa. These differences were supported from the findings of the quantitative phase where 28.8% of teachers sometimes experienced unacceptable words in the classroom from Syrian refugee students.

Likewise, the majority of social workers in this study confirmed that they had not trained nor attended workshops to work with refugee students but relied on their practical and personal experience. This finding supports previous research in the school and refugee field which links the importance of school staff training to understanding the needs and culture of newly arrived refugees (Duman and Snoubar, 2017; Al Haj, 2018; Koehler and Schneider, 2019; Büyükşahin 2020; Soylu et al. 2020; Özmen, 2020).

8.3.4 New situation of Syrian refugee families

The circumstances of war which impact the Syrian families in Saudi Arabia were clear from the responses of the four groups that participated. The family structure of Syrian refugee students is not the same as before the war. Losing families members or family members seeking refuge in a country other than Saudi Arabia was mentioned frequently. This is likely to impact the students in their new schools, because the absence of family members is potentially traumatic and can limit the family's capacity to provide support and encouragement for the child in and out of school. For those children, even with the support of parents or other family members regarding school tasks, they miss a loved one, which brings negative feelings even for Syrian refugee children who have actually reunited with their fathers in Saudi Arabia.

This observation challenges De Bel-Air's (2015) conclusion that Syrian employees in Saudi Arabia with a temporary job contract or visitor visa (guest) are unlikely to be reunited with refugee family members. According to the results of the current study, all of the students whose fathers worked in Saudi Arabia before the Syrian crisis in 2011 confirmed that the majority of children had been reunited with their fathers in Saudi Arabia and now live with them.

The role of the families in child integration in the country of refuge is critical especially in the early years following migration. According to Reynolds and Bacon (2018), family and relationships help refugee students to interact with local citizens. Unstable relationships within families prevent children from learning the behaviour and attitudes of others. Relationships are impacted by the home environment and the circumstances surrounding the families of refugee students. The findings of this study suggest a notable characteristic of the Syrian refugee families – that they live in specific neighbourhoods in cities A and B,

due to both cultural and financial factors. According to the participating school staff, this concentration in certain areas cause feelings of isolation for refugee school students, which prevents their adaptation to their new location. Such circumstances also result in them not learning the common attitudes and behaviours that are likely to be expected in schools.

It is notable in this stage some of the Syrian families lived in Saudi Arabia before the Syrian crisis and receive the new refugee families to help them with life expenses and housing. This study shows that many Syrian families live in one place, with crowded homes and this is often one of the characteristics of refugee populations in developing countries (Alfadhli and Drury, 2018). Although this practice of receiving newly arrived families may be a positive factor for newcomers who are not aware of the new environments, such living conditions are linked to social pressure. According to the ecological model, the various systems within an individual's life are interconnected. In the case of Syrian refugees, their low financial status is a feature of the mesosystem, which includes factors like employment that directly impact their living conditions and indirectly affects the microsystem which acts as the context for the provision of care for relatives. Participants shared their experience of low financial status as a negative influence on Syrian refugee students. One school social worker (MSSA2) stated:

The workers have large families to take care of. I mean, I know one of my Syrian friends and his mother is from Syria, and his uncle and aunts lived with him after the crisis started, and he has five families in one home, and his salary is not enough. Sometimes he cannot buy basic things such as bread; most of the refugee families have low incomes as they hold basic jobs. This impacts the children of both the refugee families and the new families negatively in and out of school.

Although Saudi Arabian policies allow new Syrian refugee to work and move freely in their new land, some participants mentioned that some fathers of Syrian refugee students do not have jobs or have low income jobs that do not cover living expenses. This situation might be linked to the qualifications of newly arrived refugees who work in low-paid, unskilled jobs in the private sector, which contributes to some Syrian families living in poverty. This finding aligns with the findings of Alfadhli and Drury (2018) regarding refugee students and their families enduring long periods of poverty. Moreover, another possible explanation for the

lack of a steady income may be the limited resources accessible to newcomers, particularly those who arrive to Saudi Arabia without relatives living in the country to receive them and provide them with necessary information regarding to the policies of working and available resources.

Due to the new living conditions, the families of Syrian refugee students often suffer from financial burdens. This is because of the cultural obligation of some working fathers to be responsible for helping other family members or other Syrian families in Saudi Arabia. As a consequence, interrelated issues mentioned above that develop in Saudi Arabia may not be completely disconnected from the Syrian refugee students' systems.

8.3.5 Post-migration stressors of Syrian refugee families and their children

In interviews and open-ended questions, all school staff shared their experience working with the new Syrian families and revealed their understanding of the situation regarding the new lives of these families and how it affects students in school. For instance, the challenging financial situation of these families makes students more vulnerable to psychological and social difficulties. This finding reflects those of Ehntholt and Yule (2006), Paat (2013) and Guo et al., (2021), who found that refugee children frequently have mental health issues or symptoms of depression at least partly due to severe family socioeconomic hardships.

According to ecological theory, the family unit is a microsystem linked directly to the child, creating reciprocal effects between them. Therefore, a malfunction in one system affects the other. Based on the ecological model, the economic circumstances of Syrian parents are part of the exosystem which is not directly linked to the Syrian refugee students, but to the parents, although its impacts reach the children's microsystem (school).

Moreover, where families are impacted by low income or parental unemployment Syrian refugee families tend to involve their children, especially boys in work. Whether this tendency comes from urgent need or possible cultural expectations, it impacts refugee students' integration into Saudi schools. Tardiness or frequent absence is one of the challenges schools face with Syrian refugee students, because many of them work with their fathers in the early morning or until late at night. This aligns with the conclusions drawn by

Duman and Snoubar (2017) as well as Imrie-Kuzu and Özerdem (2023), that due to the limited time since their arrival faced by certain Syrian refugee families in Turkey coupled with the importance of financial resources, they opt to engage their children in work instead of enrolling them in school. Such situations, in some cases, prevent those children from enrolling in school or lead them dropping out after starting.

The findings show that the environment of Syrian refugee families plays a crucial role in the students' integration. For example, some parents expect their children to perform their best in school, and if students fail to meet such expectations, they will be punished physically and verbally at home. As reported in Chapter 5, the findings indicated external challenges, such as violence within the home, may be associated with a sense of isolation at school and separates refugee students from other students. Negative intra-family relationships are likely to prevent refugee children from interacting properly with the other students and school staff (Rousseau and Guzder, 2008; Reynolds and Bacon, 2018). Furthermore, violence within the home against refugee children is more likely to trigger psychological issues, slowing the process of integration into schools. If this important 'system' is interrupted or works improperly, this adversely impacts the development of the refugee student (Paat, 2013).

Another negative family environment factor that affects children at school is what news circulates within the family regarding the Syrian crisis, war, and scenes that are not believed to be suitable for children. Some parents may neglect such aspects that affect the child psychologically due to a lack of awareness of how it impacts their children or a keenness to watch what is happening in Syria. The findings suggest possible a relationship between current and previous experiences related to war in Syria. Although the later experience of successfully seeking refuge may be linked to advantages, such as a better life, safety, and positive opportunities, the former experience may continue to influence the families and children alike. Therefore, meeting parents in school or contacting them by telephone to provide consultation services and advice with regards to their new circumstances is one of the services school social workers rely on to enable students and their families to overcome such challenges.

8.4 Saudi schools and families of Syrian refugee students

After discussing and highlighting the first stage of Syrian refugee students' journeys to Saudi Arabia, this section focuses on the second stage of students in Saudi Arabia and the experiences of school staff and students (See figure 8-1). This will address the four research questions by exploring, interpreting, and linking the findings to previous studies, while integrating qualitative and quantitative data to enhance understanding of the phenomena. Here I discuss the advantages of the Saudi school system for the integration of Syrian refugee students which are associated with school curricula, relatives of newcomers within schools, and gender-separated schools. Additionally, I discuss the disadvantages represented by bullying and discrimination refugee children's early years in Saudi schools, and the extent to which schools might address problems such as the poverty of refugee families.

8.4.1 The school context

One unanticipated and significant finding was that newly arrived Syrian refugee pupils found the Saudi school curriculum to be simple to understand and helpful in achieving academic success. However, Syrian refugee students found the curriculum relatively different than what they studied in Syria. In Saudi school, curricula concentrate on religious, human, and English subjects, while in Syria, schools focus more on scientific subjects, such as math and physics. Some school staff were aware of the different educational experience regarding the school curricula for Syrian refugee students, which helped them to realise the academic needs of newcomers. School staff (school social workers and principals) shared a similar experience, with the majority of their Syrian refugee students achieving good grades in school exams and tasks.

In line with this finding, the results of the questionnaire show that a large number of teachers agreed that school curricula help to integrate Syrian refugee students into Saudi schools. A substantial portion of teachers in cities (A) and (B) - between 30 to 40% - responded 'often.' While this isn't a majority, it's a notable percentage, with no teachers fully challenging the outcome and only a small minority (10%) slightly disagreeing.

Some teachers responding to the questionnaire believed students' difficulties were linked to them being placed in the wrong grade in Saudi schools and suggested their lack of awareness of the educational system in general might cause poor academic achievement. Beside the poverty that may influence refugee students' achievement academically, the above result regarding placed students in the wrong grade may be explained by the fact that some teachers lack experience in the schools and are unaware of the challenges and needs of newcomers. The second section of the questionnaire's responses demonstrated that around 40% of teachers may lack suitable experience to work with Syrian refugee students, and around 36% of them are unaware of the needs and culture of Syrian refugee students. However, only 7% of the teachers said that they found difficulty in dealing with Syrian refugee students.

Negative responses may be attributed to the fact that some Saudi teachers lack general experience in schools, as mentioned by most of the school social workers and principals. This lack of experience means those teachers find it relatively difficult to deal with refugee students and therefore implement unsuitable practices, such as bullying. School staff, especially social workers, reported that they are constantly striving to raise awareness among teachers regarding the appropriate techniques to handle Syrian refugee students, which helps students achieve good grades in school and supports their integration. According to Alhaj (2018) and Koehler and Schneider (2019), teachers must recognise the crucial needs of newcomers.

The perception of poor academic achievement of some Syrian refugee students is a significant finding in this study, associated with both inside and outside school challenges. Some of the challenges are due to the new situation of the Syrian families who sought refuge in Saudi Arabia, such as low financial status, as we have seen, which, indirectly impacts the children's achievement in schools. For example, the findings show that many Syrian refugee students work while studying, which causes frequent absences and tardiness. This might be linked to accidents when students work (Habib et al., 2021; Kirdar et al., 2022). Syrian refugee students, in many cases, take on physically demanding or hazardous jobs to support their families, which increases the likelihood of injuries. These accidents can further disrupt their education, leading to missed school days and impacting their overall academic performance.

Other challenges face newcomers in schools, such as bullying and discrimination, which are linked to poor academic achievement. Numerous studies have revealed that refugee adolescents are more likely to experience prejudice and bullying at school (Dryden et al., 2019). As an illustration, 33% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon claimed to have experienced discrimination at their new schools (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Wells et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2019).

8.4.1.1 Academic achievements among Syrian refugee students: circumstances and outcomes

While poor academic achievement is a significant issue, some Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools also face routine challenges that might affect their performance. These challenges are not unique to refugee students but can be exacerbated by their circumstances. However, the simplicity of the school curriculum in Saudi schools, as experienced and perceived by Syrian refugee students, is a notable advantage that facilitates their integration. The relative ease of the subjects taught in Saudi schools appears to help most of these students achieve good grades in school, which relieves the pressure on the student in terms of fear of not securing a place in Saudi universities after graduation, which is one of the prominent challenges facing high school students. Furthermore, when a good grade is achieved in school, violence within the home experienced by refugee children may lessen due to the student achieving what the parents expect of them at school. As one of the social workers explained:

I had dealt with an isolated student, who talked to me a lot, and would not leave, and spent a lot of time in my office. The student mentioned that she would be punished at home because her family was expecting her to achieve high grades.

– Female social worker (FSSA2)

Additionally, good grades help to distinguish students in school, earn them recognition and acceptance among their peers, and relieves pressure on them by creating positive relationships with other students. Lastly, this achievement, which is due to the simplicity of the school subjects, creates a good relationship with the teachers, and therefore, the teachers try to help and support the students as much as possible in this new place and

remove some barriers of integration in the school. As mentioned, the first years in Saudi schools are difficult for Syrian refugee children; however, this advantage (a less advanced curriculum) makes it easier for them.

8.4.2 Families and other relatives of newcomers within schools

Most Syrian refugee students receive support from parents or other family members with their school homework during their first years. The benefit of simplicity regarding school curricula removes some of the pressure from the parents and family in the early years as those students are less likely to rely on their family's support in relation to school tasks. In this regard, around 40% of teachers in both cities revealed that 'sometimes' the parents of Syrian refugee students help their children with homework, while only 1.3 % of teachers indicated that they responded 'never' to the statement. Some refugee fathers, as mentioned by school staff, do work long hours outside the city in which they live, resulting in insufficient time being spent with their children and failure to support their children with school-related tasks and homework. In this respect, the current study found that such parents' work circumstances prevent parents, especially fathers, from engaging in school activities such as meeting teachers.

One striking finding is that relatives of Syrian refugee students who attend the same school of the newly arrival students support them in their crucial stage as they start to attend an unknown school environment. According to most school staff, many newly Syrian refugee students get help from their families regarding school tasks and proper habits of the local culture that must be used in and out school. Furthermore, such support for newly arrived students removed some of the challenges presented by bullying and discrimination. As mentioned, the main cause of bullying of Syrian refugee students was their different spoken dialect, but with support from relatives in schools, Syrian refugee students learn and master the spoken dialect. Syrian refugee students also benefit from information provided by previous students about the school system and regulations. Although previous and new Syrian students formed restricted friendship groups that threaten the school environment, school social workers are able to tackle such issues. Such challenges were also confirmed by 3% of school teachers, equating to approximately 2 teachers, who believed that newcomers

'rarely' follow school regulations, which maximises the challenges during their initial period in Saudi school.

On a more important level of assistance in understanding policies and regulation of education, the relatives of Syrian refugee families who received them in Saudi Arabia were also a benefit for the new arrival families and represented positive family ties. With respect to the new students, fathers who already had children attending school taught the fathers of new students about the policies and regulations such as the process of enrolling children in Saudi schools, the general requirements, and the documents required.

Although this level does not directly involve Syrian students, it is closely connected to their families. According to ecological theory, students benefit from their relatives at the meso level. Positive interactions between the micro level (students) and the meso level (families and relatives) help facilitate the child's integration into school. This smooth and timely facilitation promotes student development by preventing delays in enrolment. When family support and school processes work together effectively, they accelerate school enrolment, enabling students to acquire essential skills at this critical stage. However, if these systems fail to coordinate properly, delays in enrolment can hinder the students' ability to develop these crucial skills.

8.4.3 Gender-separated schools

Although gender-separated schools represented a new experience for most Syrian refugee students, different from most schools in Syria, this was considered a benefit among participating female Syrian school students, especially for female students. Such policies facilitate the integration into their new educational environment, enhancing their attachment and belonging to Saudi public schools. SFA4 stated, 'It is good to study with girls, frankly, girls like here in Saudi Arabia, because with girls we can share many things, and girls can understand themselves and the other girls well. If male students study with us, there is no peace of mind'.

Feelings of attachment and belonging encourage the newcomers to accept the local culture of their peers, removing some of the differences that could potentially hinder integration. The challenge presented by simple differences between the two cultures causes particular

refugee girls to be unaware of the new culture, making them more likely to be victims of sexual harassment. For example, the data shows that all participating female students wear a formal school uniform (Abaya and Hijab), which is intended to protect them from dangers which can potentially occur outside schools, such as extortion. Such acceptance of a new lifestyle reflects the integration process positively because most of the female students become more comfortable and accept these practices.

Wearing traditional attire may protect students from exploitation suggests that cultural or behavioural conformity is necessary to avoid external threats. This perspective points to a troubling reality about the outside school environment, which may not be entirely safe for these girls. Strang and Ager (2010) argued that refugee integration is a two-way process, which means that the adaptation is a responsibility from newcomers but also an obligation from the host society to create an inclusive and supportive environment. Thus, if the responsibility of safety lies solely on the behaviours of the girls, this could contribute to their vulnerability. Although the acceptance of school uniforms and new practices reflects a positive adaptation for many female students, it is crucial to question whether these adaptations are sufficient to address the deeper social risks they face outside of school. Integration should fundamentally be viewed as a process of mutual adaptation; thus, the broader environment must accommodate and protect refugees rather than placing the burden solely on them to conform to societal norms (Lundberg, 2020; Hammoud et al., 2022).

In my sample, most female students gradually became more comfortable with and accepted these practices. However, this adaptation came with challenges, highlighting the need for continued discussions about personal choices, cultural expectations, and the outside pressures they experience. Understanding these factors is important for a better grasp of the integration process and for ensuring the safety and well-being of Syrian refugee girls in Saudi schools. It has been argued that refugee students who form a strong sense of belonging are more likely to improve their academic performance and feel an increased sense of well-being (Waters et al., 2010). Notably, most of the female Syrian students' culture is relatively similar to that of female Saudi students. Besides offering protection outside of school, this acceptance also benefits Syrian female students in forming positive relationships with other female students and easing their integration into Saudi schools.

The acceptance of school uniforms and new practices is reflected in the perceptions of female teachers regarding the behaviour and relationships of female Syrian students within the school environment. According to my survey results, 14% of female teachers reported that they have not experienced any issues when communicating with Syrian students. However, about 10% of teachers reported challenges in this area, while the majority (39%) indicated that they sometimes face difficulties in communicating with female Syrian refugee students. This variation in responses highlights the complexity of integrating Syrian students into Saudi schools, suggesting that while some teachers feel comfortable interacting with these students, others encounter challenges that need to be addressed.

Similarly, most of the female Syrian students interviewed had no issues communicating with their teachers. This finding may be attributed to the interactions between the Syrian female refugee students and everyone in the school, including their peers. More than a third of the teachers believed that refugee students mostly interacted with their non-Syrian peers with confidence; however, a small proportion of female teachers disagreed with this statement. In contrast, regarding the cultural differences between female Syrian refugee students and their Saudi peers, more than a third of teachers felt that such differences sometimes led to limited interaction, while less than a third completely disagreed with this view.

The positive interactions observed between female Syrian refugee students, their teachers, and peers reflect the adaptive systems outlined in the ADAPT model (Silove, 2013) and align with findings from Wells et al. (2018) and Guo et al. (2019). This model's emphasis on safety and security, bonds and networks, justice, roles, and identities highlight the importance of social connectedness and acceptance in fostering resilience among female Syrian refugee students. The students' ability to communicate effectively with teachers and interact confidently with non-Syrian peers indicates a supportive network that contributes to their sense of safety and integration. While cultural differences sometimes posed challenges, as noted by a portion of the teachers, the overall positive interactions suggest that these adaptive systems were facilitating resilience by helping students build supportive bonds, establish secure roles, and integrate into their new schools.

Several factors could explain the low interaction between Syrian refugees and their peers. Firstly, as mentioned, due to simple cultural difference, a low level of interaction might

occur among a minority of new students who are unaware of the school system and policies. Confirming this perspective, 28.6% of female teachers believe that Syrian students 'often' exhibit unacceptable behaviour in the classroom. Secondly, due to the challenges of starting a new life in Saudi Arabia, some families live and gather in certain areas, thereby preventing their children from interacting with local students, which might create a feeling of isolation or alienation (*ghurba*). This finding is in line with a study by Osmandzиковic (2020), who found that Syrians who arrived in Saudi Arabia after 2011 have a general sense of estrangement from the Saudi people. Although this concerns adult Syrian people and families, in accordance with the ecological model, the family acts as a microsystem which frames the experiences of refugee students; therefore, this could affect those students and cause separation from local students in school and impact relationships or cause delays in forming friendships. Moreover, from the open-ended survey questions the data shows that some newly arrived Syrian families appear to find it difficult to adapt to the new community. Finally, this result may be associated with Syrian refugee students suffering bullying from a minority of students and teachers during their first years in Saudi school, which influences the level of interaction negatively; leading to a lack of confidence among Syrian refugee students when interacting with others in schools.

However, the presence of problems such as difficulty in communicating with other students or teachers, as well as the low interaction between Syrian refugee students and their peers, may be the result of the simple differences in cultural background. The policy of single-sex schools can increase the speed at which friendships are formed and the sense of belonging to the school among female Syrian refugee students, and this in turn helps in facilitating the process of integration into the school system. These findings reflect similarities to the large number of conservative Syrian refugee families who arrived in Turkey. Those families refused the idea of coeducation, especially the more conservative families, leading to females of school age opting out of school (Sunata and Abdulla 2020). Therefore, a policy provided by the educational policies of Saudi Arabia enables female students to attend school as well as fulfilling their conservative parents' wishes. With reference to the systems related to Syrian refugee students, here we can see how the policies of the large system (the Ministry of Education) can affect the interaction of female students within the school and how they can help or hinder the integration process.

