Navigating Challenges to Integration:

A Qualitative Analysis of Personal Experiences of Turkish Status Holders in the Netherlands in Professional Integration

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"Differences aren't a threat; they're an opportunity"[1]

-Micheal Agar, 2014

[1] Michael Agar. (1994). *Language Shock*.

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I am arriving at the end in tears, leaving sleepless nights, countless cups of coffee, and an overloaded laundry basket behind. Yet, amidst all this, I hold a great pride for making this happen that I will treasure forever as my success story. Through this study, I do hope to make a meaningful contribution and a change in the lives of other refugees arriving in the Netherlands, regardless of their nationality. Without the people named above, this would not have been possible. My gratitude and appreciation are eternally yours!

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Abstract

This study investigates the professional integration experiences of highly educated Turkish status holders in the Netherlands, focusing on their challenges and barriers during this process as well as the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles. The research was conducted with 17 participants using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. It explores themes such as cultural transitions, acculturation, second language socialization, cultural adjustment, and perceptions of inclusion and integration as a theoretical framework. The data was analysed in an interactive way using a thematic coding system. Language barriers were identified as the primary challenge, followed by cultural differences and a lack of organizational inclusion. Strategies identified include language skill enhancement, networking, and utilizing support systems.

Although the main research question aimed to reveal the strategies employed by status holders themselves, findings indicate that external factors such as intercultural awareness and organizational strategies and policies significantly impact successful integration. This study also critiques diversity policies and addresses the gap in the literature where the voices of refugees are scarce in diversity research. It also provides suggestions for future research on refugee integration in diverse cultural contexts.

Key words: *Status Holders, Netherlands, Professional integration, Challenges, Strategies*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, many individuals are forced to flee from their homes and seek refuge in other countries due to a variety of circumstances, including wars, abuse, persecution, political conflicts, and human rights violations (Bakewell, 2021, p. 124). In 2019, it was reported that 79.5 million people were forcibly displaced around the world, 26.0 million of whom were identified as refugees (UNHCR, 2019). In 2015, Europe experienced the highest number of asylum applications in thirty years, primarily driven by the mass displacement caused by the civil war in Syria (Aiyar et al., 2016). Since 2016, Turkey has experienced a surge in political conflict and crackdown, leading to a considerable increase in Turkish refugees seeking asylum in various European countries (Girdap, 2020, p. 73), including Netherlands. In the third quarter of 2021, there were 8,845 first-time asylum requests submitted in the Netherlands. During this period, the number of asylum requests from Turkish nationals quadrupled, arising from 380 in the second quarter to 1,540 in the third quarter (CBS,2021).

Therefore, host countries have faced increasing pressure to address the demand for integrating growing numbers of refugees into their societies and labour markets due to this ongoing refugee crisis (OECD & UNHCR, 2016). However, refugees often lack financial resources, local networks in the host country, and foreign language skills, making employment particularly challenging given the involuntary and unprepared nature of their immigration (Ward et al., 2001). Additionally, many refugees suffer from traumatic stress due to violent conflicts and crises in their home countries (Gericke et al., 2018). These factors collectively position refugees as a ‘’disadvantaged minority group’’ within the societies of their host countries (Yakushko et al., 2008), where job opportunities for them are scarce or completely absent. Recent studies show that refugees are six times less likely to be employed

compared to native Dutch citizens (Dourleijn and Dagevos, 2011), despite the demand for employees in the labour market.

In the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 by the European Commission (2020), it has been argued that "Integration and inclusion are key for people coming to Europe, for local communities, and for the long-term well-being of our societies and the stability of our economies" (p. 1). While integrating refugees into the workforce is challenging, it is one of the most critical steps in the overall integration of refugees into the receiving society (Desiderio, 2016). Regarding the importance of labour market integration for both refugees and host countries, this study aims to illuminate the challenges and barriers faced by Turkish status holders in the Netherlands during their professional integration process, as well as the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles.

The Research Question that guides this study is presented as follows:

RQ: How do Turkish status holders in the Netherlands navigate the challenges and barriers to the process of professional integration?

To address this research question, the following sub-questions are proposed:

SQ1: What are the most salient barriers faced by Turkish status holders in the Netherlands at the workplace?

SQ2: Which strategies do Turkish status holders employ to facilitate professional integration in the Netherlands?