8.4.4 Bullying and discrimination when starting in Saudi schools

A strong finding to emerge from the analysis is that four participant groups (school social workers, principals, students, and teachers) confirm that the bullying and discrimination is one of the most prominent disadvantages and challenges Syrian students face when they start attending Saudi public school. However, these incidents are more likely to occur in male schools than female schools, as both groups of students indicate in the interviews. This might link to the nature of gender differences in terms of attitude, according to which females usually grow up to be empathetic and sensitive, whilst males become more powerful in their social interaction (Blaylock, 2017).

Furthermore, school staff noted that some teachers were responsible for bullying or discrimination against newcomers. This finding aligns with previous studies about refugees and schools indicating bullying and discrimination among the challenges that minorities experience in host countries due to a different cultural background, race, and religion (Mthethwa and Kisiara, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Dryden et al., 2019). However, newcomers' experiences with bullying and discrimination recede with time spent in Saudi Arabia and proficiency in acquiring the local dialect.

Bullying experienced by refugee students produces tangible obstacles that hinder their integration into schools. Bullying directly influences students' mental health (Ehnholt and Yule 2006; Moore et al., 2017). Consequently, Syrian refugee students facing such challenging experiences might find themselves more isolated than other students in school. Also, the persistence of such difficulties in the lives of refugee students in Saudi schools leads to frequent absences, academic failure, and dropping out of school altogether (Ehnholt and Yule, 2006). This is a critical issue that must be identified during the first year in school, when newcomer students have not yet learned the local dialect. Identifying and solving this issue helps newcomers achieve and maintain suitable support within their microsystem (peers), as supported by research indicating school-based interventions that are crucial for the development and well-being of refugee children. These interventions focus on creating a supportive peer environment, which is essential for their social integration and academic success (Arar et al., 2019; Başaran, 2020; Guo et al., 2021). Additionally, the role of school social workers in facilitating these interventions is

emphasised in the literature, as they help address the unique challenges faced by refugee students (Arar et al., 2019).

Approximately one third of teachers in both cities reported that Syrian refugee students occasionally encounter instances of physical and verbal abuse from their peers within the classroom. However, the majority of teachers hold a differing perspective on this matter. In the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, teachers confirm this perspective to some extent. This low percentage may be due to such incidents remaining undiscovered during the first years of attendance for newcomers in their new schools. Additionally, some educators are not conscious of bullying's impact on schoolchildren (Büyüksahin, 2020). Although my findings did not conflict with those of Mthethwa and Kisiara (2015), Human Rights Watch (2016) and Dryden et al. (2019), the results suggest that newcomers' experiences of bullying and discrimination tend to occur during their early time in school. As for most high school students, exposure to such issue is less likely, due to their positive relationships with other students (since they form bonds like those of brothers and sisters).

8.4.5 Financial challenge

Students' financial situation was one of the challenges raised by schools staff and students. As the participants stated, Syrian refugee students in Saudi public schools have low incomes in their first years, evident through their physical appearance, inability to buy meals, or lack of school supplies. This finding is consistent with data obtained from the work of Piedra and Engstrom (2009), who note that refugees and immigrants in new environments face a variety of challenges, including low income status.

This issue also causes the children to face other challenges, such as being involved in dangerous work, especially for male students. This finding is consistent with Habib et al. (2021), who found that Syrian refugee students in Lebanon were at higher risk of labour violations and injury at work compared to local students and adults. However, in practice, school staff, particularly social workers, are responsible for addressing this issue and managing its effects, such as frequent absences and tardiness (See figure 8-1).

The data shows that during the peak of receiving new refugee students, schools were under high pressure due to the new students' (visitors) poverty, yet staff, – especially social

workers – relied on their personal efforts to support newcomers financially, as the support from the Ministry of Education was insufficient to cover all school activities. Although schools are not responsible for supporting refugee students financially, the poverty of refugee students prevents their integration, which is a crucial part of maintaining and improving their wellbeing in Saudi Arabia.

The data shows that during the peak of receiving new refugee students, schools were under high pressure due to the new Syrian refugee students' poverty. Consequently, as shown in the data, schools – especially social workers – rely on their personal efforts to support newcomers financially, as the support from the Ministry of Education is insufficient and only covers some school activities. Although schools generally are not responsible for supporting refugee students financially, such weak statuses impact these students in school and prevent proper integration, which is a crucial part of maintaining and improving their wellbeing in Saudi Arabia.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 6, the work of most school social workers involves three parties as available resources for financial support (school staff members, sponsors, and charities). These resources are charities that support the families and students, sponsors who are keen to support poor people in the society, and the support activities of school staff. The school social workers emphasised the fact that the main inspiration for supporting newcomers stems from their religious and cultural background and they work as mediators who link students and families with supporters. School staff perceive Syrian refugees as brothers and sisters in a disaster situation and in urgent need of support. A male social worker MSSA1 stated that 'I tell the school principal that we should appreciate these people because they are our brothers, but the circumstances in their country affected them, so if the Saudi government receives them in the country, we at the school must welcome and enrol them and facilitate the enrolment procedures'. This finding aligns with Teater (2014), who emphasises that the development of children requires input from other people, communities, and institutions in the environment. In this case, the school social workers use the external system in the community to support the integration of Syrian refugee students.

Although this kind of financial support is not a formal programme implemented by nearly all school social workers, it is an important activity to support the children and their families in

building a good life in Saudi Arabia and is in the interests of integrating the child into the schools. This can decrease challenges by preventing the influences of the weak financial status of the Syrian refugee families that require the child to work, causing frequent absences and sleeping in the classroom. This role for school staff chimes with Rousseau and Guzder's (2008), argument that school social workers should consider the environments of child refugees when developing programmes at school to meet their needs.

Working with several systems, such as charity organisations is a key direct practice intervention of school practitioners used to eliminate barriers that affect children's other systems. As a result, their intervention aids in increasing the system's connection to children, in order to meet their needs (Boyle et al., 2009). Consequently, this measure may meet one of the most pressing demands in the new environment of Syrian refugee pupils. In alignment with this perspective, the ecological model obliges the social worker to function efficiently in a balanced manner with all of the systems that surround the individual (Boyle et al., 2009). This implies working with external organisations that provide financial support to the refugee child and his/her family as well as with the other systems within the school, facilitating financial support through extra-curricular activities in which school staff and students participate.

Confirming this view, a notable percentage of teachers agreed that school social workers employ social programmes to overcome the financial challenges faced by Syrian students. School social workers' role as mediators requires them to work with teachers to understand the needs of refugee students and to involve them in activities that support the children financially in school. While a minority of Saudi teachers may be unfamiliar with the needs of the Syrian refugee students, most teachers received information from school social workers regarding the Syrian refugee students' needs and challenges, one of which is financial status.

Refugee children often live in challenging neighbourhoods that expose them to threats like crime and abuse. Improving their circumstances can lead to positive changes in their lives. When Syrian families cluster in specific neighbourhoods, they may inadvertently isolate themselves, fostering feelings of alienation. Engaging in community activities can help mitigate the negative financial influences that contribute to poor behaviour both inside and

outside of school. By providing a supportive environment, these activities can counteract the impact of their challenging circumstances (Strang and Quinn, 2021).

8.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed the major findings from all sets of data, merging them together to reach a deeper understanding of the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi public schools, and the roles of school social workers in this regard. Discussion of the findings has been linked to previous literature, the objectives and research questions of the study. The findings of the study illuminate the roles of school social workers, supports from families and schools in integrating Syrian refugee students into their new schools. Such roles are linked to all the stages of Syrian refugee students' lives, both from the Arab Spring onwards and current experiences, and how they affect their integration.

The interview findings have shown that many refugees and their children need support in understanding their new environment, including its dominant culture. Syrian refugee students often found themselves in a suitable school environment, which assisted their integration, even with the existing challenges. This suitable environment involved Syrian refugee students' relatives supporting them in their new surroundings, an easy-to-master school curriculum, and gender-segregated schools, which are especially important for female students. The challenges for newcomer students are represented by the financial issues of their families, working while studying, and bullying and discrimination from local students in the early stages of their school attendance. My findings indicate that the efforts of school social workers, such as offering consultation, guidance, and assistance with financial support, played a significant role in helping Syrian refugee students integrate more smoothly. Without these interventions, the well-being of these students would likely be negatively impacted, leading to delays in their integration. The implication is that school social workers and their colleagues rise to the challenge of creating a school environment to support the integration of Syrian refugee students. The next chapter will continue to discuss school strategies by introducing the last theme which emerged from the integration of both sets of data, the practical and professional approach of Saudi public school social workers to the integration of Syrian refugee students.

Chapter 9 Discussion Practical and professional approaches of Saudi public school social workers to the integration of Syrian refugee students ‘The final stage’

9.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the practical and professional approach of Saudi public school social workers to the integration of Syrian refugee students. It starts with the importance of understanding the background of Syrian refugee students and discovering early challenges through individual assessments by school social workers, and collaboration with school staff, especially teachers. In section 9.4 consultation services will be discussed, with a formal programme directed to all students, including the refugee students. This includes three types of consultations, with students, families and external institutions within the Ministry of Education. Discussion then moves to the importance of parental engagement (9.5), which school social workers were keen to encourage. Subsequently, extracurricular activities as a strategy to achieve the integration of Syrian refugee students will be discussed (9.6). After that, time spent in Saudi Arabia and refugee students’ sense of belonging are discussed (9.7) with both considered to be factors of integration into the educational system of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Finally, section 9.8 presents reflections on the concept of integration within the context of the study, while section 9.9 discusses unexpected variations regarding teachers' responses to closed-ended quantitative questions.

9.2 Understanding the background of students and identifying early challenges

Saudi school social workers’ understanding of the surrounding circumstances of Syrian refugee students was developed through individual assessments conducted for all new students. Although such a task is performed for all students, whether Syrian or Saudi, most school social workers confirmed the importance of focusing particular attention on the newcomers, due to their difficult circumstances. School social workers made Syrian refugee students a priority in regard to assisting students with urgent needs. Students who have moved from war zones struggle to meet their basic needs and require help more urgently than most local students (Carlson et al., 2012; Duman and Snoubar, 2017).

Saudi school social workers mentioned that, while conducting assessments, their understanding of the circumstances of newcomers improved, allowing them to assist the

students using their school's available resources to fulfil their needs. Moreover, in regard to professional school social workers' practices in addressing the challenges of newcomers, discovering challenges at an early stage was a practice that assisted refugee students during their early life in Saudi Arabia (the first stage). Most school social workers identified one of the key challenges at this stage, which is the poverty of the Syrian refugee students and their families, a challenge that led many male students to take on paid employment while studying, which in turn links to additional risk factors.

In regard to the use of assessments to discover early problems, the appropriate collaboration of teachers with school social workers assisted in fulfilling this task. Due to the significant time that teachers spend with students in classes –with continuous interaction involving the observation of students' behaviours, their interaction with other students, and the extent to which they perform school tasks – they are in a good position to identify challenges facing Syrian refugee students in their new environment. In this scenario, teachers would typically refer students to social workers, who started investigating challenges and working to solve them.

School social workers confirmed the collaboration of school staff, especially teachers, as one of the elements that helped them in providing services to Syrian refugee students. Saudi school teachers highlighted such cooperation as significant in serving the newly arrived refugee students. This perspective was also apparent in the teachers' responses to the questionnaire which demonstrated that almost half of the sample of teachers completely agreed about the importance of cooperating with the school social worker in order to help Syrian refugee students. However, the findings of the current study do not coincide with previous research of Alotaibi (2014), whose general study of school counsellors, conducted in a secondary school in the small Saudi city of Afif, explored obstacles preventing school counsellors in Saudi Arabia from fulfilling their role. In Alotaibi's study, administrators and teachers were most likely to lack cooperation due to lack of awareness of school counsellors' (school social workers') roles.

9.3 The importance of collaboration between school social workers and school staff

A possible explanation for agreement on the importance of collaboration between teachers and school social workers in addressing barriers to Syrian refugee students' integration lies

in the motivation behind the teachers' efforts. As highlighted in responses to the open-ended questions, this motivation is often rooted in cultural and religious beliefs. These shared values among Saudi school staff encourage support for newly arrived Syrian refugee students, even in the absence of a formal integration programme specifically for refugees.

Another explanation for this finding concerns the policies of the termly meetings in schools. School principals participating in this study revealed that the meetings (held at the beginning of each term of the school year) with teachers to discuss the term plan involved discussion of the new situation of Syrian refugee students. In this way teachers are encouraged to work with other school staff in serving education in Saudi public schools, which involves helping students to overcome challenges, whether they are Saudi or Syrian students. In these meetings, teachers are encouraged to engage in activities to raise the awareness of Syrian refugee students' rights under the supervision of school social workers.

According to Strekalova and Hoot (2008), cited in the work of Thomas (2016), teachers in the United States are required to understand the experiences of refugee students, as these inform most of their behaviour and interaction with others in school. As a result, teachers' understanding of refugees' behaviour might promote the effectiveness of positive cooperation. These meetings are important in the collaboration process, as 40% of the teachers in this study indicated that they felt less experienced when working with Syrian refugee students. Additionally, around 37% reported that they could not understand the culture of refugee students, and similarly, 36% struggled to understand their specific needs. Moreover, these collaboration meetings were important since the vast majority (98.8%) of teachers in both cities had not trained to work with refugee students; so through the meetings, teachers might receive some information about Syrian refugee students and the most suitable way to work with them. This finding aligns with Özmen (2020) and Alhaj (2018), who highlighted that the lack of training programmes for teachers negatively impacts the integration of refugee students into schools in Turkey and Jordan respectively.

A significant number of teachers indicated that school social workers frequently prepared the school environment with a view to integrating Syrian refugee students into the school, with 22% of teachers suggesting that this was 'always' the case. However, a minority of teachers suggested that this 'never' occurred. Furthermore, this finding indicates

recognition of the mutual work required to achieve the integration of Syrian refugee students into their new schools. This is due to the fact that school social workers cannot achieve their best practices in serving newcomers without the continuous efforts and cooperation of other parties within the school.

9.4 Consultation services

The data shows that most school social workers emphasised the importance of consultation services for newcomers. These services supported the children in school, and in their wider living environment. This finding reflects the fact that school social workers are conscious of the external factors that support the child in their new environment. Providing such services for Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools helped the children to integrate and feel safe in their new school, which in turn maximised opportunities for refugee students to contribute to a positive environment in which they could continue to interact, once settled in Saudi Arabia.

Consultation services for students constitute one of the programmes that social workers are required to undertake in Saudi public schools, in line with the policies of the Saudi Ministry of Education. As stated on the Ministry of Education website, the educational guidance aims to follow up on the student's achievement level, provide care and appropriate counselling services in schools, and discover circumstances affecting educational process. These services are provided not only for students who excel academically but also for those facing social and psychological issues that contribute to their absences and tardiness in school (Saudi Ministry of Education, no date). Based on participants' responses, among the challenges faced by schools in receiving the new influx of students, the absence and tardiness of Syrian students have been prominent. Consultation services assist school social workers in identifying and addressing those challenges.

The consultation services offered by Saudi school social workers are of three types. First, consultation related to the Syrian refugee students concentrates on personal and school challenges. This includes providing guidance for the children in their new environment, such as assisting them to cope with difficulties outside school. In addition, school social workers revealed the importance of providing encouragement to students regarding their school achievements, which students may receive during sessions, whether one-to-one or with

other peers. These sessions identify the importance of the microsystem to which students belong. Working on this system assists newcomers to address the challenges they face in their new environment since it encourages children's development appropriately and effectively (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). As a result, in such counselling sessions, school social workers help students build resilience by developing their ability to cope with stress and its influences, which enhances their capacity to thrive in their new schools (Knight, 2014).

The second type of consultation services concerns the mesosystem of students, since the work of the school social workers not only directly influences students, but also influences their families. Some students have experienced violence within the home, due to Syrian families' high expectations of their children's educational performance, or due to challenging circumstances such as financial burden, which affects the relationships between students and their families. In this task, school social workers explain appropriate approaches for caring for students within a positive familial environment and inform Syrian families about the dangers of violence and its potential effects on child development, such as emotional trauma and academic difficulties, both inside and outside of school.

According to Rousseau and Guzder (2008), one of the important school programmes in fulfilling the needs of refugee students is the promotion of positive relationships between the student's family and the school. School social workers providing such guidance to Syrian families encourage the development of positive relationships between the two parties, resulting in maximising the performance and development of students in schools. The social workers' role in schools involves making the parents aware of the social and psychological changes occurring within children, as well as raising parents' awareness of suitable parenting approaches in their new land (Abdelghani, 2013).

The role of school social workers in raising parents' awareness of the social and psychological changes occurring in their children is highly relevant to fostering resilience among Syrian refugee students. By educating parents about suitable parenting approaches in their new country, social workers contribute to creating a supportive family environment, which serves as a critical protective factor for refugee children. This aligns with key resilience factors identified by Yaylaci (2018), where elements such as identity and belonging help support mental health outcomes. When parents are engaged and informed,

they can enhance their children's identity and foster a sense of belonging, protective factors that mitigate the adverse effects of discrimination. As a result, these resilience-building strategies contribute positively to the mental health and well-being of Syrian refugee students, guiding intervention strategies to support their integration and success in new educational and social environments.

The third type of consultation service occurs between school social workers and external institutions, which provide policies and regulation for practices, and are primarily responsible for the professional roles of the school social workers (in this case, the Counselling and Guidance Committee of the Ministry of Education). According to the ecological model, such an institution is considered to represent the exosystem, which does not directly involve the students, but rather provides the necessary policies for the school social workers to serve the newcomers in their new environment. The exosystem incorporates the linkages and processes occurring between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person, but in which events occur that influence processes within the immediate setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Saudi school social workers asserted that consultation with the Counselling and Guidance Committee of the Ministry of Education provides significance factors for the integration of Syrian refugee students by raising the awareness of the rights of these students in Saudi schools, resulting in the prevention of some challenges, such as discrimination. However, some school social workers did not mention or utilise this level of consultation. Therefore, the effectiveness of such consultation requires school staff, especially school social workers, to consistently implement services for newcomers.

Interaction with other institutions within the Ministry of Education is considered a mesosystem for school social workers. However, any mistakes that occur within this system can indirectly affect students, particularly the integration of Syrian refugee students into schools (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Golden and Earp, 2012; Teater 2014). If school social workers are unable to consult with and obtain suitable support from these institutions, their ability to implement practices that promote students' integration into schools will be compromised.

Teachers' perspectives of the counselling programmes provided by school social workers, to support Syrian students, were revealed in the questionnaire. Twenty-five percent of teachers asserted that school social workers 'often' implement such programmes, with 23% suggesting such programmes were 'always' implemented. The high level of agreement apparent in the responses of the sample confirms that school social workers, even with the absence of practical experience in dealing with refugee students, rely on the current counselling system to play a significant role in serving the newcomers in their new environment.

Meanwhile, 40% of teachers felt the social workers only sometimes or rarely implemented counselling programmes to support the Syrian students to overcome their problems and only 11.3% of teachers claimed the social workers never helped the students in this way. The reasons for such variations in teachers' responses are not clear, but may be due to their poor awareness of the role of school social workers, or to them having less experience in the educational system than their colleagues, or a weakness in some schools' preparation of teachers to work with refugee students. This may be the case particularly during the first term of the school year, in which a meeting is held by most of the schools in the sample to prepare teachers to work with refugee students. This finding chimes with Abdelghani (2013), whose study of Egyptian students in Saudi schools found that (within an institution) the interventions of experienced staff are necessary to train teachers in the use of suitable approaches to interacting and dealing with non-Saudi students.

9.5 Parental engagement

Evidence from this study shows that parental engagement represented a reliable strategy employed by most school social workers in regard to students' enrolment, helping students to overcome challenges, and supporting them in new schools. For example, the school social workers indicated that only with parental engagement can students fully and formally enrol in schools, since their parents are responsible for contacting the school and providing official documents. This strategy aims to facilitate students' feelings of safety and happiness in their school. This strategy as reported by school social workers aims to facilitate students' feelings of safety and happiness in their school. A male school social (MSSA2) worker stated that 'If we need identification documents from a student, I don't ask the visiting student

directly or in front of other students or teachers to maintain their privacy. Instead, we communicate with their guardian. All these matters are handled with the guardian if we need official documents, so that the student remains happy and feels safe at this young age. We don't want to burden them with things beyond their capacity'. This finding confirms that communication between parents and schools is crucial for the integration of students, as it helps address concerns and promotes a supportive home environment (Tösten et al., 2017; Karsli-Calamak, 2018).

Engaging with parents also offers a route to identifying problems that might be experienced by students in schools. Parents, being responsible for their children, are usually keen for students to avoid challenges in schools. Meetings with parents in schools, or contacting them by telephone, might reveal the internal challenges Syrian refugee students face in school. According to Heckman (2008), school social workers, whose duties include collaborating with students' parents to determine the issues affecting them, report that some refugee students have difficulty in expressing their problems. Their parents, on the other hand, might reveal the child's pertinent issues to school social workers.

Parental engagement can also help students to be aware of the new system that needs to be followed in their school. School social workers suggested that the cooperation of Syrian families helped newcomer students to commit to the policies and regulations of schools. This is because families provide students with suitable information and resources, such as school uniforms. Although students are informed directly of such practices, the families share a role in teaching students the importance of following Saudi school regulations.

Consistent with the findings of Wimelius et al. (2016) in Sweden, families represent an important factor of integration, as they provide children with guidance about the host society in integration processes. Students, in this case, benefit from both the mesosystem (school social workers and family relationships) and the microsystem (school social work and student relationships), Here school social workers mediate between the different ecological systems when intervening in regard to the students' integration. These interconnected relationships are reflected in the integration model when school social workers reach out to families (see Figure 8-1).

The relationship between home and school is a vital strategic domain in which school social workers are the bridge, facilitating students' development and integration (Paat,2013; Duman and Snoubar, 2017). However, to accomplish this task, trust and positive relationships between schools and families of Syrian refugee students must be apparent. It is noteworthy that school social workers suggested that this is not always possible due to the families' circumstances in regard to their new situation. Syrian students' parents, especially their fathers, are more likely to engage in long-term work in locations outside of the cities, leading to weak engagement with schools. This situation is also linked to uneducated fathers who work in low-earning jobs. This finding is in line with those of Đurišić and Bunijevac's (2017) review article that identifies low financial status among parents as a barrier to positive parental involvement with the school.

Regarding parental engagement, interviews with school staff, particularly social workers, and teachers' perspectives revealed that most teachers agreed families frequently contact them about their children's issues. However, around 8% of teachers reported that this 'never' occurred. The differences in teachers' responses might be linked to the varying circumstances of families. For example, teachers who dealt with educated parents, with high expectations for their children's achievements, found that families communicated with them most of the time. These findings help interpret the actual situation of parental involvement in schools.

On the other hand, parents who work long hours, or are unaware of the importance of education to their children, or who work outside the cities, are less likely to communicate with teachers or other school staff regarding students' achievement or problems, which may lead to decreased engagement in their education. For example, parents may be unaware of how changes in their work status (such as working overtime) could impact their child's social behaviour and academic achievements in school (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Moreover, this interpretation is supported by the fact that a number of Saudi school teachers from cities A and B reported that they rarely (16.3%) or never (3.8%) managed to maintain positive relationships with the parents of Syrian refugee students, leading to weak parental involvement with the school.

The school social workers in this study advised parents to participate in several meetings during the school year, which were held at school, and made telephone calls in order to strengthen parents' attachment to school. Just over one third of teachers reported that they were able to maintain positive relationships with Syrian families and this might reflect the actions of almost half of the school teachers who referred the families of Syrian refugee students to school social workers.

The role of school social workers in facilitating relationships between teachers and families may encourage families to reach out when their children face problems. Most teachers reported frequent contact with families regarding their children's issues, while a small percentage (8.8%) noted a lack of communication from Syrian refugee families. This lack of contact may stem from several factors, such as teachers' inexperience with the educational system or the families' adjustment to new circumstances, including challenges like poverty. Additionally, some families may not perceive any significant issues that warrant communication with teachers.

9.6 The importance of extracurricular school activities

This theme concerns social workers' practices that are not directed specifically at Syrian refugee students, but are rather directed at other factors inside school, improving the situation of those students and the environment in which they interact. The data shows the importance of cultural activities, on which school social workers rely to support the integration of Syrian refugee students. These activities are not formally required by the Ministry of Education, but school social workers use their available resources to form such programmes to serve the school environment, and particularly Syrian refugee students' integration. One of the male school social workers (MSSA3) confirmed that 'school extracurricular activities form one of the hidden tools of school resources, which, if utilised effectively, can strengthen school integration for minorities, and in general assist in achieving the educational of goals of the school'. The current study found that through extracurricular activities, Syrian refugee students are able to face challenges and integrate into schools. This finding aligns with the studies of Due et al. (2016) and Başaran (2020), which found that such activities in a safe and welcoming environment foster attachment to

the school, thereby increasing students' likelihood of successfully integrating into the school.

One of the most interesting findings was that the extracurricular activities helped in promoting and raising awareness among students and teachers about the rights of Syrian refugee students. A male school social worker (MSSA3) explained 'Based on our observations, we have a school football league where each team includes two or three Syrian students. This demonstrates their integration. You can always see this. The team members are selected from diverse backgrounds, not from a single tribe or nationality, giving everyone a chance. The school league often provides further evidence of integration. For example, in class, I noticed a Syrian, a Sudanese, and a Saudi student, all from different nationalities. This helps others understand the rights of Syrian refugee students'. Through the activities and related processes, Syrian refugee students enjoyed the same opportunities as their local peers while attending and participating in Saudi schools. The equality of the rights of refugee students with those of local students is an important consideration if the aim is to create an appropriate educational environment that ensures the integration of the refugee students. A female school social worker (FSSA4) explained: 'We don't want to create a specific advice programme just for Syrian refugee students, but rather for all students. A specific programme could create a sense of separation, affecting their experience at school. It could influence how other students perceive them and how they see themselves in this new environment. It might also impact their rights to participate in other programmes'. This is confirmed by the perspective of two thirds of teachers who strongly agreed that Syrian refugee students participated equally with their peers in school.

The value of extracurricular activities echoes Manzoni and Rolfe (2019), who argued, in the UK context, that extracurricular activities are crucial for integrating migrant students into the larger school community, creating new friendships, and fostering broader academic and social interests and may be viewed as another means through which newcomers can build confidence and learn new skills, while local children can learn more about the past and present of their peers and migrants/refugees in general.

This illustrates how extracurricular activities in Saudi schools foster resilience among Syrian refugee students by promoting integration and equal participation, aligning closely with

resilience theory. By including Syrian students in mixed-nationality teams and avoiding separate programs, schools create a supportive environment that enhances students' sense of belonging (protective factors central to resilience). According to resilience theory, factors like belonging and social cohesion act as mediators, helping individuals manage the stress of integration and isolation. The inclusive approach described, where Syrian students engage equally with their local peers, reduces stigmatization and strengthens their psychological resilience by allowing them to form meaningful connections and see themselves as valued members of the school community. This method supports both their mental health and well-being, demonstrating how integration-focused strategies can positively influence refugee students' resilience in a new environment.

Opportunities to participate in shared extracurricular activities can help in understanding the differences between refugee students and their school peers. This is partly because local students become more aware of the rights of Syrian students to participate in school activities. Additionally, participation in cultural activities by all students highlights their similarities, encouraging mutual acceptance. Activities by school social workers are designed to include celebration of the culture of minorities; for example, they can bring their own food and costumes to school which raises local students' awareness of their peers' culture. This also allows a sense of harmony and social adjustment, enabling the integration of the groups together, and leading to the removal of several potential barriers (Strang and Ager, 2010; Abu AlQasim, 2017).

These activities also help Syrian refugee students to overcome one of the early internal barriers in school, as they manage the local dialect through consistent interaction with their peers and teachers. The extracurricular activities allow students to interact together effectively in a positive environment, under the supervision of social workers and other school staff. This helps to prevent or counter instances of discrimination and bullying during the critical stage of initial attendance at Saudi schools, associated with lack of awareness of the new environment.

During these activities, school social workers can effectively minimise one of the barriers that prevents the formation of relationships between newcomers and local students. As mentioned in chapter 5, Syrian refugee students, in their initial attendance at Saudi public

schools, tend to form restricted friendship groups with other Syrian students, inhibiting interaction with other (local and non-Saudi) students. This led a small group of Saudi teachers to believe that the level of interaction of Syrian refugee students with their peers is permanently low due to their different cultural backgrounds.

With the survey of teachers indicating that around one third of teachers in cities A and B were not aware of the culture of Syrian refugee students, extracurricular activities may also enable teachers in Saudi public schools to better understand the culture of newcomers and create positive relationships. According to Allen et al. (2021), students who maintain positive relationships with teachers are more likely to participate in activities and form a sense of belonging to their new school. The relationships formed through such activities enable students to accept their new school environment. During extracurricular activities, Syrian refugee students may benefit from the support of teachers. For example, teachers may assist financially by buying food brought by students representing Syrian culture, leading to a greater sense of acceptance and belonging in the school setting.

One of the most powerful tools on which school social workers rely when organising and conducting activities is the teachers themselves. School social workers confirmed that without the full collaboration of teachers, the activities could not be conducted. This is an important system that directly links to supporting children. Although relationships formed by teachers and school social workers constitute a microsystem, for those children, this may be considered a mesosystem occurring between the parties, its effectiveness relying on the role of school social workers.

Positive intervention by teachers in schools can have a strong positive impact on Syrian refugee students. For example, teachers' support of students in school instils within them a sense of belonging to their school, which encourages them to attend school, and means they can avoid work-related risk factors (this is especially the case for male students). As mentioned earlier in section 6.7.2.3 one of students (MSA1) stated:

The teachers are trying, for example, to make me follow lessons on YouTube in the same dialect and with the same recitation... for example, as Saudi students, and try

to repeat the lesson once or twice until I get the idea of the lesson. They help the students.

And a female student, SFB4, mentioned 'I always go directly and talk to my teachers; they were asking us to talk about any problem'. Such activities enable female students to avoid problems related to their new environment, by helping them form an understanding of the culture of their peers. Consequently, Syrian refugee female students are able to practise the new lifestyle and culture outside of school, forming protective factors against outside risk.

In relation to extra curricula school activities, school social workers were vital in forming a suitable environment for the integration of Syrian refugee students. They engage and deal with different systems and factors that impact the children's development and well-being (Miller et al., 2014). Therefore, enabling these school social workers to operate at their full effective potential ensures that the urgent support required by refugees can be incorporated into Saudi schools.

9.7 Time spent in Saudi Arabia and belonging

Time plays a crucial role in the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi public schools. Syrian refugee students face several challenges after initially joining Saudi schools, in what may be considered the first time period. First, the movement of Syrian families into Saudi cities impacts the children's settlement and sense of security, which might delay their integration as they find difficulty in adapting to their new school environment. Such movement is linked significantly to the low financial status of Syrian families, and consequent movement of fathers, as heads of households, from one city to another to obtain a good job. However, simply by spending more time in Saudi Arabia, Syrian refugee students develop their understanding of the culture of their peers, helping them avoid challenges in schools such as bullying and discrimination. When refugee students initially arrive and enrol in Saudi schools, they lack their peers' dialect, and may face bullying. Such negative challenges diminish with time, as students manage to speak in the same manner as their peers. It is important to note that such a practice by Syrian students can be seen as assimilation if only the Syrian students are making changes. True integration, however, involves mutual adaptation where both Syrian students and their peers learn from each other, fostering a sense of shared community. This reciprocal process helps maintain

cultural diversity, encourages mutual respect, and creates a more inclusive and supportive school environment for all students.

Building positive relationships reflects the resilience that newcomers develop during their time in Saudi Arabia. While early years of attending Saudi public school for Syrian refugee students may be associated with bullying and discrimination, positive relationships with locals that develop gradually over time form a vital protective factor, providing social support in unfamiliar surroundings, in this case new schools. According to Ungar (2004), protective factors assist an individual in avoiding exposure to harm. This finding is consistent with that of Ahmed et al (2020), who indicate that newly formed relationships of Yemeni refugee students with others in Saudi Arabia have provided a strong source of support.

It is important to consider that, over time, Syrian refugee students develop and strengthen their relationships. In particular, the school social workers' interventions might be considered significant during the most critical stage (the initial attendance of Syrian refugee students at their new school), due to the fact that their interventions help in eliminating conflict that prevent the creation of positive relationships. Making a microsystemic intervention, school social workers assist in nurturing relationships between new students and their local peers, which in turn contributes to one of the essential supports that the newcomers need in their new surroundings (Yakushko and Chronister, 2005).

Evidence from this study indicates that Syrian refugee students formed strong relationships with their Saudi peers even though they might have found it easier to develop restrictive friendships with other Syrian refugee students. This finding suggests that students overcome the challenges they face when they start their journey in Saudi schools, specifically bullying and discrimination. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the changes and developments occurring over the lifetime of an individual represent the chronosystem, which is influenced by other interconnected systems, such as the microsystem and mesosystem.

Notably, this finding confirms the idea that integration is a two-way process which depends on newcomers' and local students' acceptance of each other (Strang and Ager, 2010). Such acceptance, however, cannot be built if the relationships between those two parties do not develop positively. The development of relationships depends on Syrian refugee students'

ability to cope with challenges and to improve their skills in order to form relationships, and also depends on local students accepting the simple differences of the newcomers such as the way they talk and word choices. The findings are consistent with those of Alsayed and Wildes (2018), who confirmed that Syrian refugee students in Turkey possess a strong ability to confront the new challenges they face. Taking these matters into consideration, without an appropriate school environment, in which school staff and local students show acceptance and cooperation, integration is much less likely to be achieved.

School social workers support the children during this time, encouraging a sense of belonging in the children in relation to their schools, and promoting integration by creating a welcoming and appropriate school environment for newcomer students, helping them to face challenges inside and outside school.

The sense of belonging of the Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia represented one of the most interesting findings of this study, as they indicated their unbridled desire to stay in Saudi Arabia. This finding indicates the stable and adequate life of those students and their families in Saudi Arabia, owing to vital factors such as feeling of safe and experiencing close cultural and religious beliefs, which were mentioned by all participants (school staff and students from both data collection tools – interviews and questionnaire).

Moreover, such a strong sense of belonging may be linked to some of those students having grown up in Saudi Arabia, as they sought refuge at an early stage of their life (i.e. around six to eight years old). During the process of growing up, and in school, they learned the dialect of their peers, which is important in avoiding bullying and creating a sense of belonging. According to Picton and Banfield (2018), learning the language of the host society is an important factor for integration and belonging. It is worth noting that the Syrian refugee students speak Arabic, like their peers, but exhibit difference in their dialect, which was the main reason for bullying. This is because speaking with a different dialect or accent leads to stigma, which impacts the children, as foreigners (Derwing and Munro, 2009; Smyrnova 2015).

Additionally, schools play a crucial role in developing Syrian refugee students' sense of belonging by creating an enabling environment. School staff confirmed that without a sense of belonging among Syrian refugee students to the school and country, the school cannot

provide an appropriate environment for their integration. As Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) argued in their study of adolescent Somali refugees in the United States, school, as a result of its impact on the lives of children, can strengthen their sense of belonging to their new communities, but, first, school must ensure a suitable environment which involves positive relationships, support and behaviour, resulting in high self-efficacy and lower incidence of depression.

Developing a strong sense of belonging in newcomers requires the effective intervention programme, which helps in minimising interior and external barriers that hinder integration. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), all the systems in which children live have a huge influence on them, whether directly or indirectly. As a result, the continuous and overlapping interaction of these systems over time assists children to develop the ability, motivation and skills to participate in different social and academic activities. Participating school social workers indicated that their practices are intended to remove all barriers obstructing Syrian refugee students at all stages of their lives in Saudi Arabia, thereby fostering a sense of belonging as these students spend more time in the country.

9.8 Exploring integration as a concept for Syrian refugee students within the Saudi - school context

The integration experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi public schools stand out as notably different from those documented in other countries. Key factors such as the shared Arabic language and Islamic faith may help alleviate some of the cultural and linguistic challenges that Syrian students often face in Western or non-Arab countries. Additionally, specific aspects of the Saudi education system such as single-gender schools and distinct curriculum differences contrast with the educational systems in places like Turkey, where Syrian students experience integration in an environment characterized by language differences and secular education. However, Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabia still share similar challenges with other students in developing countries. Those challenges involve poverty, discrimination and bullying, working while studying (for male students), and sexual harassment (for female students) (Newbold, 2005; Kia-Keating, 2007; Piedra and Engstrom, 2009; Duman and Snoubar, 2017). Such issues can partly be attributed to the fact that integrating Syrian refugee students is a relatively new experience for Saudi schools. This

novelty means that schools are still developing effective strategies and practices to support these students. The apparent similarities between Syrian and Saudi Arabian cultures, particularly in terms of religion, are significant factors for the motivation of the school staff in working with Syrian refugee students and integrating them into Saudi schools. Moreover, the spoken language of both newcomers and locals is Arabic, even if the dialect is mismatched.

Significantly, there are clear differences between Saudi Arabia and other host countries to Syrian refugees in terms of the integration concept and policies of integration for refugees or displaced people, especially Western countries where formal programmes are provided to refugees once they arrive at destinations where they plan to stay for a long period of time (Pace and Simsek, 2019). Most countries that have not signed the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol, including Saudi Arabia, treat refugees as guests or visitors, rather than formal refugees, which has important implications for the concept of integration, understood differently among scholars in the field of refugees and social sciences (Pace and Simsek, 2019; Berry and Hou, 2021).

The experiences of schools in integrating refugee students are very similar to how the UNCHR defines integration as a participatory process, which depends on the actions of both refugees and members of the host society. Additionally, the schools' experiences are consistent with that of Crisp (2004) whose view on integration in the context of education emphasises the removal of obstacles for refugees to live freely in their new surroundings. Syrian refugees must be treated equally in these situations and be given full access to the same rights as their peers, in order for them to interact with members of their new society without facing prejudice.

The significance of school social workers' interventions is apparent during the critical stage (Syrian refugee students' initial attendance at school), given that the Syrian refugee students face various internal and external challenges at this time. Interventions to integrate newcomers assist in removing conflict between Syrian and local students. After Syrian refugee students have spent a significant period in Saudi schools, some of the initial barriers they faced such as language difficulties, cultural differences, and social isolation tend to decrease. As they form positive relationships with their local peers and become

more integrated into the school community, the need for intensive interventions from school social workers lessens, though ongoing support may still be required for specific challenges. According to Paat (2013), the support students receive from local citizens enhances the possibility of successful integration, due to the indication that the acceptance of another culture is welcome in the society (macrosystem). A welcoming atmosphere was found during extracurricular activities which celebrated the culture of the students' countries such as food and dress. While both Saudi and Syrian cultures share common religious beliefs (Islam) and customs, specific differences are evident in dialects, traditional practices, and daily life. One notable distinction is in women's dress, where the expectations for female clothing, especially regarding the wearing of the Abaya and Hijab, are more strictly enforced in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, dialectal variations can affect communication, as Saudi Arabic differs from Syrian Arabic in pronunciation and vocabulary, which might create subtle barriers for students adjusting to the new environment.

Positive relationships between local and refugee students reflect integration into schools, though this does not necessarily reflect that Syrian refugee students have been assimilated. While high school students show huge acceptance and openness towards each other, but this does not mean that Syrian students are losing their original culture. For example, some participating students stated that they used the Saudi dialect in school to communicate with friends and teachers but at home they continued to speak the Syrian dialect. In addition, relationships between newcomers and local students led to creating a sense of parallel belonging in their new surroundings. Most studies of refugee children, specifically those children representing a second generation, nonetheless suggest that they are in danger of assimilation (completely losing their original culture), and this impacts their family relationships (Piedra and Engstrom, 2009).

However, evidence from this study indicates that Syrian refugee students maintain strong relationships with their families, largely due to family reunification, as discussed earlier in section 4.3.2 on family support networks and structural dynamics. A male student (SMB3) stated 'Of course, our relationship here has become stronger. I mean, our relationship with my brothers and sisters was not strong. Here, we meet a lot together, and there in Syria, we were separated. I mean, some of my brothers and sisters do not live in the same city'. Most displaced refugee families in Western societies face conflict in regard to pressure to

assimilate (Phillimore, 2011). However, Syrian refugee students and their families in Saudi Arabia share the same religion and several cultural aspects with the dominant society, which means that such conflict was rarely experienced as substantial by newcomers, and fears of assimilation were low.

This integration does not necessarily entail Syrian refugee students fully adopting the culture of Saudi students (the process known as assimilation), but rather refugees preserve their culture and interact with citizens smoothly. A male school social worker (MSSA2) confirmed:

‘Regarding the issue of their integration. You see that the Syrians have been living with us since we were children, and they have been living among us. We are not surprised, even in the neighbourhoods you see them but sometimes there is only a simple cultural difference, a difference in values. The Syrians, due to the strength of their customs, culture and personality, often have a stronger influence than some other group communities that dissolve into Saudi society immediately’.

This offers a different picture from studies in Canada (Berry and Hou, 2021) and the United States (Tran and Birman, 2019), as well as findings by Tran and Birma (2019), which point to pressures on young refugees to assimilate into the dominant culture. According to Killian et al., (2018), acculturation refers to the broader process of cultural exchange, with integration representing a balanced coexistence of cultural identities, while assimilation involves a complete shift towards the host culture, often at the expense of one’s native culture. Recognising these distinctions is essential for effectively supporting refugee children as they navigate their integration into school.

As a result, commonalities between Syrian and Saudi cultures such as shared language, religion, and cultural values minimise barriers to integration, facilitating a smoother transition while promoting safety and stability (Ager and Strang, 2008). However, children’s identity remains as it is, even as they adapt to a new lifestyle and culture, becoming more similar to their Saudi peers. One of the Syrian refugee students (SMA4) stated that ‘Look, I don't speak in a Saudi dialect with my family, but only with my friends. With my family, we speak the same way we did when we were in Syria. Nothing has changed, it's not different’.

All school staff noted that most locals often cannot distinguish Syrian refugees from Saudi students, and they believe that Syrian students are Saudi.