2. CONTEXT

The context chapter provides essential background information for understanding the significance of the study. It gives an overview of the socio-economic and political circumstances in the Netherlands, highlighting their relevance to the research. The main focus is on examining the factors that influence the professional integration of Turkish status holders in the Netherlands.

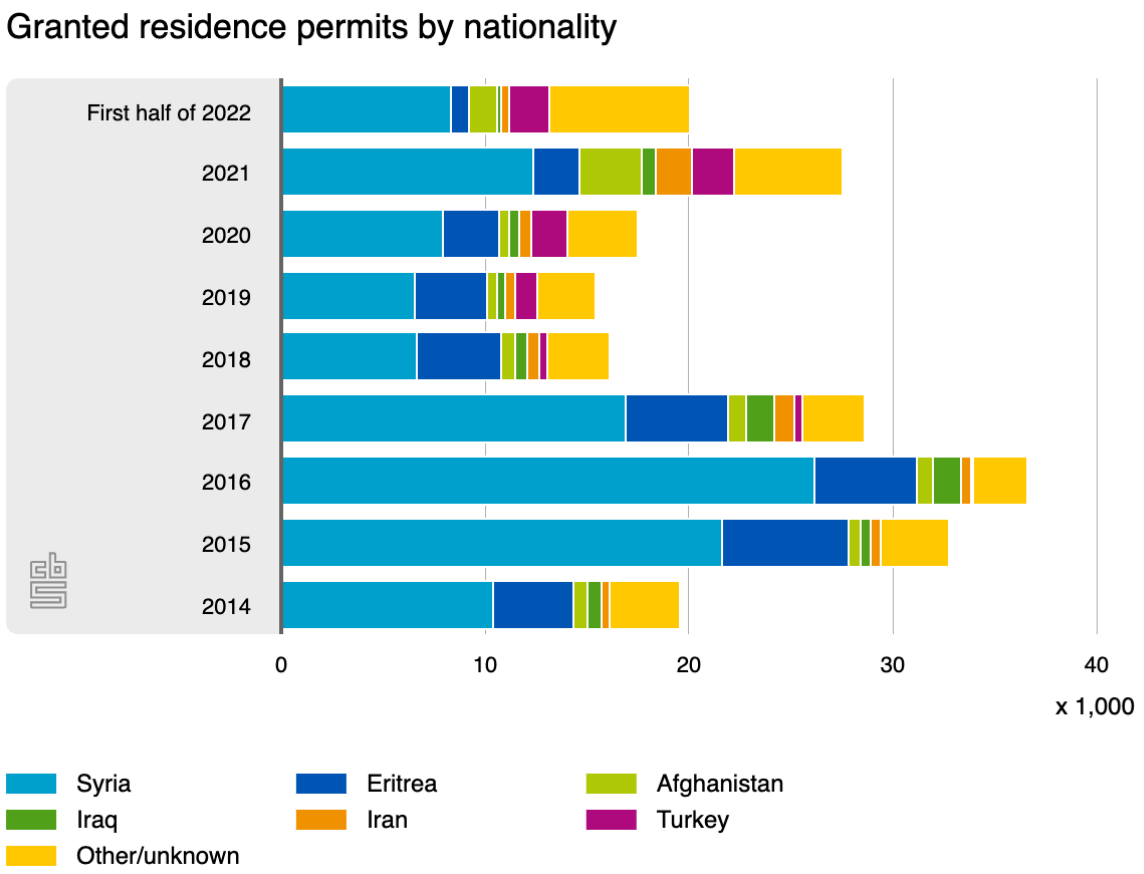
2.1. IMMIGRATION AND STATUS HOLDERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands has a rich history of immigration spanning several decades, resulting in a diverse population that includes individuals seeking asylum, employment opportunities, and family reunification. Recent data from the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) indicates a steady increase in the country's immigrant population, with a significant proportion consisting of asylum seekers. In the third quarter of 2023, 10.5 thousand people submitted their initial asylum applications in the Netherlands, marking a notable 32 percent increase from the previous quarter. This surge in asylum applications was particularly pronounced among nationals from Syria (with an 82 percent increase), Turkey (73 percent increase), and Eritrea (49 percent increase) (CBS, 2022). Upon being recognized as refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention, asylum seekers in the Netherlands receive temporary asylum permits, typically valid for five years (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, n.d.).