A male school social (MSSB3) worker explained that 'Some Syrian students, if they don't speak, you don't know if he is Saudi or Syrian'. This reflects the close cultural alignment between newcomers and locals, which helps maintain identity. Another female student (SFB5) reported 'I mean, when I enter the class, they don't ask, Are you Syrian? or Who are you? I don't expect that they know that I'm Syrian. It's normal. I mean, they treat me like a Saudi. I mean, I'm a normal student'. Similarly other male students (SMA1) Stated 'we got used to the nature of life, especially the customs and traditions, because we have lived here for a long time'. The reduction of visible differences was also reinforced by school policies (mesosystem), such as requiring all students to wear uniforms. Importantly, evidence from interviews with Syrian students shows that they continue to observe certain cultural practices and traditions, which supports the argument that they maintain their own identity despite adapting to their new environment or integrating into school.

In the context of Saudi Arabia's efforts to integrate Syrian refugee students into schools, the principles of the 1951 Refugee Convention play a significant role in guiding the country's approach. Despite not being a signatory to the Convention, Saudi Arabia can draw upon its principles of non-discrimination and access to education to ensure that Syrian refugee students have equal opportunities for learning (UNCHR 2017). By upholding these principles, Saudi Arabia can create a supportive and inclusive educational environment that fosters the integration of refugee students into the school community (Ferris and Kirisci; Dryden et al 2019).

School social workers in Saudi Arabia play a crucial role in supporting the integration of Syrian refugee students by providing essential services and assistance. These professionals offer counselling, guidance, and advocacy to address the social and emotional needs of refugee students, helping them adjust to the new educational setting. Social workers also promote cultural information and understanding within schools, working to create a welcoming atmosphere that respects the diversity of backgrounds among students, including Syrian refugees. By collaborating with community organizations and stakeholders, social workers can enhance the support network available to refugee students and their

families, facilitating a smoother integration process. Additionally, the school policies mentioned above, which aid in student integration, align with the findings of Gürel and Büyükkahin (2020). They argued that the lack of necessities, such as clothing, food, cleaning supplies, and stationery, was a common factor affecting the psychological well-being of Syrian refugee students, which, in turn, influenced their ability to integrate.

Furthermore, social workers in Saudi schools can advocate for the rights and educational needs of Syrian refugee students, ensuring that they receive the necessary support and resources to succeed academically. By raising awareness of the challenges faced by refugee students and advocating for inclusive policies and practices, social workers help create an environment that supports the educational success of all students, regardless of their background. Drawing on Janmyr's (2021) argument, studying the relationship between non-signatory countries and the 1951 Refugee Convention offers valuable insights into international refugee law. Including non-signatory countries such as Saudi Arabia provides a broader, global perspective on refugee protection practices outside the Convention's framework. By combining adherence to international refugee law principles with the dedicated efforts of school social workers, Saudi Arabia can improve the educational experiences and outcomes of Syrian refugee students, fostering their successful integration into the education system.

9.9 Displaying unexpected variations: Teachers' responses to closed questions (Quantitative)

While this study did not set out to explore differences within the participating groups of teachers, school social workers, principals and students, the comparison of teachers' responses based on the variables of city, gender, and practical experience level did present some slight differences. Most of the teachers in City B held positive views about the role of school social workers in preparing the school environment to facilitate Syrian refugee students' integration, as compared to City A teachers. For example, 34.2% of teachers in City B often viewed school social workers as effectively preparing the school environment for the integration of Syrian students, compared to only 21.4% in City A. Additionally, fewer teachers in City B selected the options 'rarely' and 'never' (13.2%) compared to 19% in City A, indicating a generally more favourable perception of school social workers' contributions

in City B. This difference may have occurred due to many reasons, such as the experience of school social workers in the educational field, the extent to which school staff cooperate with school social workers in conducting their programme and activities, and the number of students and number of school social workers in each school. The number of students can significantly impact the work of school social workers, especially if one school social worker is responsible for many students in one school. However, it is important to note that this difference, while interesting, is descriptive, and statistical significance cannot be confirmed based on the available data. As such, further research is needed to explore additional details on this subject, as will be discussed in the next chapter."

There were also variations in teachers' views based on their gender. For example, in section 7.5, and specifically in figure 7-11, female teachers were less likely to believe that Syrian female students experienced physical violence compared to male teachers. Such a finding has been confirmed by another strand of this study, in which most male school staff and students are more likely to recognise this issue than female participants. Another clear variation in the responses between male and female teachers appears in communication with the families of Syrian students who have encountered problems. Here, female teachers tend to contact families (or are contacted by families) more often than male teachers. Such variations may be understood in terms of the discipline and policy of each school.

In addition to these differences, teachers who felt more experienced and teachers who felt less experienced in working with Syrian refugee students exhibited some variations in their responses to some statements. For example, most of the teachers who felt experienced believed that the low level of interaction between Syrian refugee students and their peers was not due to different cultural backgrounds, while in teachers who felt less experienced believe this to be the case. This finding may reveal the fact that teachers who felt more experienced spend more time with those students, and their background in the educational system assists in observing the situation of newcomers' interaction with peers. Similarly, teachers who felt more experienced hold more positive communication with Syrian families when compared to their colleagues who felt less experienced colleagues. This difference might be attributed to several factors, such as the confidence level of teachers in understanding the background of Syrian refugee families and their problems.

9.10 Summary

In addressing practical and professional approaches of Saudi public school social workers to the integration of Syrian refugee students without a specific programme, school social workers rely on their practical and personal efforts, which require an understanding of the background of the newcomers, and the discovery of early challenges. These interventions also require the suitable collaboration of school staff, especially teachers. School social workers, in addressing the challenges of the newcomers, provided consultation services and sought parental engagement to ensure the children could settle in school. In addition, school social workers use the extracurricular programme, which included cultural activities from all countries to which school students belong; by utilising this programme, the differences between Syrian refugee students and others are minimised. This approach fosters acceptance, builds peer relationships, and supports newcomers as they adapt to their new environment.

Time and belonging represent important factors in the integration of Syrian refugee students in the school. With support from school staff and students, Syrian refugee students have shown the ability to create positive relationships, understand the new culture, and form positive relationships with other students and the school, which in turn creates a sense of belonging that helps them to integrate into the new school.

Having revealed the situation of the Saudi schools, and the situation of Syrian refugee students, as well as their integration process, the conclusion of the study now follows. This will cover the significance, implications and recommendations of the study, identify future research related to refugee students in Saudi Arabia, and conclude with the limitations of the study.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

Six sections form this chapter; it starts with the introduction, then presents the main findings while the third section introduces the original contributions of the study. The fourth section will comprehensively discuss the recommendations for policy, practice and further research in the field of school social work and refugees. Finally, deliberation of the limitations of this study follows.

The conclusion chapter presents the major findings emerging from the perspectives of participants (Syrian refugee students, school social workers, principals and teachers). The study used two data tools (interviews and surveys), which helped in reaching a better understanding about the investigated area, and enhanced the trustworthiness of findings by triangulating data. The purpose of the current study is to explore how school social workers support Syrian refugee pupils to integrate into Saudi schools, and to discover the students' experiences in Saudi schools in terms of their challenges and relationships with their families and teachers. Due to the growing number of refugees from war-torn nations in the region, I anticipate that the findings will expand the prospects for continued research in this area, with a focus on the Middle East and Saudi Arabia in particular.

10.2 Main findings relating to research questions

The findings clearly highlight the current experiences of Syrian refugee students in Saudi public schools (RQ1). Syrian students, particularly in their early years in Saudi schools, face challenges such as delays in enrolment due to the loss of official documents and difficulties with the residency visa process. These challenges are compounded by cultural differences, such as bullying from local students and teachers, at times. The presence of Syrian refugees in culturally distinct neighbourhoods further affects their ability to integrate into the school environment. Additionally, the sense of belonging to their new surroundings plays a vital role in their integration process. Students who express a desire to remain in Saudi Arabia rather than return to Syria indicate positive familial status and relationships with peers as critical factors contributing to their feeling of belonging.

In terms of the needs and obstacles faced by Syrian refugee students (RQ2), the research highlights several challenges both inside and outside the school. Financial difficulties of Syrian families in Saudi Arabia are significant, as some students work to support their families, which hinders their integration into school. Social workers play a crucial role by offering financial assistance through incentives and gifts, ensuring dignity and reducing any feeling of inferiority among refugee students. Moreover, cultural activities and extracurricular programmes that foster positive interactions between Syrian and local students further facilitate the integration process, helping overcome barriers rooted in cultural differences.

The study also highlights the difficulties faced by teachers and schools in educating Syrian refugee students (RQ3). A significant number of teachers expressed concern that some Syrian students may present challenges to the school environment, often attributing this to behavioural differences stemming from cultural factors. Teachers acknowledged that there was a clear lack of formal training or dedicated programmes provided by the Ministry of Education to help them understand and address the specific needs of Syrian refugee students. While some teachers believed that the cultural similarities between Syrians and Saudis helped bridge some of the gaps in understanding, the absence of official training and support continued to hinder their ability to effectively respond to the unique needs and challenges of these students.

Finally, the research illustrates the crucial role of Saudi school social workers in supporting the integration of Syrian refugee students (RQ4). Social workers were typically the first staff members to interact with Syrian families when they arrive to enrol their children in schools, assisting them with the formalities of the enrolment process. The absence of an official programme dedicated to refugee integration meant that school social workers relied on their personal efforts and available resources to address the unique needs of Syrian students. Despite this lack of formal guidance, social workers provided vital support to Syrian students, helping them overcome obstacles in both their academic and personal lives. They prioritised Syrian students due to their vulnerability in a new and challenging environment, offering assistance in navigating their surroundings. Social workers not only provided financial support but also worked closely with Syrian families to encourage students to remain in school rather than engage in work, a common issue among male

students. Additionally, through their collaboration with teachers, social workers helped implement cultural and extracurricular activities that foster positive relationships between Syrian refugee students and their peers. This cooperation between social workers and teachers was critical to creating an inclusive environment that helped Syrian students integrate into their new schools.

10.3 Original contributions of the study

As the first study of the role of school social workers in the integration of Syrian refugee children into Saudi schools, this thesis makes original methodological, empirical, and theoretical contributions to the fields of refugee studies, school social work and integration theory.

1. It contributes methodologically by making use of a mixed methods design including qualitative as well as quantitative methods. While this in itself is not generally unusual, it is a new departure for the Saudi context in which quantitative methods are considered to be the standard (Albeladi, 2024). The use of interviews as well as a survey in this study enabled a deeper exploration of how the integration process worked, how was it supported, what barriers made this difficult and how these were overcome. These questions were subjected to yet deeper interrogation through the use of samples of Syrian refugee pupils, school social workers, school principals and teachers. The comparative design taking samples from two different cities lent further depth to the study to investigate any geographical differences.
2. Empirically, the study is the first to explore the obstacles faced by Syrian refugee pupils in integrating into Saudi schools, and the role of school social workers in promoting integration. It adds to the considerable body of knowledge that has been amassed on the education of Syrian refugees in neighbouring Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon as well as in Western countries, bringing unique insights arising from Saudi Arabia's different stance in treating refugees as guests, and from the religious, linguistic and cultural similarities between Syria and Saudi Arabia.
3. Theoretically, the study makes an important contribution by building a model of integration (Figure 8-1), developed from the data generated in this study. The model draws on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and benefits from the theoretical

concept of resilience that has been subject to changing understandings (Breda, 2018). Together these combine the impact of different systems on individuals and different sources of strength available to Syrian refugee children in Saudi Arabia in the face of multiple adversities. The model can serve to inform further studies of integration in different locations, contexts and circumstances.

10.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, this section will offer the following recommendations for policy, practice and further research.

10.4.1 For policy

1. Raising the awareness among responsible workers in Saudi schools about the circumstances surrounding Syrian refugee students (new and previous experiences), and how these experiences and their circumstances impact life in general and their integration into schools.
2. Policy makers should maximise the understanding of positive and negative factors related to relatives who receive newcomers in Saudi Arabia. The role of existing Syrian relatives in providing support upon arrival introduces a unique dynamic that shapes the integration process. This reflects the importance of pre-existing community networks in refugee resettlement, which can be particularly relevant in countries like Saudi Arabia with large expatriate populations.
3. Although there are policies to support the education of refugee children in Saudi Arabia, and although challenges for Syrian refugee children may be partially mitigated through linguistic, religious and cultural familiarity with the host country, they face significant challenges in entering and integrating into Saudi schools. The lack of a formal programme within the Ministry of Education leaves school staff reliant on their religious and cultural values to support the children. It is recommended therefore, that the Ministry of Education establishes a formal programme to address the challenges and needs of newcomers, to facilitate their smooth integration into schools, taking into account the wide range of challenges including poverty, cultural expectations regarding gender and the development of positive relations between Saudi and Syrian students. Such programmes could

indicate ways of tackling such challenges through charities and supporters within the community, cultural activities and other non-class activities.

4. School social workers perform optimally in serving refugee students when teachers collaborate; therefore, the Ministry of Education, school staff, and school social workers should encourage other Saudi school staff, including school social workers and teachers, to raise awareness of this important factor (collaboration) in order to assist minority groups to be successfully integrated into schools.
5. Policy makers in the Ministry of Education should develop education policies that adopt an ecological framework to assess and address the needs of refugee students. This should include collaboration among various systems of schools, families and community organisations to create supportive environments that foster student integration.
6. Saudi Arabian universities should create courses about refugees and minorities in Saudi Arabia in order to prepare students who will be working as social workers, psychologists and teachers in Saudi schools in the future. This could enhance their ability to understand the needs of refugees when working with them.

10.4.2 For practice

1. Families of Syrian refugee students need to be fully involved in school; this can be achieved through a school welcoming programme.
2. Some Saudi school teachers must be more aware of the needs and culture of Syrian refugee students. To achieve that, I recommend the establishment of specific training programmes for school teachers and school staff, whether by schools or the Saudi Ministry of Education, in order that those staff can engage in such a programme to enhance their familiarity of the needs and culture of newcomers.
3. The evident importance of Saudi religious and cultural values of school staff in welcoming and supporting Syrian refugee children in schools should inform the development of programmes, to be implemented by school social workers, to encourage and enhance the positive integration of refugees in schools with staff who are less experienced in working with refugees.
4. Social workers and educators should make use of the model of integration a) by being mindful of the impact of family dynamics, school culture and community

resources on Syrian students' experiences and b) using the model in training to increase awareness of the dynamics of integration among staff who are less experienced in working with refugees.

10.4.3 For further research

Further areas for future research include:

1. the use of large samples utilising quantitative methodologies in schools throughout the KSA to better generalize findings on Syrian refugee students' integration experiences., as well as qualitative or mixed studies in numerous Saudi districts.
2. the extension of qualitative methods, for example participant observation, to develop more nuanced understandings of effective practices and particular difficulties teachers have in supporting refugee students.
3. The impact of gender on the experiences of school staff working with refugees.
4. The experiences and needs of female refugee students undertaken by female researchers.
5. The situations and roles of refugee mothers undertaken by female researchers.
6. Further exploration of differences in teachers' experiences by geographical location
7. Extending the study of refugee integration to include private schools.
8. Comparing the experiences of Syrian students born in Saudi Arabia and those who arrived as refugees.
9. The role and effectiveness of the non-profit (charitable) sector in supporting Syrian refugee students.
10. Longitudinal studies to explore the longer-term impact of school environment, school social workers and other factors in promoting the integration of refugee students into Saudi society.
11. Studies of systems of support for Syrian refugee children in other Gulf countries: the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain that, like Saudi Arabia, are not signatories to the UN Refugee Convention and also treat refugees as 'guests'.
12. The role of school social workers in the integration of refugee students in other countries.

10.5 Limitations of the thesis

This study includes several limitations. The limitation is related to conducting research during the peak of the COVID-19 crisis, which was difficult for two reasons. First, travel procedures and restrictions in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom presented problems in terms of entering and exiting both countries. Second, I encountered problems in relation to interviewing the participants; for example, one male school principal agreed to participate in this study, but a week later he contacted me to apologise for his inability to participate in the study due to COVID-19 illness, forcing the researcher to locate another school.

Third, the lack of awareness of some school staff with regard to interviewing as a tool in collecting data represented a limitation, since they are familiar with, and prefer to participate in, surveying rather than interviewing, which also resulted in consuming more time to find participants. Fourth, because of the cultural and religious rules in the KSA, involved difficulty in interviewing female school staff, whether school social workers or principals, as three girls' schools in city A refused to participate in the research, as did two schools in city B. Upon visiting female schools, two female school staff were eligible to participate in the interviews, and initially agreed, but once I explained how the interview would be conducted (needing to be recorded), they withdrew. This is because some female school staff did not want others to hear their voice, especially men. In the same scenario, one of the school staff in City A mentioned that her husband would not accept a situation in which other men were contacting her.

Fifth, as expected, one of the limitations of the study concerned Syrian refugee students (or their parents) declining to participate; this represents the biggest limitation. This is because, to some extent, several Syrian students' parents were not satisfied with the term 'refugees'. As a consequence, a minority of Syrian parents in both cities refused to participate in the study, explaining to school social workers that they are not refugees, but residents, and pay for the privilege. Sixth, certain students struggled to explain their own experiences during the interview; as a result, I had to repeat questions and provide extra silent time to allow them to think about their responses, which was a time-consuming issue.

Finally, while this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge several limitations. The difference in teachers' responses, although interesting, remains descriptive

and does not establish a causal relationship or allow for generalisation across different contexts. The use of Google Forms to distribute questionnaires, though efficient, may have led to misunderstandings due to the absence of the researcher to clarify unclear questions. Moreover, the findings are limited to ten schools in two cities, which may not fully represent the experiences of other regions in Saudi Arabia. These limitations highlight the need for further research employing larger sample sizes and more rigorous methodologies. Future studies should explore whether factors such as gender influence teachers' perceptions of school social workers' roles in integrating Syrian refugee students, possibly using mixed-method approaches. By addressing these gaps, subsequent research can contribute to more effective strategies and policies for supporting refugee integration in education.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Durham University ethical approval

Ethical Approval: SOC-2020-11-03T16_34_49-lxgl81

Ethics <no-reply@sharepointonline.com>

Mon 11/01/2021 11:10 AM

To: ALHARBI, MAJED S. <majed.s.alharbi@durham.ac.uk>

Cc: SOCIOLOGY-PGRADMIN, S S. <sociology.pgradmin@durham.ac.uk>; SMITH, ROGER S. <roger.smith@durham.ac.uk>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Do not open links or attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe. Otherwise, use the Report Message but on or report to phishing@durham.ac.uk.

Please do not reply to this email.

Dear Majed,

The following project has received ethical approval:

Project Title: School Social Workers' Role in Facilitating the Integration of Syrian Refugee Students into Saudi Arabian Public Schools

Start Date: 01 January 2021;

End Date: 01 April 2021;

Reference: SOC-2020-11-03T16_34_49-lxgl81 Date of ethical approval: 01 January 0001.

Approved via e-mail from Tiago Moreira (11.01.21)

Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to the design, duration or delivery of your project, you should contact your department ethics representative for advice, as further consideration and approval may then be required.

If you have any queries relating to the ethical review process, please contact your supervisor (where applicable) or departmental ethics representative in the first instance. If you have any queries relating to the online system, please contact research.policy@durham.ac.uk.

الرقم : ٧١٥١٠
التاريخ : ١١ / ٧ / ١٤٤٤ هـ
المشروعات :



المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم
وكالة التخطيط والتطوير
مركز بحوث سياسات التعليم

الموضوع: بشأن تسهيل مهمة الباحث / ماجد الحربي

سعادة مدير عام التعليم بمنطقة الرياض
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته
تجدون سعادتك برفقه استبانة ، وأسئلة مقابلة للمبتعث من جامعة الملك سعود
لدراسة الدكتوراه بجامعة (Durham) في بريطانيا / ماجد بن سعود الحربي، بعنوان
" دور الإخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في تسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين
اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية".
آمل من سعادتك التكرم بالتوجيه بتسهيل مهمته، مع ملاحظة أخذ موافقة
ولي الأمر الخطية المسبقة فيما يخص أسئلة المقابلة للطلاب، وألا يتزامن الإجابة
عليها مع وقت حصص الطلاب على المنصة.
وتقبلوا تحياتي وتقديري

مدير عام مركز بحوث سياسات التعليم

أ.د. عبدالرحمن بن عبدالكريم مرزا

الرقم :

التاريخ :

المشروعات :



المملكة العربية السعودية

وزارة التعليم

وكالة التخطيط والتطوير

مركز بحوث سياسات التعليم

الموضوع: بشأن تسهيل مهمة الباحث / ماجد الحربي

وفقه الله

سعادة مدير التعليم بمحافظة حضرة الباطن

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

تجدون سعادتكم برفقه استبانة، وأسئلة مقابلة للمبتعث من جامعة الملك سعود لدراسة الدكتوراه بجامعة (Durham) في بريطانيا / ماجد بن سعود الحربي، بعنوان "دور الإخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في تسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية".

آمل من سعادتكم التكرم بالتوجيه بتسهيل مهمته، مع ملاحظة أخذ موافقة ولي الأمر الخطية المسبقة فيما يخص أسئلة المقابلة للطلاب، وألا يتزامن الإجابة عليها مع وقت حصص الطلاب على المنصة.

وتقبلوا تحياتي وتقديري

مدير عام مركز بحوث سياسات التعليم

أ. د. عبدالرحمن بن عبدالكريم مرزا

Appendix 3 Permission from the Ministry of Education in city A

الرقم : ٩٣٤٣
التاريخ : ١٤٤٢ / ٨ / ٣ هـ
المرفقات :



المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم
٢٨٠
الإدارة العامة للتعليم
إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

" تسهيل مهمة باحث "

اسم الباحث		ماجد بن سعود بن هادي الحربي	
السجل المدني	١٠٧٥٢٣٠٦٥٤	العام الدراسي	١٤٤٢ هـ
الجامعة	جامعة (Durham) بريطانيا	الكلية	العلوم الإنسانية التطبيقية
الدرجة العلمية	الدكتوراه	التخصص	خدمة اجتماعية
الغرض من الدراسة	الحصول على الدرجة العلمية	عينة الدراسة	قائد /ة مدرسة مرشد /ة طلابي معلم /ة طلاب/ات المرحلة المتوسطة والثانوية
عنوان الدراسة	دور الإخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في تسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية .		
فترة التطبيق	خلال الفصل الدراسي الثاني لعام ١٤٤٢ هـ		
روابط أداة الدراسة	(١) https://cutt.us/17xBl	(١)	المفصلة لقائمة المدارس
	(٢) https://cutt.us/yvTAe	(٢)	المفصلة للمدرسين الطلاب
	(٣) https://cutt.us/6nTg	(٣)	اسموفة للمعلمين /ات
	(٤) https://cutt.us/1xwy	(٤)	نقل مقابلة الطلاب
للتواصل مع الباحث	majalharbi@ksu.edu.sa		

المكرم/ة /قائد/ة مدرسة _____ (المرحلة المتوسطة والثانوية) وفقه/ه ل الله

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ... وبعد:

إشارة إلى قرار سعادة مدير عام التعليم بمنطقة _____ رقم ٣٨٩٢٠٧٩٣ وتاريخ ١٤٣٨/٦/٢٣ هـ بشأن تفويض الصلاحية لإدارة التخطيط والتطوير لتسهيل مهمة الباحثين والباحثات، وحيث تقدم إلينا الباحث/ة (الموضحة بياناته/ها أعلاه) بطلب تطبيق أداة البحث على عينة الدراسة في نطاق الإدارة العامة للتعليم بمنطقة _____، ونظراً لإكمال الأوراق المطلوبة نأمل تسهيل مهمته/ها مع ملاحظة أن الباحث/ة يتحمل كامل المسؤولية المتعلقة بمختلف جوانب البحث، ولا يعني سماح الإدارة العامة للتعليم موافقتها بالضرورة على مشكلة البحث أو على الطرق والأساليب المستخدمة في دراستها ومعالجتها، أو على نتائج الدراسة .

شاكرين ومقدرين جهودكم وتقبلوا تحياتنا .. والله موفق ...

مدير إدارة التخطيط والتطوير المكلف

د. خالد بن إبراهيم السعيد

الرقم: ٣٢٤١٢٢٢٢
التاريخ: ١٤٤٢/٨/٥ هـ
المرفقات: ١



المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم
(٢٨٠)
الإدارة العامة للتعليم بمنطقة
مكتب التعليم

بشأن: تسهيل مهمة الباحث/ ماجد الحربي.

حفظها الله

وبعد ...

المكرمة / قائدة المدرسة
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

بناء على خطاب مدير إدارة التخطيط والتطوير ذي الرقم (٩٢٤٣) والتاريخ ١٤٤٢/٨/٣ هـ (المرفق) بشأن تسهيل مهمة الباحث/ ماجد بن سعود هادي الحربي للدراسة بعنوان " دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في تسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية "

عليه نأمل منكم تسهيل مهمة الباحث لتطبيق أدوات الدراسة (مقابلة لقائدة المدرسة + مقابلة للمرشد الطلابي + استبانة للمعلمات + دليل مقابلة الطلاب) على عينة الدراسة: قائدات - مرشدات طالبات - معلمات - طالبات المرحلة المتوسطة والثانوية ، علماً أن روابط الأدوات الإلكترونية ورمز الماسح الضوئي موضحة في الخطاب المرفق.

شاكرين حسن تعاونكم ، ،

مديرة مكتب تعليم

فاطمة بنت أحمد الحكمي

١٤٤٢/٨/٥
نزهة السبيعي

١٤٤٢/٨/٥
نزهة السبيعي

- صورة/ مع المرفق لقائدات المرحلة (المتوسطة - الثانوي) حكومي.
- صورة/ مع المرفق للباحث majalharbi@ksu.edu.sa

(ن / النوفل)


أيميل: @hotmail.com

هاتف:

مكتب تعليم

Appendix 4 Permission from the Ministry of Education in city B

الرقم : ٩٧
التاريخ : ١٤٤٢/٧/١٨ هـ
المشروعات : - ٨


وزارة التعليم
Ministry of Education

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم
(٢٨٠)
إدارة التعليم بمحافظة
التخطيط والتطوير


الموضوع : تسهيل مهمة المبتعث/ ماجد سعود الحربي .
تعميم لجميع المدارس (بنين - بنات).

المكرم/ة / قائد / قائدة / مدرسة : وفقهم الله
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.

تجدون برفقه خطاب سعادة مدير عام مركز بحوث سياسات التعليم رقم ٧١٥١٠
بتاريخ ١٤٤٢/٧/١١ هـ المتضمن طلب تسهيل مهمة المبتعث من جامعة الملك سعود لدراسة
الدكتوراه / ماجد بن سعود الحربي ورفقه استبانة بعنوان " دور الإخصائيين الاجتماعيين
في المدارس في تسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية
السعودية) .

نأمل التكرم بتسهيل مهمته مع ملاحظة أخذ موافقة ولي الأمر الخطية المسبقة فيما
يخص أسئلة المقابلة للطلاب وألا يتزامن الإجابة عليها مع وقت حصص الطلاب على
المنصة .

وتقبلوا تحياتي وتقديري.


مدير ادارة التخطيط والتطوير
سليمان بن شليويح الزيني

Appendix 5 Information sheet, consent form, and interview schedule for school social workers

ورقة المعلومات الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين / مديرو المدارس

عنوان المشروع: (دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في سهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية)

الباحث / ماجد الحربي

القسم: علم الاجتماع والسياسة الاجتماعية

تفاصيل الاتصال: ٠٠٩٦٦٥٨٢٢٢٢٦٧٨

اسم المشرف: البروفيسور روجر سميت - د. أليسون جوبي

تفاصيل الاتصال بالمشرف: roger.smith@durham.ac.uk alison.jobe@durham.ac.uk

أنت مدعو للمشاركة في دراسة أفوم بها كجزء من رسالة الدكتوراه. أطروحة في جامعة دورهام. وحصلت هذه الدراسة على الموافقة الأخلاقية من قسم علم الاجتماع والسياسة الاجتماعية في جامعة دورهام ووزارة التربية والتعليم في المملكة العربية السعودية.

قبل أن تقرر ما إذا كنت ستوافق على المشاركة ، من المهم أن تفهم الغرض من البحث وما يتضمنه كمشارك. يرجى قراءة المعلومات التالية بعناية. يرجى الاتصال إذا كان أي شيء غير واضح أو إذا كنت ترغب في مزيد من المعلومات.

البحث:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في سهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، ستكشف الدراسة التحديات والعقبات التي يواجهها اللاجئون السوريون داخل المدارس وخارجها. ستكشف الدراسة أيضًا عن المشكلات التي يواجهها المعلمون فيما يتعلق بتعليم اللاجئين السوريين في المدارس العامة.

المشاركين:

لقد تمت دعوتك للمشاركة في هذا البحث لأنه يمكنك إثراء الدراسة. تساعد المعلومات التي تقدمها في الإجابة عن أسئلة البحث وتحقيق أهداف الدراسة.

إذا وافقت طواعية على المشاركة ، فيمكنك الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء السبب. أيضًا ، يمكنك الاحتفاظ بصحيفة المعلومات هذه والتوقيع على نموذج الموافقة بحيث يكون لديك نسخة من حقوقك قبل المقابلة وبعدها. إذا وافقت على المشاركة في الدراسة ، فستجيب على عدة أسئلة ، وستغرق المقابلة حوالي ٣٠ دقيقة إلى ساعة واحدة.

السرية:

ستتم المقابلة في مواقع آمنة في المدارس العامة لضمان بقاء معلوماتك آمنة. لتلتزم بأخلاقيات البحث ، لن يتم الكشف عن أسماء المشاركين وسيتم الحفاظ على السرية التامة في جميع الأوقات. سيبدل الباحث اسمك برموز وأرقام. سيتم تدمير رتود المشاركين بمجرد الانتهاء من الدراسة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، لن يتم مشاركة السجلات الصوتية مع الآخرين وسيتم تخزينها على جهاز الباحث المحمي بكلمة مرور.



سيتم استخدام النتائج فقط لغرض الدراسة ولن تتضمن النتائج المنشورة الأسماء والبيانات الشخصية. سيتم كتابة الدراسة التي تمت دعوتك للمشاركة فيها كأطروحة. عند التقديم الناجح للأطروحة ، سيتم إيداعها مطبوعة وعلى الإنترنت في أرشيف الجامعة ، لتسهيل استخدامها في البحث المستقبلي. سيتم نشر الرسالة عن طريق الوصول المفتوح. من المتوقع أن تكتمل هذه الدراسة في عام ٢٠٢٢م.

الحماية:

سيكون على الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين وموظفي المدرسة تقديم الدعم إذا كانت المقابلات تؤثر على الأطفال. لتجنب التأثيرات السلبية لإجراء المقابلات ، يحق للطلاب رفض الإجابة عن الأسئلة التي لا تشعر بالراحة تجاهها. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، يمكنهم الانسحاب من المقابلات. لن يشارك الطلاب في المقابلات حتى يتم منح الطلاب وأولياء أمورهم الإذن.

إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة أو مخاوف أخرى حول هذه الدراسة ، يرجى التحدث إلى الباحث أو وزارة التربية والتعليم.

نشكرك على قراءة هذه المعلومات والتفكير في المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

نموذج الموافقة

هذا النموذج هو لتأكيد أنك تفهم ما هي أغراض المشروع ، وما الذي يتضمنه وأنه سعيد بالمشاركة. ضع علامة () للإشارة إلى موافقتك

أؤكد أنني قد قرأت و فهمت ورقة المعلومات الموزعة // وإشعار الخصوصية للمشروع أعلاه	
لقد كان لدي الوقت الكافي للنظر في المعلومات وطرح أي أسئلة قد تكون لدي ، وأنا راضٍ عن الإجابات التي تلقيتها	
أفهم من سيكون له حق الوصول إلى البيانات الشخصية المقمنة ، وكيف سيتم تخزين البيانات ومما سيحدث للبيانات في نهاية المشروع	
أوافق على المشاركة في المشروع أعلاه	
أفهم أن مشاركتي طوعية وأنني حر في الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء سبب	
أدرك أن صوتي سيتم تسجيله وأنهم كيف سيتم استخدام هذه التسجيلات في مخرجات البحث وسيتم إتاحتها بعد ذلك	
أفهم أنه قد يتم اقتباس كلماتي في المنشورات والتقارير ومخرجات البحث الأخرى ولكن اسمي لن يظهر بأي شكل	



توقيع المشارك _____ التاريخ _____

توقيع الباحث _____

دليل المقابلة للأخصائي الاجتماعي في المدرسة:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس فيسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ستكشف الدراسة التحديات والعقبات التي يواجهها اللاجئون السوريون داخل / خارج المدارس. ستكشف الدراسة أيضًا عن المشكلات التي تواجه المعلمين فيما يتعلق بتعليم اللاجئين السوريين في المدارس العامة. وللتزام بأخلاقيات البحث، المعلومات المستخدمة لغرض البحث العلمي ولن يتم الكشف عن أسماء المشاركين وسيتم الحفاظ على السرية التامة في جميع الأوقات. سيقوم الباحث باستبدال اسمك برموز وأرقام وسيتم حذف ردود المشاركين بمجرد الانتهاء من الدراسة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، لن تتم مشاركة السجلات الصوتية مع الآخرين وسيتم تخزينها على جهاز الباحث المحمي بكلمة مرور.

البيانات الأولية

مقبلة رقم _____

المدرسة _____ المدينة _____ المؤهل _____

الجنس: ذكر أنثى العمر _____

سنوات من الخبرة: سنة إلى خمس سنوات خمس إلى عشر سنوات عشر سنوات فأكثر

الخلفية العلمية والتعليمية والعملية والتقنية:

- 1/ ما هي تجربتك مع الطلاب اللاجئين؟
- 2/ ما هي خلفيتك التعليمية؟ هل يساعدك على العمل مع الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين؟
- 3/ ما هو دورك كأخصائي اجتماعي في دمج الطلاب اللاجئين في المدارس؟
- 4/ كيف تتجح في دورك كعامل اجتماعي؟
- 5/ ما أنواع استراتيجيات التدخل التي تستخدمها لتعزيز اندماج الطلاب؟
- 6/ ما هي برأيك أهم المشاكل التي يواجهها الطلاب السوريون اللاجئين؟
- 7 / هل يمكنك تحديد المشاكل التي تعيق اندماج الطلاب السوريين في المدارس؟
- 8 / ما نوع الخدمات المقدمة للطلاب السوريين في المدارس؟
- 9 / ما هي توقعاتك من الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس السعودية؟ ومن أين تأتي هذه التوقعات؟
- 10 / هل تعملون مع المعلمين لحل مشاكل الطلاب السوريين؟ كيف ولماذا؟
- 11/ هل توجد برامج تدريبية للأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدرسة للعمل مع الطلاب اللاجئين؟ ما هم؟ هل حضرتم؟ هل كانت مفيدة؟
- 12/ ما هي أهمية البرامج التدريبية لإعداد الموظفين والمعلمين للعمل مع اللاجئين السوريين؟
- 13/ ما هي الارشادات التي تعلمون عليها لدمج الطلاب السوريين؟ ومن أين تحصل عليها؟
- 14 / ما هي المهارات الضرورية التي يجب أن يمتلكها الأخصائيون الاجتماعيون في المدرسة لمساعدة الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين على الاندماج؟



- 15 / هل يتفاعل الطلاب السوريون اللاجئين مع الطلاب السعوديين وغيرهم من الطلاب ذوي الخلفيات الثقافية المختلفة؟
- 16 / بصفتك أخصائي اجتماعي في المدرسة ، كيف يمكنك تسهيل التفاعل بين الطلاب المحليين والطلاب اللاجئين السوريين؟
- 17 / ما الذي يدفعك لمساعدة الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين؟
- 18 / ما هي المعوقات التي تحول دون تنفيذ برامج دمج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين؟

سياسات المدرسة

- 19 / هل تعملون مع إدارة المدرسة لمساعدة الطلاب على الانتماء في المدارس؟
- 20 / كيف تسجل المدرسة الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس العامة؟
- 21 / إيريك ، هل السياسات الحكومية والمدارس الحالية تساعد الطلاب السوريين على الانتماء في المدارس السعودية؟ وما لا؟
- 22 / كيف يمكن للأخصائي الاجتماعي في المدرسة المساعدة في وضع وتطوير سياسات لدمج اللاجئين السوريين؟

بيئة المدرسة -

- 23 / كيف يمكن للبيئة المدرسية أن تساعد في دمج الطلاب السوريين؟
- 24 / كيف يمكن للأخصائيين الاجتماعيين خلق بيئة مدرسية مناسبة لدعم انتماء الطلاب اللاجئين؟
- 25 / ما هي التدابير المعمول بها لتحسين البيئة المدرسية لإنماج الطلاب اللاجئين؟
- 26 / ما هي المشاكل التي قد تؤثر على البيئة المدرسية؟ كيف يمكنك التغلب على هذه المشاكل للمساعدة في انتماء اللاجئين؟
- 27 / هل يشارك الطلاب اللاجئين في الأنشطة الرياضية / الاجتماعية / الأكاديمية / الثقافية؟ ما هو دورك في تسهيل ذلك؟

الأُسرة والمجتمع

- 28 / كيف يمكن لعائلات الطلاب اللاجئين أن تؤثر على انتماء الطلاب في المدرسة؟
- 29 / ما هي الخدمات التي تحصل عليها أسر الطلاب اللاجئين من المدرسة؟ كيف يمكن أن يؤثر ذلك على انتماء الطلاب؟
- 30 / كيف يمكن للتواصل بين المدرسة والأسرة أن يساعد على دمج الطلاب وما هي أهم المهام كعامل اجتماعي لتنفيذ ذلك؟
- 31 / ما هي البرامج القائمة لتعزيز التواصل بين الأسر والمدرسة؟
- 32 / هل تواجه العائلات السورية مشاكل؟ هل يمكنك وصفهم؟
- 33 / هل تستطيع الأسرة من موارد اجتماعية خارجية؟ كيف يمكن أن يؤثر ذلك على انتماء الطلاب في المدرسة؟
- 34 / إيريك هل العائلات السورية على دراية بالبيئة المدرسية؟ وهل هم على علم بعلاقة الأطفال بالطلاب الآخرين؟
- 35 / كيف يمكن للخلفية الثقافية للأسرة (الجنسية) أن تساعد أو تعرقل انتماء الأطفال في المدرسة؟
- 36 / هل تعمل المدرسة مع مؤسسات أخرى لخدمة اللاجئين السوريين وعائلاتهم؟



Information Sheet for

School Social Workers/ Principals

Project title: (School Social Workers' Role in Facilitating the Integration of Syrian Refugee Students into Saudi Arabian Public Schools)

Researcher(s): Majed Alharbi

Department: Sociology and Social Policy

Contact details: 00966582222678

Supervisor name: Prof. Roger Smith - Dr Alison Jobe

Supervisor contact details: roger.smith@durham.ac.uk alison.jobe@durham.ac.uk

You are invited to take part in a study that I am conducting as part of the Ph.D. Dissertation at Durham University.

This study has received ethical approval from the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at Durham University and the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia.

Before you decide whether to agree to take part, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved as a participant. Please read the following information carefully. Please get in contact if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Research:

This study aims to explore the roles of school social workers in facilitating the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi Arabian public schools. In addition, the study will explore the challenges and obstacles Syrian refugees face in / out of schools. The study will also explore the problems that face teachers regarding teach Syrian refugees in public schools.

Participants:

You have been invited to participate in this research because you can enrich the study. The information you provide will help to answers the research questions, and achieve the aims of the study.

If you do agree to take part voluntarily, you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Also, you can keep this information sheet and sign the consent form so that you have a copy of your rights before and after the interview. If you agree to take part in the study, you will answer multiple questions, and the interview will last approximately 30 minutes to one hour.

Confidentiality:

The interview will take place in secure places in the public schools to ensure your information will remain secure. To adhere to research ethics, the names of the participants shall not be disclosed and complete confidentiality will be maintained at all times. The researcher will replace your name with symbols and numbers. The Participants' responses will be destroyed

once the study is completed. In addition, voice records will not be shared with others and will be stored on the researcher's password-protected device.

The results will be used only for the purpose of the study and published results will not include names and personal data. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. Upon successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the university archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published by open access. This study is expected to be completed in 2022.

Safeguarding:

Social workers and staff will be at the schools to provide support if the interviews impact children. To avoid the interviews' having negative impacts, students have the right to refuse to answer questions that are not comfortable with. In addition, they can withdraw from the interviews. Students will only take part in interviews after both students and their parents have granted permission.

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or the Ministry of Education.

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

Consent Form for

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This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated / / and the privacy notice for the above project.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	

I understand who access to personal data will have provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I agree to take part in the above project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that my voice will recorded and I understand how these recordings will be used in research outputs and will be destroyed afterwards.	
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, and other research outputs but my name will not appear in any form.	

Participant's Signature_____ Date_____
Name (Optional)_____
Researcher's Signature_____ Date_____

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

Demographics

Interview# School City

Sex: Male Female

Age_____

Qualification: _____

Years of experience: One to five years Five to ten years More than ten years

Experience, educational, practical and cultural background:

- 1/ What is your experience with refugee students?
- 2/ What is your educational background? Does it help you to work with Syrian refugee students?
- 3/ What is your role as a social worker in integrating refugee students into schools?
- 4/ How can you succeed in your role as a social worker?
- 5/ What types of intervention strategies do you use to enhance students' integration?

- 6/ In your opinion, what are the main problems that Syrian refugee students face?
- 7/ Can you identify the problems that hinder Syrian students' integration into schools?
- 8/ What kind of services are provided to Syrian students in schools?
- 9/ What are your expectations for Syrian refugee students in Saudi schools? And where do those expectations come from?
- 10/ Do you work together with teachers to solve Syrian students' problems? How and why?
- 11/ Are there training programs for school social workers to work with refugee students? What are they? Have you attended them? Have they been useful?
- 12/ What is the importance of training programs to prepare staff and teachers to work with Syrian refugees?
- 13/ What guidelines do you rely on to integrate Syrian students? And where do you get it from?
- 14/ What are the necessary skills that school social workers should have to help Syrian refugee students integrate?
- 15/ Do Syrian refugee students interact with Saudi students and other students with different cultural backgrounds?
- 16/ As a school social worker, how can you facilitate interacting between local students and Syrian refugee students?
- 17/ What motivates you in helping Syrian refugee students?
- 18/ What are the obstacles that prevent the implementation of programs to integrate Syrian refugee students?