Within the scope of this study, individuals granted such permits are referred to as status holders. The number of asylum seekers recognized as status holders in the Netherlands surged from over 100,000 in 2016 to more than 218,000 in 2022 (CBS, 2022). Notably, a higher number of asylum permits were granted in the first half of 2022 compared to the previous four years, with a shift observed in the nationalities. Turkish asylum seekers are

among those whose asylum applications are approved, resulting in refugee status being granted to them in the Netherlands, which grants them a five-year residence permit initially.

Figure 1. *Granted residence permits by nationality*



Source: SBC, 2022

This permit affords them certain opportunities in the host country, including the legal right to work, followed by the possibility of long-term residency. However, despite the opportunities provided by these permits, statistics indicate that more than half of status holders remain unemployed even five years after their arrival in the host country (CBS, 2022). This study aims to shed light into challenges and barriers faced by Turkish status holders in the Netherlands during their professional integration process as well as analysing the factors that facilitate their socio-economic integration.

2.2. THE CASE OF TURKEY: A TURNING POINT IN FORCED MIGRATION

Throughout its history, Turkey has consistently struggled to succeed in ensuring human rights. Despite changes in power dynamics, violations and issues pertaining to the protection of human rights have persisted. The political conflict in the country in 2016 marked a significant escalation in Turkey's ongoing struggle to uphold human rights, intensifying these issues to unprecedented levels (Girdap, 2020, p. 74). The events of 2016 served as a dark chapter in Turkey's political history, representing the peak of these violations and acting as a turning point that resulted in the forced migration of many intellectuals from the country.

The breaking point of political conflicts in the country occurred after the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016. Immediately after, the government declared a State of Emergency *(OHAL)*[2], a Turkish acronym (Girdap, 2020, p. 76). Within the following few years, the Turkish government conducted mass purges, declaring OHAL multiple times. Consequently, more than 130,000 civil servants working in the public and private sectors were dismissed from their professions, including highly educated professionals such as bureaucrats, diplomats, teachers, journalists, and academics. These dismissals were made without providing any legal evidence linking them to the coup, a clear violation of human rights.

The current Turkish administration not only neglects to safeguard human rights but actively persecutes citizens advocating for basic freedoms such as freedom of speech and expression. Criticism of the government often leads to imprisonment, a practice that intensified following the 2016 coup attempt. The government's response to dissent has been severe, resulting in mass dismissals of public servants, closure of media outlets, universities and institutions, and

[2] OHAL (Olağanüstü Hal) is the declaration of a state of emergency in Turkey, during which the Turkish government has implemented measures that include mass dismissals of professionals and public servants (Girdap, 2020, p. 76).

imprisonment of individuals (Girdap, 2020, p. 73). Following these oppressive measures many people, especially intellectuals, experienced severe consequences such as job loss and the threat of imprisonment, leading them to undergo involuntary migration in search of a more certain future elsewhere. This study focuses on individuals from this group who sought asylum in the Netherlands, aiming to illuminate the challenges they encounter during their professional integration process in the host country.

2.3. RELEVANCE TO SOCIETY

Regarding the increasing number of Turkish status holders in the Netherlands due to the ongoing conflict in Turkey, it is important to examine the barriers hindering successful professional integration of these people. Since they are often highly educated and experienced individuals who held prominent positions before they became refugees, their professional integration is vital for their full and equal participation in the receiving society (Deen, 2021) and to meet the demand for employees in the Dutch labour market for socio-economic development. Recent studies on the ongoing refugee crisis have examined the challenges surrounding the integration of refugees into the workplace (Gorashi, 2020). However, the arrival of this specific group in the Netherlands is a relatively recent topic, and further research is required to address the challenges comprehensively. Therefore, this research can not only contribute to academic literature but also inform newcomers, organizations and policymakers about the needs for diverse workplaces. Moreover, the study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing narratives from the firsthand experiences of status holders (Gorashi, 2020), shedding light on the challenges they face in their workplaces.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTERCULTURAL TRANSITIONS: NAVIGATING LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL COMPLEXITY FOR ADAPTATION

Every year, many individuals worldwide make the decision to cross borders, driven by diverse motivations such as education, employment, travel, or migration. While some willingly relocate to new countries, others are compelled to seek refuge, whether temporarily or permanently, due to circumstances beyond their control (Jackson, 2020, p. 168).