School policies

- 19/ Do you work with the school administration to help students' integration into schools?
- 20/ How does school enroll Syrian refugee students in public schools?
- 21/ In your opinion, do the current government and schools policies help Syrians students to integrate into Saudi schools? Why or why not?
- 22/ How can school social worker help in establishing and developing policies to integrate Syrian refugees?

School environment:

- 23/ How can the school environment help integrate Syrian students?
- 24/ How can social workers create a suitable school environment to support refugee students' integration?
- 25/ What measures are in place to improve the school environment for refugee students' integration?
- 26/ What problems may affect the school environment? How can you overcome these problems to help refugees' integration?

27/ Do refugee students participate in sports/ social/ academic/ cultural activities? What is your role in facilitating this?

Family and society

28/ How can refugee students' families affect students' integration in school?

29/ What services do the families of refugee students receive from school? How can this affect students' integration?

30/ How can communication between the school and the family help to integrate students and what are the most important tasks as a social worker to implement this?

31/ What are the existing programs to enhance communication between families and the school?

32/ Do Syrian families face problems? Can you describe them?

33/ Does the family benefit from external social resources? How can this affect the integration of students in school?

34/ In your opinion, are Syrian families familiar with the school environment? And are they aware of the children's relationship with other students?

35/ How can a family's cultural background (nationality) help or hamper children's integration into school?

36/ Does the school work with other institutions to serve Syrian refugees and their families?

Appendix 6 Information sheet, consent form, and interview schedule for school principals

ورقة المعلومات الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين / مديرو المدارس

عنوان المشروع: (دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في سهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية)

الباحث / ماجد الحربي

القسم: علم الاجتماع والسياسة الاجتماعية

تفاصيل الاتصال: ٠٠٩٦٦٥٨٢٢٢٢٦٧٨

اسم المشرف: البروفيسور روجر سميث - د. أليسون جوبي

تفاصيل الاتصال بالمشرف: roger.smith@durham.ac.uk alison.job@durham.ac.uk

أنت مدعو للمشاركة في دراسة أقوم بها كجزء من رسالة الدكتوراه. أطروحة في جامعة دورهام. وحصلت هذه الدراسة على الموافقة الأخلاقية من قسم علم الاجتماع والسياسة الاجتماعية في جامعة دورهام ووزارة التربية والتعليم في المملكة العربية السعودية.

هل أن تقرر ما إذا كنت ستوافق على المشاركة ، من المهم أن تفهم الغرض من البحث وما يتضمنه كمشارك. يرجى قراءة المعلومات التالية بعناية. يرجى الاتصال إذا كان أي شيء غير واضح أو إذا كنت ترغب في مزيد من المعلومات.

البحث:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في سهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، ستكشف الدراسة التحديات والعقبات التي يواجهها اللاجئون السوريون داخل المدارس وخارجها. ستكشف الدراسة أيضًا عن المشكلات التي يواجهها المعلمون فيما يتعلق بتعليم اللاجئين السوريين في المدارس العامة.

المشاركين:

لقد تمت دعوتك للمشاركة في هذا البحث لأنه يمكنك إجراء الدراسة. تساعد المعلومات التي تقدمها في الإجابة عن أسئلة البحث وتحقيق أهداف الدراسة.

إذا وافقت طواعية على المشاركة ، يمكنك الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء السبب. أيضًا ، يمكنك الاحتفاظ بصحيفة المعلومات هذه والتوقيع على نموذج الموافقة بحيث يكون لديك نسخة من حقوقك قبل المقابلة وبعدها. إذا وافقت على المشاركة في الدراسة ، فستجيب على عدة أسئلة ، وستغرق المقابلة حوالي ٣٠ دقيقة إلى ساعة واحدة.

السرية:

ستتم المقابلة في مواقع آمنة في المدارس العامة لضمان بقاء معلوماتك آمنة. لتلتزم بأخلاقيات البحث ، لن يتم الكشف عن أسماء المشاركين وسيتم الحفاظ على السرية التامة في جميع الأوقات. سيبدل الباحث اسمك برموز وأرقام سيتم تغيير رموز المشاركين بمجرد الانتهاء من الدراسة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، لن يتم مشاركة السجلات الصوتية مع الآخرين وسيتم تخزينها على جهاز الباحث المحمي بكلمة مرور.



سيتم استخدام النتائج فقط لغرض الدراسة ولن تتضمن النتائج المنشورة الأسماء والبيانات الشخصية. سيتم كتابة الدراسة التي صمت دعوتك للمشاركة فيها كأطروحة. عدد التقديم الناجح للأطروحة ، سيتم إيداعها مطبوعة وعلى الإنترنت في أرشيف الجامعة ، لتسهيل استخدامها في البحث المستقبلي. سيتم نشر الرسالة عن طريق الوصول المقترح من الموقع أن تكتمل هذه الدراسة في عام ٢٠٢٢م.

الحماية:

سيكون على الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين وموظفي المدرسة تقديم الدعم إذا كانت المقابلات تؤثر على الأطفال. لتجنب التأثيرات السلبية لإجراء المقابلات ، يحق للطلاب رفض الإجابة عن الأسئلة التي لا تشعر بالراحة تجاهها. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، يمكنهم الانسحاب من المقابلات. لن يشارك الطلاب في المقابلات حتى يتم منح الطلاب وأولياء أمورهم الإذن.

إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة أو مخاوف أخرى حول هذه الدراسة ، يرجى التحدث إلى الباحث أو وزارة التربية والتعليم.

نشرك على فراء هذه المعلومات والتفكير في المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

نموذج الموافقة

هذا النموذج هو لتأكيد أنك تفهم ما هي أغراض المشروع ، وما الذي يتضمنه وأنه سعيد بالمشاركة. ضع علامة () للإشارة إلى موافقتك

	أؤكد أنني قد قرأت وفهمت ورقة المعلومات الموزعة // وإشعار الخصوصية للمشروع أعلاه
	لقد كان لدي الوقت الكافي للنظر في المعلومات وطرح أي أسئلة قد تكون لدي ، وأنا راض عن الإجابات التي تلقيتها
	أنهم من سيكون له حق الوصول إلى البيانات الشخصية المقدمه ، وكيف سيتم تخزين البيانات ومما سيحدث للبيانات في نهاية المشروع
	أوافق على المشاركة في المشروع أعلاه
	أفهم أن مشاركتي طوعية وأنهى حر في الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء سبب
	أدرك أن صوتي سيتم تسجيله وأتفهم كيف سيتم استخدام هذه التسجيلات في مخرجات البحث وسيتم إتلافها بعد ذلك
	أفهم أنه قد يتم اقتباس كلماتي في المنشورات والتقارير ومخرجات البحث الأخرى ولكن اسمي لن يظهر بأي شكل



توقيع المشارك _____ التاريخ _____

توقيع الباحث _____

دليل المقابلة للمدرسة

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس فيسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ستمكشف الدراسة التحديات والعقبات التي يواجهها اللاجئون السوريون داخل / خارج المدارس. ستمكشف الدراسة أيضاً عن المشكلات التي تواجه المعلمين فيما يتعلق بتعليم اللاجئين السوريين في المدارس العامة. وللتزام بأخلاقيات البحث، المعلومات المستخدمة لغرض البحث العلمي ولن يتم الكشف عن أسماء المشاركين وسيتم الحفاظ على السرية التامة في جميع الأوقات. سيقوم الباحث باستبدال اسمك برمز وأرقام وسيتم اطلاق رموز المشاركين بمجرد الانتهاء من الدراسة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، لن يتم مشاركة السجلات الصوتية مع الآخرين وسيتم تخزينها على جهاز الباحث المحمي بكلمة مرور.

البيانات الأولية

مقبلة رقم _____

المدرسة _____

المدينة _____

المؤهل _____

الجنس: ذكر أنثى

العمر _____

سنوات من الخبرة: سنة إلى خمس سنوات خمس إلى عشر سنوات عشر سنوات فأكثر

الخلفية العلمية والتدريبية والمهنية والتقنية:

1/ ما هي تجربتك مع الطلاب اللاجئين؟

2 /كيف تساعدك خلفيتك التدريبية على العمل مع الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين؟

3 /كم عدد الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في هذه المدرسة؟

4 /ما الفرق بين استقبال الطلاب السوريين قبل وبعد 2011 ؟

5 /ما هي احتياجات الطلاب السوريين في المدرسة؟

6 /هل المدرسة بها مشاكل؟

7 /كيف تضمن المدرسة شعور الطلاب اللاجئين السوريين بالترحيب؟

8 /ما هي المشاكل التي يواجهها اللاجئون السوريون في المدرسة؟

9 /هل هذه المشاكل تحد من اندماجهم؟ كيف ولماذا؟

10 /ما هي الخدمات التي تقدمها المدرسة للطلاب السوريين اللاجئين؟

11 /هل تعمل مع اخصائيين اجتماعيين ومعلمين لمساعدة الطلاب السوريين؟ برأيك كيف يساعد ذلك في عملية الاندماج؟

12 /ما هي برامج التدريب التي يتلقاها المعلمون والأخصائيون الاجتماعيون للعمل مع الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين؟



سياسات المدرسة :-

- 13/ ما هي البرامج الموجودة لاستقبال وإعداد الطلاب السوريين الجدد؟
14/ كيف تسجل المدرسة الطلاب السوريين اللجئيين في المدارس العامة؟
15/ كيف يمكن لسياسات المدرسة أن تساعد أو تعرقل اندماج هؤلاء الطلاب؟
16/ ما هي السياسات المطبقة لدمج الطلاب السوريين اللجئيين في المدرسة؟
17/ ما نوع العقوبة التي تطبقها على الطلاب الذين يسيئون التصرف؟

بيئة المدرسة :-

- 18/ كيف يمكن للبيئة المدرسية أن تساعد في دمج الطلاب وكيف يمكن تحقيق ذلك؟
19/ ما هي الموارد المتاحة المستخدمة لدمج الطلاب في البيئة المدرسية؟
20/ ما طبيعة العلاقة بين الإدارة والطلاب؟ هل يؤثر على اندماجهم؟
21/ هل يشارك الطلاب السوريون اللجئيين في الأنشطة المدرسية؟ هل يمكنك شرح هذه الأنشطة بالتفصيل؟
22/ هل التحصيل العلمي يؤثر على اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللجئيين؟
23/ ما هي المشاكل التي قد تؤثر على البيئة المدرسية؟ كيف يمكنك التغلب على هذه المشاكل لمساعدة اللجئيين على الاندماج؟

الأسرة والمجتمع :-

- 24/ هل تشارك الأسرة في البرامج التي تقدمها المدرسة؟
25/ هل تتواصل المدرسة مع عائلات الطلاب السوريين؟ برأيك كيف يمكن أن يساعد ذلك في دمج الطلاب السوريين؟
26/ ما هي الخدمات التي تحصل عليها العائلات السورية؟ كيف يمكن أن يساعد ذلك في دمج الطلاب السوريين اللجئيين؟
27/ ما هي البرامج المنفذة لإعداد الأسرة والطلاب بالمدرسة؟
28/ ما هي موارد المجتمع الخارجية التي تتعاون معها المدرسة لمساعدة الطلاب اللجئيين وعائلاتهم؟



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Contact details: 00966582222678

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Supervisor contact details: roger.smith@durham.ac.uk alison.jobe@durham.ac.uk

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Safeguarding:

Social workers and staff will be at the schools to provide support if the interviews impact children. To avoid the interviews' having negative impacts, students have the right to refuse to answer questions that are not comfortable with. In addition, they can withdraw from the interviews. Students will only take part in interviews after both students and their parents have granted permission.

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or the Ministry of Education.

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

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Supervisor name: Prof. Roger Smith – Dr. Alison Jobe

Supervisor contact details roger.smith@durham.ac.uk alison.jobe@durham.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated / / and the privacy notice for the above project.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I agree to take part in the above project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	

I understand that my voice will be recorded and I understand how these recordings will be used in research outputs and will be destroyed afterwards.	
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, and other research outputs but my name will not appear in any form.	

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____
Name (Optional) _____
Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Demographics

Interview# School City

Sex: Male Female

Age _____

Qualification: _____

Years of experience: One to five years Five to ten years More than ten years

Experience, educational, practical and cultural background:

- 1/ What is your experience with refugee students?
- 2/ How does your educational background help you to work with Syrian refugee students?
- 3/ How many Syrian refugee students are in this school?
- 4/ What is the difference between receiving Syrian students before and after 2011?
- 5/ What needs do Syrian students have in the school?
- 6/ Does the school have any problems?
- 7/ How does the school ensure Syrian refugee students feel welcome?
- 8/ What are problems Syrian refugees face in school?
- 9/ Do these problems limit their integration? How and why?
- 10/ What are the services provided by the school for Syrian refugee students?

11/ Do you work with social workers and teachers to help Syrian students? In your opinion, how does this help in the integration process?

12/ What training programs do teachers and social workers receive to work with Syrian refugee students?

School policies:

13/ What programs are in place to receive and prepare new Syrian students?

14/ How does school enroll Syrian refugee students in public schools?

15/ How can school policies help or hamper the integration of these students?

16/ What policies are in place for integrating Syrian refugee students in school?

17/ What kind of punishment do you apply for students who misbehave?

School environment:

18/ How can the school environment help integrate students and how can this be achieved?

19/ What are the available resources used to integrate students into the school environment?

20/ What is the nature of the relationship between the administration and students? Does it affect their integration?

21/ Do Syrian refugee students participate in school activities? Can you explain these activities in detail?

22/ Does educational achievement affects the integration of Syrian refugee students?

23/ What problems may affect the school environment? How can you overcome these problems to help refugees integrate?

Family and society:

24/ Does the family participate in programs offered by the school?

25/ Does school communicate with Syrian students' families? In your opinion, how can this help in integrating Syrian students?

26/ What services do the Syrian families receive? How can this help in integrating Syrian refugee students?

27/ What are the programs implemented to prepare the family and students in the school?

28/ What are external community resources that the school cooperates with to help refugee students and their families?

Appendix 7 Information sheet, consent form, and interview schedule for Syrian refugee students



ورقة معلومات للطلاب

عنوان الدراسة: دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في تسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية

الباحث: ماجد الحربي - جامعة نور هام المملكة المتحدة

لماذا يقوم الباحث بهذا البحث؟



تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى اكتشاف دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في تسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية. سيكتشف التحديات والمشاكل التي يواجهها اللاجئون السوريون داخل / خارج المدارس. سيكتشف الدراسة المشاكل التي تواجه المعنيين فيما يتعلق بتعليم اللاجئين السوريين في المدارس العامة.



لماذا صحت دعوي لهذه المقابلة؟

لقد صحت دعويك للمشاركة في هذا البحث لأنه يعتقد إزاء الدراسة. ستساعد المعلومات التي تقدمها في الإجابة على أسئلة الدراسة وتحقق أهدافها.

لماذا تلتقت هذه المعلومات؟

احتفظ بورقة المعلومات هذه وقم بالتوقيع على نموذج الموافقة حتى تعرف حقوقك قبل المقابلة ويعدّها



هل سيرفضني الناس إذا تحدثت إلي الباحث؟

سبح المقابلة في مكان خاص في مدرستك لضمان بقاء معلوماتك آمنة. يقوم الباحث باستبدال اسمك برموز وأرقام. لن تتم مطابقة السجلات الصوتية مع الآخرين وسيتم تخزينها على جهاز الباحث المحمي بتلكمّة مرور وسيتم التخلص من الردود بمجرد اكتمال الدراسة في عام ٢٠٢٢

ماذا سيحدث بعد المقابلة؟

سيتم استخدام النتائج فقط لعرض الدراسة ولن تتضمن أي نتائج منشورة أو أسماءك وبياناتك الشخصية. سيتم تغطية الدراسة التي دعيت للمشاركة فيها غائبة.



ماذا لو لم أُرغب في اتصال المقابلة؟

يمكنك الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء الأسباب.

كم من الوقت ستستغرق المقابلة؟

إذا وافقت على المشاركة في الدراسة ، ستجيب على عدة أسئلة ، وستستغرق المقابلة حوالي ٣٠ دقيقة إلى ساعة واحدة

هل ستكون بأمان؟

سيكون الأخصائيون الاجتماعيون والموظفون في مدرستك لدعمك إذا أثرت المقابلات عليك. يمكنك رفض الإجابة على الأسئلة غير المريحة. لن تشارك في المقابلة إلا بعد أن تمنحك أنت والبيك الإذن. إذا كنت ترغب في إجراء مقابلة ، يمكن للوالدين الاتضام إلينا

هذا النموذج هو لتأكيد أنك سعيد بالمشاركة في المقابلة

يرجى قراءة كل مربع والتوقيع للإشارة إلى موافقتك

	أؤكد أنني قد قرأت ورقة المعلومات وذهمته
	لقد كان لدي الوقت الكافي للنظر في المعلومات وطرح أي أسئلة قد تكون لدي
	أنا أفهم من سيصل إلى معلوماتي
	أنا سعيد بالمشاركة في المشروع
	أفهم أن مشاركتي طوعية وأتني حر في مقابلة المقابلة في أي وقت دون إبداء سبب
	أفهم أنه تم تسجيل صوتي وأفهم كيف سيتم استخدام هذه التسجيلات في البحث وسيتم تدميرها بعد ذلك
	أفهم أنه قد يتم اقتباس كلماتي في التقارير ولكن اسمي لن يظهر بأي شكل



توقيع المشارك _____ التاريخ _____

توقيع الباحث _____

مليل المقابلة للطلاب

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في سهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ستمتصكف الدراسة التحديات والعقبات التي يواجهها اللاجئون السوريون داخل / خارج المدارس. ستمتصكف الدراسة أيضاً عن المشكلاات التي تواجه المعلمين فيما يتعلق بتعليم اللاجئين السوريين في المدارس العامة. وللتزام بأخلاقيات البحث، المعلومات ستمستخدم لغرض البحث العلمي ولن يتم الكشف عن أسماء المشاركين وسيمت الحفاظ على السرية التامة في جميع الأوقات. سيقوم الباحث باستبدال اسمك برموز وأرقام وسيمت اطلاق ردود المشاركين بمجرد الانتهاء من الدراسة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، لن يتم مشاركة السجلات الصوتية مع الآخرين وسيمت تخزينها على جهاز الباحث المحمي بكلمة مرور.

مقابلة رقم _____

المدسة _____ المدينة _____ الصف _____
الجنس: ذكر انثى العمر _____

الخبرة شخصية:

- 1 / منذ متى وانت تعيش في السعودية؟ كيف أنبت للعيش هنا؟
- 2 / ما الفرق بين مدرستك في سوريا وهنا؟
- 3 / هل تشعر بالقبول في المدرسة؟

بيئة المدرسة:

- 4 / هل تواجه اي مشكل في المدرسة؟
- 5 / هل يمكنك وصف اصداقك؟
- 6 / هل يساعدك الطلاب في الفصل؟
- 7 / ما هي الأنشطة المدرسية التي تشارك فيها؟ كيف انخرطت؟
- 8 / هل تتحدث مع معلميك؟ هل يدرك مدرسوك احتياجاك كطالب؟
- 9 / هل يحبك المعلمون إلى الأخصائي الاجتماعي بالمدرسة؟
- 10 / كيف يساعدك الاخصائي الاجتماعي في المدرسة؟
- 11 / هل تعرضت للعقاب في المدرسة؟ لماذا؟

الأسرة والمجتمع:

- 13 / اين مكان سكنتك؟ هل يساعدك المكان الذي تعيش فيه على الاندماج في المدرسة؟
- 14 / ما هي الأنشطة التي تشارك فيها / خارج المدرسة؟
- 15 / هل تفضل التعامل مع عائلتك؟
- 16 / ما هي الخدمات التي حصلت عليها أنت وعائلتك أثناء التحااك بالمدرسة؟
- 17 / كيف تساعد عائلتك في واجباتك المدرسية؟
- 18 / هل تعمل بعد الدوام المدرسي تساعد عائلتك مالياً؟ كيف يؤثر هذا عليك في المدرسة؟





Information Sheet for Students

Study Title: School Social Workers' Role in Facilitating the Integration of Syrian Refugee Students into Saudi Arabian Public Schools

The researcher: Majed Alharbi – Durham University United Kingdom

Why is the researcher doing this research?



This study wants to discover the roles of school social workers in facilitating the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi Arabian public schools. It will discover the challenges and problems Syrian refugees face in / out of schools. The study will explore the problems that face teachers regarding teach Syrian refugees in public schools.



Why have I been invited to this interview?

You have been invited to participate in this research because you can enrich the study. The information you provide will help to answers the study questions and achieve its aims.

Why have I received this information?

Keep this information sheet and sign the consent form so that you know your rights before and after the interview.



Will people know me if I talk to the researcher?

The interview will take place in a private space in your schools to ensure your information will remain secure. The researcher will replace your name with symbols and numbers. Voice records will not be shared with others and will be stored on the researcher's password protected device and responses will be destroyed once the study is completed in 2022.

What will happen after the interview?