On one end, there are highly educated and globally connected individuals already established in professions, possessing specialized skills that allow them to transition easily between jobs worldwide. They are voluntary migrants, empowered to choose destinations based on career opportunities or personal preferences. At the opposite end, there are involuntary migrants, those forcibly expelled from their homelands, compelled to seek asylum elsewhere due to factors such as political persecution, armed conflict, or grave human rights violations. (Bakewell, 2021, p. 124).

In contrast to voluntary migrants, refugees may experience more complex emotions about being in a foreign country, along with heightened levels of stress and uncertainty about their future prospects (Berry et al., 2011, p. 311). According to Kramsch and Uryu (2012), in involuntary cases, intercultural interactions are often influenced by negative factors such as power struggles among diverse ethnic or cultural groups, or the dominant control exerted by a more powerful group over the less powerful, spanning political, economic, ideological, and cultural spheres (p. 212). As newcomers enter a new country, they inevitably interact with individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Throughout the adaptation process, they encounter unfamiliar languages or dialects, as well as different sets of values, norms, beliefs, and behaviours. These various elements collectively influence the

intercultural transition process and impact the quality of adaptation (Jackson, 2020, pp, 168-172).

Such diverse encounters and adjustments may pose significant challenges to the professional integration process of refugees, where language barriers and cultural differences can hinder effective intercultural communication. As language and culture play key roles in intercultural transitions, this study aims to illuminate the primary challenges and barriers faced by status holders during their professional integration process in the Netherlands.

3.2 ACCULTURATION AND SECOND LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION

Encountering a new linguistic and cultural context can pose significant obstacles and profoundly affect the integration of refugees. Over recent years, a significant amount of research has been conducted to understand the linguistic, sociocultural, psychological, and physical challenges experienced by newcomers in their host countries (Jackson, 2020, pp. 174-175). Diverse theories and conceptual frameworks concerning this subject have been thoroughly deliberated and delineated in recent literature.

According to Jackson (2020), acculturation pertains to the process of adjustment or transformation that individuals undergo when exposed to a new culture or co-culture, such as relocating to an unfamiliar country (p. 175). This process, similarly explained by Berry (2006), involves cultural and psychological change that occurs when individuals encounter a new culture. As outlined by Kim (2015), acculturation entails the adaptation of individuals whose primary socialization occurred within one cultural context as they learn, acquire, and internalize traits from another culture (p. 792).

In the context of intercultural adaptation, Jackson (2020) asserts that second language socialization closely aligns with acculturation. It involves developing intercultural communicative competence in an unfamiliar linguistic and cultural environment, encompassing linguistic conventions, sociopragmatic norms, cultural scripts, and other behaviors (p. 175). Second language socialization, as described by Duff (2010), focuses on learning and adapting to the social norms and practices associated with a second language. Understanding how individuals navigate these processes is essential for comprehending their experiences in a new cultural context, particularly concerning language acquisition and cultural adaptation.

Researchers have uncovered a diversity in how individuals and groups react to intercultural contact and acculturation. These variations arise from different levels of motivation to adapt to the new culture by embracing a local identity, mastering the host language, and building networks with host nationals. Additionally, differences exist in the desire to preserve one's own cultural heritage and language, encompassing aspects such as cultural identity, native tongue, traditions, values, and customs (Jackson, 2020, pp. 175-176).

Acculturation theories, such as Berry's two-dimensional acculturation model (Berry, 1997), offer valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural adaptation that newcomers may experience in unfamiliar environments. Berry's model includes four acculturation strategies: integration (maintaining one's cultural identity while also engaging with the new culture), assimilation (adopting the new culture while abandoning the original culture), separation (maintaining the original culture while avoiding contact with the new culture), and marginalization (lacking engagement with both the original and new cultures) (Jackson, 2020, p. 177). (refer to figure 2 below).

Figure 2. *The two-dimensional acculturation model of Berry*

Maintenance of heritage culture	Cultural Adaptation (relationship sought among groups)	
	Low	**High**
High	Separation	Integration
Low	Marginalization	Assimilation

Source: Kiylioglu & Wimmer, 2015 p. 4

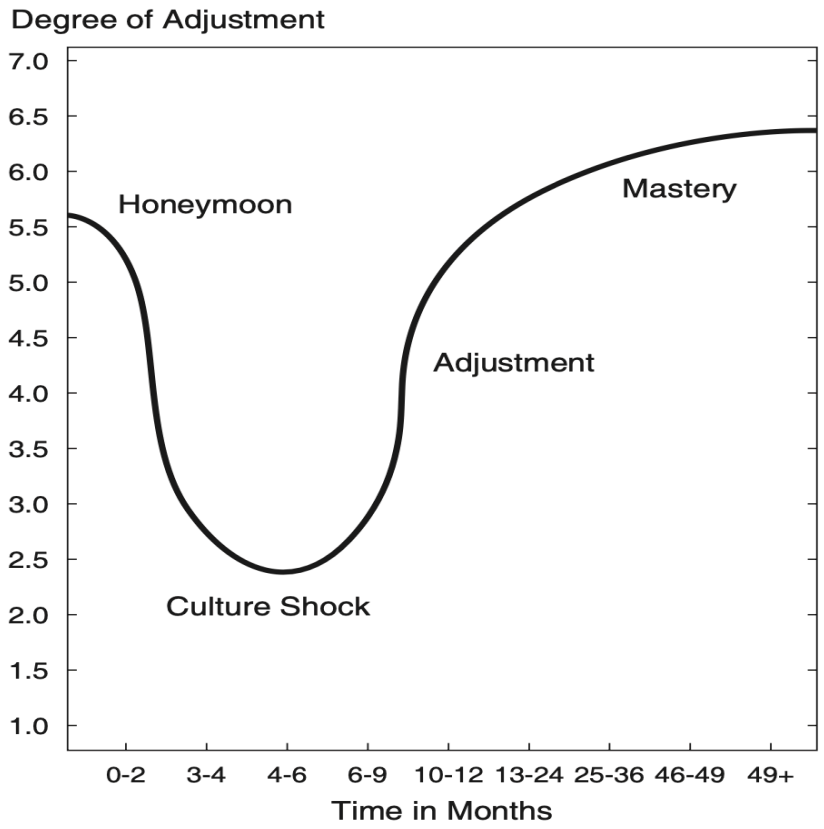
Investigating the acculturation strategies of Turkish status holders will shed light on their motivations for adaptation, especially in the professional context, providing valuable insights into their experiences for professional integration.

3.3 CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND ADAPTATION

Different models of cultural adjustment have been explored in academic literature to illustrate the phases of intercultural adaptation. Among these, the U-curve adjustment model (Lysgaard, 1955) stands out as one of the earliest and most well-known. The U-Curve model, also known as the cultural adjustment curve or the culture shock curve, describes the main stages and situations that individuals may experience when adjusting to a new cultural environment (Oberg, 1960). The model includes four main phases when adjusting to a new culture: 'honeymoon stage, culture stress and shock, adjustment (integration), mastery (adaptation)'. (refer to figure 3 below).

In the honeymoon stage of cultural adjustment, individuals feel excited and curious about the new culture, viewing it positively. As they encounter challenges, they move into the next phase. In the crisis stage, individuals feel confused, frustrated, and dissatisfied. They may experience homesickness and find it hard to connect with the new culture or communicate effectively. Following the crisis stage, individuals gradually adapt and recover. They gain a deeper understanding of cultural differences, possibly even appreciating aspects of the new culture. Building new relationships becomes possible, fostering a sense of belonging in their new environment (Oberg, 1960).