The results will be used only for the purpose of the study and any published results will not include your names and personal data. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis.



What about if I do not want to complete the interview

You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

How long will the interview take?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will answer multiple questions, and the interview will last approximately 30 minutes to one hour.

Will I be safe?

Social workers and staff will be at your school to support you if the interviews impact you. You have can refuse to answer uncomfortable questions. You will only take part in the interview after both you and your parents give permission. If you like to be interviewed, parents can join us.

Consent Form for Students

This form is to confirm you are happy to take part in the interview.

Please read and initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have.	
I understand who will access to my information.	
I am happy to take part in the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to leave the interview at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that my voice is recorded and I understand how these recordings will be used in research and will be destroyed afterward.	
I understand that my words may be quoted in reports but my name will not appear in any form.	

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Name (Optional) _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

(Name) _____

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

Demographics

Interview # School City

Sex: Male Female Age _____ Grade _____

Personal experience:

1/ How long have you been living in Saudi Arabia? How did you come to live here?

2/ What is the difference between your school in Syria and here?

3/ Do you feel accepted in the school?

School environment:

4/ Do you face any problems in the school?

5/ Can you describe your friends?

6/ Do students help you in class?

7/ What school activities do you participate in? How did you become involved?

8/ Do you talk to your teachers? Do your teachers realize your needs as a student?

9/ Do the teachers refer you to the school social worker?

10/ How does the social worker help you in school?

11/ Have you experience punishment in school? Why?

Family and society:

13/ Where do you live? Does the place you live help you to integrate into school?

14/ What are activities you are participate in / out of school?

15/ Do you prefer interacting with your family?

16/ What services did you and your family get during your enrolment in school?

17/ How does your family help you with school homework?

18/ Do you (work after school hours) help your family financially? How does this affect you in school?

19/ Does the family benefit from any social organizations such as (charity)?

20/ Does your school social worker speak to your family?

Appendix 8 Information sheet and consent form for the parents of Syrian refugee students

ورقة المعلومات لأولياء الأمور

أنت مدعو للمشاركة في دراسة أجريها كجزء من الدكتوراه أطروحة في جامعة دورهام. وحصلت هذه الدراسة على موافقة الأخلاقية من قسم علم الاجتماع والسياسة الاجتماعية بجامعة دورهام ووزارة التربية والتعليم في المملكة العربية السعودية. هيل أن تقرر ما إذا كنت موافق على المشاركة ، من المهم بالنسبة لك أن تفهم الغرض من البحث وما يتضمنه كمشارك. يرجى قراءة المعلومات التالية بعناية. يمكنك الاتصال بي إذا كان هناك أي شيء غير واضح أو إذا كنت ترغب في مزيد المعلومات.

البحث:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في المدارس في تسهيل اندماج الطلاب السوريين اللاجئين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، ستكشف الدراسة التحديات والعقبات التي يواجهها اللاجئون السوريون داخل / خارج المدارس. ستكشف الدراسة أيضًا عن المشكلات التي تواجه المعلمين فيما يتعلق بتعليم اللاجئين السوريين في المدارس العامة.

المشاركين

صمت دعوة طفلك للمشاركة في هذا البحث لأنه يستطيع إجراء الدراسة. سساعد المعلومات التي يقدمها في الإجابة على أسئلة البحث وتحقيق أهداف الدراسة.

إذا كنت موافق على أن طفلك سوف يشارك في هذه الدراسة طواعية ؛ يمكنه / يمكنها الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء الأسباب. أيضًا ، يمكنك الاحتفاظ بورقة المعلومات هذه والتوقيع على نموذج الموافقة بحيث يكون لديك نسخة من حقوق طفلك قبل المقابلة وبعدها. يجب على الطالب على عدة أسئلة ، وصحفرق المقابلة ما يقرب من ٣٠ دقيقة إلى ساعة واحدة.

السرية:

ستتم المقابلة في مكان خاص في المدارس العامة لضمان بقاء معلومات الطفل آمنة. للالتزام بأخلاقيات البحث ، لن يتم الكشف عن أسماء المشاركين وسيتتم الحفاظ على السرية التامة في جميع الأوقات. يقوم الباحث باستبدال أسماء الطلاب برموز وأرقام. سيتم تدمير ردود الطلاب بمجرد الانتهاء من الدراسة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، لن يتم مشاركة السجلات الصوتية مع الآخرين وسيتم تخزينها على جهاز الباحث المحمي بكلمة مرور.

سيتم استخدام النتائج فقط لغرض الدراسة ولن تتضمن النتائج المنشورة الأسماء والبيانات الشخصية. سيتم كتابة الدراسة التي صمت دعوة الطلاب للمشاركة فيها كأطروحة. عند التقديم الناجح للأطروحة ، سيتم إيداعها مطبوعة و عبر الإنترنت في أرشيف الجامعة ، لتسهيل استخدامها في البحث المستقبلي. سيتم نشر الأطروحة عن طريق الوصول المفتوح. من المتوقع أن تكتمل هذه الدراسة في عام ٢٠٢٢م.

الحماية:

سيكون الأخصائيون الاجتماعيون والموظفون في المدرسة لدعم الطلاب إذا أثرت المقابلات عليهم. لتجنب حدوث تكفيرات سلبية للمقابلات ، يحق للطلاب رفض الإجابة على أي أسئلة لا يشعرون بالارتياح تجاهها. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، كطالب ، يمكنك الانسحاب من المقابلات في أي وقت دون إبداء الأسباب. لن يشارك الطلاب في المقابلات إلا بعد منحك أنت وطفلك الإذن.



نموذج موافقة الوالدين

يرغب الباحث منك الموافقة على إجراء مقابلة مع ابنك / ابنتك. يهدف الباحث إلى استكمال رسالة الدكتوراه. أطروحة في العلوم الاجتماعية التطبيقية من جامعة دورهام بالمملكة المتحدة. يرجى قراءة ورقة المعلومات المرفقة للمقابلة.

هذا النموذج هو لتأكيد أنك تفهم ما هي أعراض المشروع ، وما الذي ينطوي عليه ، وأنك سجد بمشاركة طفلك في المقابلة. الرجاء التوقيع في كل مربع للإشارة إلى موافقتك:

	أؤكد أنني قد قرأت وفهمت ورقة المعلومات المؤرخة / / وإشعار الخصوصية للمشروع أعلاه
	أفهم أن طفلي يشارك طواعية وأنه / لها الحرية في الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء الأسباب
	أوافق على مشاركة طفلي في المشروع أعلاه
	أفهم من سيكون له حق الوصول إلى البيانات الشخصية المقدمة ، وكيف سيتم تخزين البيانات وملا سجدت للبيانات في نهاية المشروع
	أدرك أن صوت طفلي مسجل وأدرك كيف سستخدم التسجيلات في مخرجات البحث
	أفهم أن كلمات طفلي قد يتم استخدامها في المنشورات والتقارير ومخرجات البحث الأخرى ولكن الأسماء لن تظهر بأي شكل



توقيع المشارك _____ التاريخ _____

توقيع الباحث _____

Consent Form for Parents

The researcher wishes from you agree to conduct an interview with your son/daughter. The researcher aims to complete a Ph.D. dissertation in applied social sciences from the University of Durham in the United Kingdom. Please read the attached information sheet for the interview.

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy for your child to take part in the interview. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated / / and the privacy notice for the above project.	
I understand that my child's participates is voluntarily and that he/she free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I agree for my child to take part in the above project.	
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I understand that my child voice is recorded and I understand how recordings will be used in research outputs.	
I understand that my child's words may be quoted in publications, reports, and other research outputs but names will not appear in any form.	

Participant's Signature_____ Date_____
Name (Optional)_____
Researcher's Signature_____ Date_____

Appendix 9 Questionnaire for school teachers

عزيزي المعلم/ المعلمة

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد

يرغب الباحث من سعادتكم الموافقة نجدة الاستبيان الذي يحتوي على خمسة وعشرون عبارة وثلاثة أسئلة قصيرة بهدف بحث أكاديمي لاستكمال درجة الدكتوراه في العلوم الاجتماعية التطبيقية من جامعة درم بالمملكة المتحدة ويهدف البحث الى استكشاف دور الخدمة الاجتماعية في دمج الطلاب السوريين في مدارس المملكة العربية السعودية وكذلك الى معرفة خصائص المعلمين في المملكة العربية السعودية والمشكلات التي تواجه المعلمين والطلاب السوريين في المدارس الحكومية السعودية.

وللتزام بأخلاقيات البحث، المعلومات ستستخدم لغرض البحث العلمي ولن يتم الكشف عن أسماء المشاركين وسيم الحفظ على السرية التامة في جميع الأوقات. سيقوم الباحث باستبدال اسمك برموز وأرقام وسيم اتلاف ردود المشاركين بمجرد الانتهاء من الدراسة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، لن يتم مشاركة السجلات الصوتية مع الآخرين وسيم تخزينها على جهاز الباحث المحمي بكلمة مرور.



غير موافق

موافق

التوقيع: _____ التاريخ _____

توقيع الباحث _____

أولاً: البيانات الأولية

(أ)

- 1/ المدرسة _____ 2/ المدينة _____ 3/ الجنس: ذكر انثى
- 4/ العمر _____ 5/ المرحلة التدريسية متوسط ثانوي
- 6/ المؤهل العلمي: دكتوراه ماجستير بكالوريوس
- 7/ سنوات من الخبرة: سنة إلى خمس سنوات خمس إلى عشر سنوات عشر سنوات فأكثر

(ب) امل وضع علامة صح في الخانة التي تتناسب مع اجابتك:

الرقم	العبارة	نعم	لا
٨	هل لديك خبرة عملية مع الطلاب اللاجئين السوريين		
٩	لقد حضرت برنامج تدريبي على العمل مع الطلاب السوريين إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فقد ساعدني هذا التدريب على		
١٠	فهم احتياجات الطلاب السوريين		
١١	فهم ثقافة الطلاب السوريين		
١٢	فهم التعامل مع الطلاب السوريين		
١٣	اكتساب ادوات جديدة في التعامل مع الطلاب السوريين		



تانياً: هذا الجزء يقيس الاحتياجات والمشكلات للطلبة اللاجئين السوريين - يرجى وضع علامة (□) امام الخانة المناسبة: -

الرقم	المحور الأول: الاحتياجات والبرامج الموجهة للطلاب				
	دائماً	غالباً	أحياناً	نادرًا	لا أبداً
	العبارة				
١					
٢					
٣					
٤					
٥					
٦					

الرقم	المحور الثاني: المشكلات السلوكية للطلاب				
	دائماً	غالباً	أحياناً	نادرًا	لا أبداً
	العبارة				
٧					
٨					
٩					
١٠					
١١					
١٢					
١٣					



الرقم	المحور الثالث: المشكلات الاجتماعية والمدرسية				
	دائما	غالباً	أحياناً	نادرًا	لا أبداً
	العبرة				
١٤					يواجه الطلاب تفرق فيما بينهم داخل الفصل
١٥					يواجه الطلاب مشاجرات فيما بينهم داخل الفصل
١٦					يعامل الطلاب أقرانهم السوريين مثل معاملة الطلاب الآخرين في المجتمع المضيق ويشكل عامل
١٧					يتفاعل الطلاب اللاجئين السوريين مع زملائهم السعوديين بثقة
١٨					يتفخر الطلاب السوريين عن الحصص الدراسية
١٩					يتفنى مستوى تفاعل الطلاب اللاجئين السوريين مع زملائهم نتيجة لاختلاف الخلفية الثقافية
٢٠					يعاني الطلاب اللاجئين السوريين من مشكلات اجتماعية

الرقم	المحور الرابع: المشكلات والعلاقات العقلية				
	دائما	غالباً	أحياناً	نادرًا	لا أبداً
	العبرة				
٢١					يواجه الطلاب السوريين مشكلات اسرية
٢٢					يساعد أولياء الأمور الطلاب السوريين في أداء واجباتهم المدرسية
٢٣					تتواصل علاقات الطلاب السوريين مع المعلمين حول المشاكل النفسية والاجتماعية
٢٤					استطيع ان احافظ على علاقة جيدة مع علاقات الطلاب السوريين
٢٥					اوجه الأسرة للتواصل مع الاخصائي الاجتماعي في المدرسة



٢٦/ ما نوع المشاكل والخدمات التي قد يواجهها الطلاب الجدد؟

.....

.....

.....

Teachers Questionnaire

The researcher wishes from you to fill this questionnaire. The researcher aims to complete a Ph.D. Dissertation in applied social sciences from the University of Durham in the United Kingdom.

This study aims to explore the roles of school social workers in facilitating the integration of Syrian refugee students into Saudi Arabian public schools. In addition, the study will explore the challenges and obstacles Syrian refugees face in / out of schools. The study will also explore characteristics of teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the problems facing them in Saudi government schools. You have been invited because you can enrich the study with specific information that answers the research questions which in turn will achieve the aim of the study. In this questionnaire, you will answer 25 statements and three short questions.

FIRST:

(A) Demographic

1/ City 2/ School _____ 3/ Sex: Male Female

4/ Age _____ 5/ Qualification Bachelor Master Ph.D.

6/ Years of experience _____ 7/ Teaching subject _____

(B) Please tick (v) the appropriate option.

No	Statement	Yes	No
8	I have the experience to work with Syrian refugee students		
9	I have attended training on working with Syrian students If yes, this training helped me to;		
10	Understand Syrian students' needs		
11	Understand Syrian students' culture		
12	Understand how to work with Syrian refugee students		
13	Acquire new tools to work with Syrian refugee students		

Second: This part measures the needs and problems of Syrian refugee students and teachers in Saudi public schools - please tick (v) the most appropriate option.

Category 1: NEEDS AND DIRECT PROGRAMS						
No	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	The school's academic contents help integrate Syrian refugee students into the school					
2	School social workers inform teachers about the needs of Syrian students					
3	School social workers implement programs to overcome the problems faced by Syrian students					
4	School social workers cooperate with teachers to help Syrian students					
5	School social workers prepare the school environment for the inclusion of Syrian students					

6	Syrian students participate equally in the activities designed by the school					
---	--	--	--	--	--	--

Category 2: STUDENTS BEHAVIORAL PROBLEM						
No	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
7	Teachers face communication problems with Syrian refugee students					
8	Syrian students show unacceptable behaviour towards teachers					
9	Syrian students show verbal violence towards teachers					
10	Syrian students communicate with teachers if there is a problem in the classroom					
11	Syrian students seek extra help from teachers as and when needed					
12	I can maintain a good relationship with the Syrian students					
13	Syrian refugee students have more problems than their peers					

Category 3: SOCIAL AND SCHOOL PROBLEM						
No	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
14	Syrian refugee students face bullying from other students in the classroom					
15	Syrian refugee students face physical violence from other students					
16	Syrian students face discrimination by other students					
17	Syrian students interact with their Saudi classmates confidently					
18	Syrian students come to class on time					
19	The different cultural backgrounds impact the interaction between Syrian refugee students and their peers					

20	Syrian refugee students suffer from social problems					
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Category 4: FAMILY PROBLEM AND RELATIONSHIP

No	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
21	Syrian students face family problems					
22	Parents help Syrian students towards their homework, and inform teachers if there are problems					
23	Syrian students' families contact teachers about students' psychological and social problems					
24	I can maintain a good relationship with the families of Syrian students					
25	I direct the family to contact the school social worker					

26/ what are the kind of problems and services new Syrian refugee students might experience?

.....

27/ Do you have any particular concerns about Syrian refugee students?

.....

28/ What are comments would you like to add?

.....

Thank you very much for participating in this questionnaire!

RESEARCH ETHICS AND RISK ASSESSMENT FORM**SECTION A: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION**

A.1. Name of researcher(s):	Majed Saud Alharbi
A.2. Email Address(es) of researcher(s):	majed.s.alharbi@durham.ac.uk
A.3. Project Title:	School Social Workers' Role in Facilitating the Integration of Syrian Refugee Students Into Saudi Arabian Public Schools
A.4. Project Funder (where appropriate):	
A.5. When do you intend to start data collection?	1/9/2020
A.6. When will the project finish?	1/3/2020
A.7. For students only: Student ID: Degree, year and module: Supervisor:	000823938 Doctor of Philosophy Sociology and Social Policy 2019 Prof Roger Smith - Dr. Alison Jobe
A.8. Brief summary of the research questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are Saudi Arabian public schools ready to integrate Syrian refugee students? 2. What is the current situation faced by Syrian refugee students in Saudi Arabian public schools? 3. What are the needs of the Syrian refugee students and what obstacles do they face in schools? 4. What problems do teachers face when teaching Syrian refugee students? 5. What is the role of Saudi Arabian school social workers in helping Syrian refugee students integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?

6. How do social workers intervene to help refugee students integrate into their new public school?

7. What is the best intervention or program to help Syrian refugee students integrate into Saudi Arabian public schools?

A.9. What data collection method/s are you intending you use, and why?

This study will adopt a mixed-methods research design (also known as triangulation). This approach as gathering both quantitative and qualitative data about a research problem simultaneously. Therefore, as this research is multidimensional and involved a big sample size, mixed method is the best strategy to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study. In addition, because of the limited time available to conduct the present study, a mixed-methods approach will allow the researcher to gather a substantial amount of in-depth data from the participants by interviews and questionnaire surveys. Aside from this, the rationale for adopting this data collection approach in the present study is that it provides an opportunity for data confirmation. Also, this approach is practical for studying different groups within a single study. It is important to note that, after collecting both data simultaneously, the analysis will be conducted separately. After that, data from both methods will be combined.

SECTION B: ETHICS CHECKLIST

While all subsequent sections of this form should be completed for all studies, this checklist is designed to identify those areas where more detailed information should be given. Please note: It is better to identify an area where ethical or safety issues may arise and then explain how these will be dealt with, than to ignore potential risks to participants and/or the researchers.

	Yes	No
a). Does the study involve participants who are <i>potentially vulnerable</i> ⁱ ?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b). Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c). Could the study cause harm, discomfort, stress, anxiety or any other negative consequence beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d) Does the research address a <i>potentially sensitive topic</i> ⁱⁱ ?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e). Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
f). Are steps being taken to protect anonymity and confidentiality?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

g). Are there potential risks to the researchers' health, safety and well-being in conducting this research beyond those experienced in the researchers' everyday life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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SECTION C: METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

C.1. Who will be your research participants?

The study will include semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys from two cities in Saudi Arabia:

- Five male and five female school social workers.
- 20 students will be interviewed – ten males and ten female, aged between 13-18 (secondary and high school age).
- Three male and two female principals.
- 40 male and 40 female teachers will participate in questionnaire surveys with closed-ended questions.

<u>City A</u>	<u>City B</u>
<u>School social workers</u> 3 MALE 2 FEMAL	<u>School social workers</u> 3 MALE 2 FEMALE
<u>Principal</u> 2 MALE 1 FEMALE	<u>Principal</u> 1 MALE 1 FEMALE
<u>Students</u> 5 MALE 5 FEMALE	<u>Students</u> 5 MALE 5 FEMALE
<u>Teachers</u> 20 MALE 20 FEMALE	<u>Teachers</u> 20 MALE 20 FEMALE
<u>Interviews 18 Questionnaires 40</u> <u>TOTAL 58</u>	<u>Interviews 17 Questionnaires 40</u> <u>TOTAL 57</u>

C.2. How will you recruit your participants and how will they be selected or sampled?

The interviewees will be selected from five public schools in Riyadh and five from public schools located in northern Saudi Arabia. The latter region was selected as it is home to many Syrian

refugee families. Open-ended questions will be used to interview the sampled respondents. Selecting a sample depends on the type of study; this requires selecting either a purposive or a judgment sample. The researcher is planning to visit the schools which involve high number of Syrian refugee students in both cities to conduct the interviews and questionnaire surveys.

School social workers and Principals: When the researcher obtains ethical approval from the University of Durham and the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia, the researcher will recruit participants after visiting the targeted schools in both cities. The researcher will introduce himself and the research objectives. As soon as they agree to participate the researcher will arrange suitable appointments for the interviews.

Students: The researcher will arrange students' interview with assistance of the school social workers. This is by identifying Syrian refugee students who have come to Saudi Arabia after 2011. The researchers will contact the parents firstly to explain the research and its objectives. Also students by themselves must agree to take part in the interviews.

Teachers: Teachers will participate in questionnaire surveys, their participations depend on the availability and agreement. This will target teachers who teach Syrian refugee students.

Conducting interviews and questionnaires during the current pandemic (COVID 19):

The researcher will apply the guidance and instructions that are provided by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia which insure the safety of the researcher and the sample of the research which are Students, Teachers and Principals in Saudi public school.

For more information

<https://www.moh.gov.sa/awarenessplateform/VariousTopics/Pages/COIVD-19.aspx>

(Male schools), The interviews will be conducted face to face with principals and social workers taking into consideration the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. For example, social distancing and face covering.

(Female schools) The interviews will be conducted wit by phone with principals and social workers. Female students will participate in the interviews by phone with help of social workers or through the assistance of a researcher.

Online interviews will be conducted, for students, and this will be done in coordination with the school administration after communicating with the students and their parents to obtaining their consent.

Teachers: Teachers' participation will be arranged through the principals or school social workers. This is by obtaining their contact information. After that the researchers will contact them to introduce himself and explain research's purpose. Teachers will participate in questionnaire surveys through online. Questionnaire will be sent by email.

C.3. How will you explain the research to the participants and gain their consent? (If consent will not be obtained, please explain why.)

School social workers and Principals: The researcher will introduce himself and the research objectives. As soon as they agree to participate the researcher will arrange suitable appointments for the interviews. After the participants' agreement, the researcher will explain the content of the interviews briefly and present the information sheet. Therefore, participants can inquire about unclear statements and information. The consent form at this time will be provided and signed by the targeted sample.

Students: The researcher will arrange students' interviews with the assistance of the school social workers. This is by identifying Syrian refugee students who have come to Saudi Arabia after 2011. The researchers will contact the parents first to explain the research and its objectives. Also students by themselves must agree to take part in the interviews. Both students and parents will have a separate consent form accordingly they can sign their own form. This will be completed after explaining the research objective and interview contents comprehensively through Information sheet. This will ensure that parents and students aware of the nature of the research and ensure their information kept confidential.

Teachers: Teachers will participate in questionnaire surveys, their participations depend on the availability and agreement. This will target teachers who teach Syrian refugee students. The researcher will ensure that teachers will sign the consent form after reading the information sheet.

- Participants will be able to contact the researchers at any time in case there are unclear information and if they need more details about the research. Moreover, participants can leave the interview they can refuse to answer any question.

C.4. What procedures are in place to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of your participants and their responses?

The Participation

You have been invited because you can enrich the study with specific information that answers the research questions, which in turn will achieve the aim of the study. The participants voluntarily take part in this study.

If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Also, you can keep this information sheet and sign the consent form to be aware of your rights before and after the interview. If you agree to take part in the study, you will answer multiple questions, and the interview will last around 30 minutes to one hour.

Confidentiality:

The interview will take place in secure places in the public schools, which in turn ensures that the information is not disclosed. In order to adhere to research ethics, the names of the participants shall not be disclosed and complete confidentiality will be maintained at all times. This is by replacing names with symbols and numbers. The Participants' responses will be destroyed once the study is completed. In addition, voice records will not be shared with a third party and will be uploaded in a private device.

The results will be used only for the purpose of the study and published results will be without names and personal data. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. Upon successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the university archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published by open access. This study is expected to be completed in 2022.

Safeguarding:

Social workers and staff will be at the schools to provide any support if the interviews impact children. To avoid the interviews' having negative impacts, students have the right to refuse to answer any questions that are not comfortable for them. In addition, they can withdraw from the interviews. Children will take part in interviews after their parents' permission is granted.

C.5. Are there any circumstances in which there would be a limit or exclusion to the anonymity/confidentiality offered to participants? If so, please explain further.

C.6. You must attach a **participant information sheet or summary explanation** that will be given to potential participants in your research.

Within this, have you explained (in a way that is accessible to the participants):	Yes	No
a). What the research is about?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b). Why the participants have been chosen to take part and what they will be asked to do?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c). Any potential benefits and/or risks involved in their participation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) What levels of anonymity and confidentiality will apply to the information that they share, and if there are any exceptions to these?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e). What the data will be used for?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f). How the data will be stored securely?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g). How they can withdraw from the project?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h). Who the researchers are, and how they can be contacted?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION D: POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS

You should think carefully about the risks that participating in your research poses to participants. Be aware that some subjects can be sensitive for participants even if they are not dealing explicitly with a ‘sensitive’ topic. Please complete this section as fully as possible and continue on additional pages if necessary.

What risks to participants may arise from participating in your research?	How likely is it that these risks will actually happen?	How much harm would be caused if this risk did occur?	What measures are you putting in place to ensure this does not happen (or that if it does, the impact on participants is reduced)?
1. The risk might impact refugees who had a painful experiences, such as losing relatives as a result of war or displacement	It depends on the individuals' experience	Minimal	School social workers and staff will be involved to provide any support. However, students have the right to refuse answers to any questions that are not comfortable for them. In addition, they can withdraw from the interviews. Children will take part in interviews after parents' permission.
Infection with the new Corona virus, COVID 19	It depends on the individuals' experience	High	Social distancing and face covering. Sterilize hands before entering the workplace and out of it. Researcher will require all participants to use the instructions.

SECTION E: POTENTIAL RISKS TO RESEARCHERS

You should think carefully about any hazards or risks to you as a researcher that will be present because of you conducting this research. Please complete this section as fully as possible and continue on additional pages if necessary. Please include an assessment of any health conditions, injuries, allergies or intolerances that may present a risk to you taking part in the proposed research activities (including any related medication used to control these), or any reasonable adjustments that may be required where a disability might otherwise prevent you from participating fully within the research.

1. Where will the research be conducted/what will be the research site?

What hazards or risks to you as a researcher may arise from conducting this research?	How likely is it that these risks will actually happen?	How much harm would be caused if this risk did happen?	What measures are being put in place to ensure this does not happen (or that if it does, the impact on researchers is reduced)?
Infection with the new Corona virus, COVID 19	It depends on the individuals' experience	High	Social distancing and face covering. Sterilize hands before entering the work place and out of it. Researcher will require all participants to use the instructions.

SECTION F: OTHER APPROVALS

	Yes, document attached	Yes, documents to follow	No
a). Does the research require ethical approval from the NHS or a Social Services Authority? If so, please attach a copy of the draft form that you intend to submit, together with any accompanying documentation.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b). Might the proposed research meet the definition of a <i>clinical trial</i> ⁱⁱⁱ ? (If yes, a copy of this form must be sent to the University's Insurance Officer, Tel. 0191 334 9266, for approval, and evidence of approval must be attached before the project can start).	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c). Does the research involve working data, staff or offenders connected with the National Offender Management Service? If so, please see the guidance at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-offender-management-service/about/research and submit a copy of your proposed application to the NOMS Integrated Application System with your form.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d). Does the project involve activities that may take place within Colleges of Durham University, including recruitment of participants via associated networks (e.g. social media)? (If so, approval from the Head of the College/s concerned will be required after departmental approval has been granted – see guidance notes for further details)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e). Will you be required to undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service (criminal records) check to undertake the research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
f) I confirm that travel approval has or will be sought via the online approval system at http://apps.dur.ac.uk/travel.forms for all trips during this research which meet the following criteria: For Students travelling away from the University, this applies where travel is not to their home and involves an overnight stay. For Staff travelling away from the University, this applies only when travelling to an overseas destination.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION G: SUBMISSION CHECKLIST AND SIGNATURES

When submitting your ethics application, you should also submit supporting documentation as follows:

Supporting Documents	Included (tick)
Fully Completed Research Ethics and Risk Assessment Form	√
Interview Guide (if using interviews)	√
Focus Group Topic Guide (if using focus groups)	n/v
Questionnaire (if using questionnaires)	√
Participant Information Sheet or Equivalent	√
Consent Form (if appropriate)	√
<i>For students only:</i> Written/email confirmation from all agencies involved that they agree to participate, also stating whether they require a DBS check. If confirmation is not yet available, please attach a copy of the letter that you propose to send to request this; proof of organisational consent must be forwarded to your Programme Secretary before any data is collected.	

Please indicate the reason if any documents cannot be included at this stage:

(Please note that any ethics applications submitted without sufficient supporting documentation will not be able to be assessed.)

Signatures

Researcher's Signature:

Date:

Supervisor's Signature (PGR students only):

Date:

Please keep a copy of your approved ethics application for your records.

If you decide to change your research significantly after receiving ethics approval, you must submit a revised ethics form along with updated supporting documentation before you can implement these changes.

PART F: OUTCOME OF THE APPLICATION

<u>Reject</u> The application is incomplete and/or cannot be assessed in its current format. Please complete the application fully.	
<u>Revise and Resubmit</u> The application cannot be approved in its current format. Please revise the application as per the comments below. Please complete the application fully.	
<u>Approved, with Set Date for Review</u> The application is approved and you may begin data collection. A date for further review of the project as it develops has been set to take place on: _____ The anticipated nominated reviewer will be: _____	
<u>Approved</u> The application is approved and you may begin data collection.	

Comments:

I approve this Ethics and Risk Assessment application and I have no conflict of interest to declare.

First Reviewer's Signature:

First Reviewer's Name:

First Reviewer's Role:

Date:

If applicable:

I approve this Ethics and Risk Assessment application and I have no conflict of interest to declare.

Second Reviewer's Signature:

Second Reviewer's Name:

Second Reviewer's Role:

Date:

Appendix 11 Example of interview transcript

What is your experience with Syrian refugee students?

Personally, I have come across more than one student, Glory be to God, who came to us after the war having lived through the war. When they came here, the students appreciated the blessings, the security, the services, the things that were provided for them. I even remember one student standing up in front of the other students and saying, 'Guys, I will say a few words to you'. When I came here, you received me. You were my family and I never lacked anything, but the water and air here are not the same as the water and air in my country. Everything in Saudi Arabia is free, so do not destroy your country. He gave advice to the students. But those who have experienced war are among the most distinguished students and know the value of life.

Why?

What made the school special in my neighbourhood, based on my work, is that there are a lot of Syrian students. Most of the Syrian workers here were born in Saudi Arabia, which makes a big difference. All the Saudi citizens here interact with them as if they are Saudis with problems, but I see that those who come as visitors, especially those who have experienced a year or two of war, understand how difficult life can be. They value the positive situation here. They become distinguished, hard-working people, keen to study, even though sometimes their new circumstances may be harsh, due to their family situation. I mean, those who work here in Saudi Arabia find themselves supporting several families, because there are several families living in one house and the fathers must also send money back to other relatives in Syria. So, life is difficult for students in terms of the requirements of school, due to their fathers' lack of money. In addition, the requirements of studying remotely is sometimes difficult because of their need for the internet and devices, but those who came as a result of the war are more conscientious than other Syrians born here in Saudi Arabia.

So, how has your educational background helped you work with Syrian refugee students?

O God, I thank You. Because I had a principal, in the past, who taught me that here (in Saudi Arabia) the government accepts foreign students in our schools and obligates universities to

give 5% of their places to non- Saudi scholarship students. Although, the clear message is that the country wants to have those students here in (Saudi Arabia), I also need to influence them positively with my principles and values and vice versa. This is something I carried with me as I travelled outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which made me enthusiastic to help people. I saw that the graduates of Saudi universities who study abroad are an extension of Saudi beliefs. They are a soft power for Saudi Arabia, so I encourage my colleagues in school to act as ambassadors who understand education strategy and employ the state's goals. We need to influence students positively, when they come to here to study from the beginning of primary school, and if we do not influence them, I consider myself and my colleagues not to have fulfilled our duty properly. I feel we have failed.

What is your role as a social worker or student counsellor in integrating Syrian students?

I don't know about other schools, but here in my school because the proportion of non-Saudis and Syrians is high, it is not difficult to integrate them. In fact, it's very easy, but when I was working in a remote neighbourhood and there were few young foreigners, they felt afraid when attending school for the first time and at the same time I was concerned because of their fear of the new circumstance and environment. So because of that, together with my colleagues, I tried as a social worker to involve them in school activities and give them a way to deal with and respond to their new situation and the different study style to that they were accustomed to in their country. Sometimes they came to me with concerns about the classes being taught in Saudi Arabia as some of them were not familiar with humanitarian subjects such as religion, history and Arabic language, because in Syria they focus on scientific subjects, such as chemistry and physics, that are intense and stronger than ours, so we tried to help them with this issue, and they were able to adapt quite quickly.

Ok, can we link the percentage of Saudi students in school to the ease of integrating Syrian refugees?

Regarding Syrian nationality, it is still an Arab nationality which is familiar to many people including school staff in this country (Saudi Arabia) because of their high numbers. Saudis are not unfamiliar with Syrian culture, as all Saudi schools either have Syrian refugee students or those with resident permits. For this reason, their integration is not difficult and

their integration into school is an easy process for me, but the real concern is the critical transitional period when they first come here to Saudi Arabia which is a little different to Syria. The issue of their integration with... you know, most of them are integrated into society, so as you can see the Syrians have lived with us since we were children and are living among us. We are not surprised because they are living in the neighbourhoods but sometimes there is an issue which is just a simple cultural difference, especially the difference in values, and the Syrians often have a strong personality, and they can influence the society. I mean, their impact on society is very strong compared to other immigrants who become absorbed into society.

How do you succeed in your role as a social worker or mentor here with regard to refugee students?

Judging the thing is part of its conception. If I understand my role as a social worker or student counsellor, I understand the nature of my work and that I must help all students, whether Syrians or other. If I work and understand my role, that means my role is guidance, and not, for example, like that of a teacher to follow-up and explain classes to them. Therefore, following up on these students sometimes begins when I know the students' behaviour. My role as a student guide begins. Thank God, the majority are well-behaved. Refugee students tend to be high academic achievers, and they are not quick to form relationships with others or keen to expand relationships. This preserves their privacy. For example, in contrast, you see that Syrians born in Saudi Arabia try to imitate other students' inappropriate behaviour and try to have more relationships. The refugee students who came after the war focus on a specific goal and want to achieve higher grades in school. Also, some of them try to do well in school in order to study abroad and obtain a scholarship in Europe or in America to study for a higher degree. Most of them come to Saudi Arabia as a transit stage to seek asylum or to search for opportunities. Perhaps we all know Syrians as a practical people who are able to work in any job, but they want a better opportunity, so the refugees come here to Saudi Arabia for a temporary period, and this makes it easier for us to work with them.

So, are there specific strategies that you use to enhance their integration?

I do not understand this question regarding my school, because I have no problems with Syrian refugee students. I just try to remind them of their goals and continue with the main goal they are here for. In our school, I advise them to do well in school and to achieve a high GPA when they graduate, and they are all top performers in school. I mean, we try to ensure they do not obtain a low GPA, so this is often my professional guidance directed at those students. For example, last year I did this for Syrian students, and the outcome was positive. First, I helped them to register for the exams that were required for final-year high school students to obtain a place in a Saudi University. It was necessary for them to maintain a high GPA to be able to gain a place because each university only takes 5% non-Saudis. They may be lucky if their GPA is high and they achieve good exam results, so I advise them not to miss these opportunities.

In your opinion, what are the most glaring problems that Syrian refugee students face here?

The big problem is financial conditions and job opportunities, not only for refugees, but also for those with residency permits. Even someone who comes with a visitor's visa has fewer problems than someone who has residency because the cost of residency is very high while the cost of a visitor's visa is less. The cost of a visitor's visa is 100 Saudi Riyals, but for residency it is SR 9,800 per person. The financial burden on the resident is greater than that on the visitor however as the visitor often enters on a visit visa and is received by their relatives who are working here, and we can find more than one family are living in one home. The worker has a large number of dependants to take care of. I mean, one of my friends who is Saudi, and his mother is from Syria told me that his uncles and aunts came and lived with him. He says he has five families in his house and his salary is not enough, even for basic things such as bread What he has at home is a big burden for a Syrian whose relatives come here to Saudi Arabia to live with him. So most refugees work in restaurants or in the private sectors. In this area, most of them are workers on low incomes. This impacts both fathers and students.

Are there problems other than the financial problem that you have previously mentioned about students?

I mean... because here in school we do not focus on behavioural problems, for example a 60-year-old Syrian who comes to Saudi Arabia has been raised with different values to those of Saudi society. Such great differences in values cause problems not only in school, but also in public services such as parks as we can see. The effects of the difference in values can be seen in the behaviours of Syrian refugees. I would like to be able to reduce these difference. Some families try to adapt quickly and learn the etiquette and values of society, and others still act according to their own culture and values.

Can you give an example?

I swear to God, if you go to the parks you will be able to recognize the examples. I mean, the behavioural aspects are very clear: the difference in values, the clothing, girls going out with inappropriate clothes, the problem, the examples are sometimes harsh. I don't want to mention them, and unfortunately, sometimes the children of the residents (who are not refugee students) are worse. I mean, let me remind you of the positive values. I knew some Syrian people and I lived with them when I travelled to Syria before the war, I saw people, women in full veils, and I asked colleagues, who said, 'She used to work in Saudi Arabia'. I mean, I saw people who were taught in the purity of belief. I experienced that and I saw a lot of students here and the ways in which the Saudi education affect them positively, but it is just a period, and it is normal that there will be changes in life. Even a Saudi student may be seen as a person with good values in front of you but have different values outside school.

Sure.

But they are still good people who like to do good things for others and for the country. I am talking about the children of refugees who have come to Saudi Arabia in general after the war. Most of their beliefs are close to ours because they chose Saudi Arabia and did not go to other countries like Turkey or Germany like other Syrians who are rich and are sponsored by other countries. The rich Syrian people went to Europe and the other Syrians came to us here (Saudi Arabia), those who are close to us and to our faith. However, their age can be an influencing factor, as can and unconservative values in Syria, which differs from Saudi society with regard to the social and behavioural situation. When a small number of Syrian students, for example one or two, come to school, they are easily influenced by society, but

when ten Syrian families come and live together in certain areas, they transfer their values to here (Saudi Arabia). Because some (Syrian refugees) isolate themselves from others (new Saudi society), they hold onto their values even when they go out in the street or to school, because they have not separated themselves from their original society and continue to live with other isolated Syrian families (a small society that exists in certain areas as I said).

So, what kind of services do you provide for Syrian students?

We sometime encounter a situation, but it is not frequent, given that there are refugees here. For example, sometimes at the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic schools used an online platform to teach students. Many students were unable to access this platform, and when we contacted their parents we found that they could not afford to buy devices such as mobile phones as they were too expensive, therefore the school provided them with mobile phones and devices. Likewise, when studying via the platform was introduced, we found some Syrian students were absent due to having to work. Those who are employed work in small stores, for example selling watches. We can see them in the mall as this school is close to the mall where they work, and others work with their fathers on transportation trucks, because their family has grown due to the visitors who have come to live with them, and the fathers force their children (male students) to work. And you see, if you go to the mall next to the school, you will see 11- 13-year-olds selling at the traffic lights due to financial circumstances, and this affects their academic performance. My role as a student counsellor and school social worker is to deal with this issue and try to help them to achieve a balance between work and school, I thank God. This year, with the platform, we helped some students to come back to school; at least we were able to help a group of them achieve a balance.

Ahhh

One of the challenges we face is the behaviour of some fathers who are unable to monitor their children due to financial circumstances. As these fathers actively search for job opportunities, it's not uncommon to find students living with their families in Riyadh while their fathers work outside the city. These fathers may only visit their families on weekends, and sometimes for just one day. Additionally, some students' fathers work in the industrial area from 6:00 am until 10:00 pm, which means they may only have an hour to see and

interact with their children at home. Naturally, the absence of a guardian from the home has an impact on the children's behaviour and exposes them to negative influences from the external environment. I've personally encountered these issues, when some Syrian students were at risk of exploitation or engaged in inappropriate activities. Thankfully, we were able to intervene and assist several students by providing advice. We also reached out to their fathers, urging them to visit the school to discuss their children's issues and actively participate in their follow-up. and reminding them (students) that schools are dealing with high school students who are young men not children, so they accept that and try to solve their issues. So, in this country we deal with those who have been struck by poverty which has an impact on the lives of Syrians as a result of their previous circumstances in Syria. This is a matter of concern for me. When fathers are busy with work and far from their families this leads to disintegration of the family as the children try to get money by various means. The problem is when Syrian refugee students compare themselves to the students around them who have a car and money, this affects them in school.

What are your expectations regarding Syrian refugee students in schools?

My expectations for them in the future?

Your expectations regarding Syrian refugee students in schools?

Of course, I am talking for myself. I believe the Syrian brothers have rights in our country so we must fulfil these rights. The right of support and brotherhood. International circumstances do not allow me to serve them in their country, so I have a principle. At least if I cannot not serve them in their country, I will serve them as my brothers here (Saudi Arabia), according to my ability. I can remember a time when I facilitated the registration of several students halfway through a semester. When the principal asked me why I did this I said told him that the least we can do is to facilitate their admission to school and try to help them upon their arrival. It was during a period of examinations, and thus we arranged the examinations for them . I mean, it is a religious, a honest, and national duty that make me motivated to serve those refugees who sought refuge in my country. This motivation made me feel optimistic. Indeed, thank God, most of those who arrived as refugees had a good level of education, so it did not take a lot of effort to support and integrate them.

Ok, did you mention an issue that facilitates their admission in school?

Yes, because the system here of enrolling Syrian refugee students into school involves the student visiting the Education Department in the region who will arrange a certificate equivalency for the student, then direct them to search for a school. These students go to schools near their homes. I tell the principal that if there is a chance to enrol them into our school, we must do so because this is the student's right and it is our duty to help them. In some schools, the widespread view among school principals is that some Syrian students cause problems inside the school, so some schools are trying to reduce the number of Syrian students' immoral behaviour. Here I am not talking about refugees, I am talking about some Syrian students who were born in Saudi Arabia who have been slow to adapt socially because of their values, and I see some of these values as wrong. Perhaps they do not know these values are wrong because they grew up with them and do not know other values, or they see them as normal in schools. I tell the school principal that we should appreciate these people because they are our brothers, but the circumstances in their country affected them, so if the Saudi government receives them in the country, we at the school must welcome and enrol them and facilitate the enrolment procedures. The school principal understands this matter.