Figure 3. *Lysgaard's (1955) U-shaped curve*

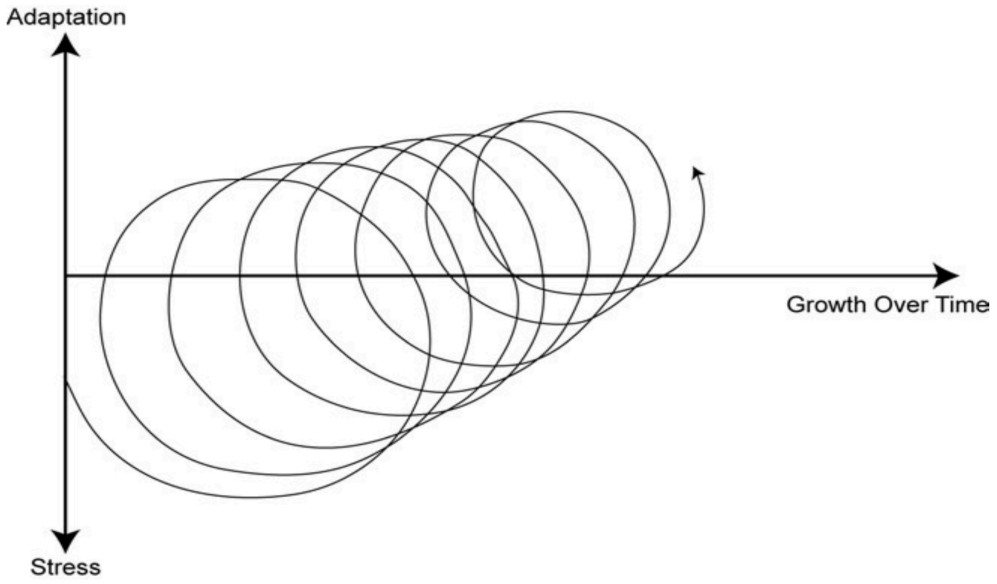


Source: Jackson, 2020, p. 184

Although Lysgaard's U-curve model has commonly been used in literature to understand the stages of adaptation to a new culture, it has drawn criticism for failing to accommodate individual differences in the process. Jackson (2020) discusses the criticism directed at adaptation models, highlighting the significant variation in developmental paths and outcomes for refugees. This variability is attributed to a complex interplay of individual factors such as educational background, personal motivation for adaptation, language and cultural learning strategies, as well as external factors including the host community network, exposure to the host culture, and economic considerations (p. 201).

To address the limitations of curve models Kim (2001) introduced the 'Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation' to illustrate how individuals gradually adjust to a new environment. This model emphasizes the role of both individual and contextual factors in influencing adaptation. Cross-cultural adaptation, as defined by Kim (2012), involves individuals' effort to establish and maintain a stable relationship with a new cultural environment. At the core of her framework is the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, which suggests that acculturative stress can lead to adaptation over time. As newcomers face challenges in the new environment, they become more attuned to cultural differences and develop better coping mechanisms and strategies, resulting in reduced stress over time (Kim, 2012). (refer to figure 4 below).

Figure 4. *Kim's (2012) stress-adaptation-growth dynamic*



Source: Kim, 2012, p. 235

Kim's model highlights three crucial dynamics that shape the process of adapting to a new environment for successful integration: ‘host communication competence, environmental factors, and individual differences’.

Host communication competence refers to individuals' ability to effectively understand and convey information in line with the cultural communication norms of the host environment. This encompasses ‘cognitive competence’, such as knowledge of the host language, culture, and social norms, as well as ‘affective competence’, which relates to emotional capacity to cope with challenges, and ‘operational competence’, involving the ability to express oneself appropriately in social interactions.

Kim also argues that environmental factors are an important part of cultural adaptation. The key term discussed as a main environmental factor is ‘host receptivity’, referring to the degree to which the host environment welcomes newcomers and offers support. ‘Host conformity pressure’ describes how much the new environment encourages or challenges the

individuals to adapt to its cultural norms and ‘ethnic group strength’ relates to the status of a particular ethnic group within the host society.

Additionally, individual differences play a significant role as well. These include motivation to learn, educational background, and personality traits as well as demographic dynamics (Jackson, 2020, p. 202).

3.4 INCLUSION AND REFUGEE WORKPLACE INTEGRATION

Shore et al. (2011) define inclusion as “the degree to which individuals experience treatment from the group that satisfies their need for belongingness and uniqueness” (p. 1265). Jansen (2014) highlights three key aspects within this definition. Firstly, inclusion involves fulfilling individual needs within the group. Secondly, it comprises two elements: sense of belonging and being unique. Thirdly, it emphasizes that it's the group's responsibility to include individuals, rather than the individuals seeking connection to the group (p. 370).

Integration is seen by Favell (1998) as an inclusive approach to incorporating ethnic minorities into society. Favell (2003) notes the challenge of measuring integration, emphasizing it as an ongoing process as it requires effort from both individuals and the host environment. Similarly, Phillimore (2011) addresses that within the relationship between refugees and host countries, the key recognition is that integration is always ongoing. The notion of an 'integrated society' is hard to conceive, as integration demands continuous efforts from both sides. Ager and Strang (2004) further explore factors influencing integration, with positive elements like access to education and jobs facilitating integration, while negative factors such as ineffective policies and discrimination hinder it.

Based on the literature review, inclusion and integration in the workplace are interconnected terms. While both concepts involve effort from both refugees and the host environment, inclusion has a more comprehensive approach to integration in which spaces are created to value the presence and contribution of minorities. ‘’In this sense, integration into a labour market means refugees have jobs, but inclusion means they realize their contribution matters’’ says Ghorashi (2020, p. 88).

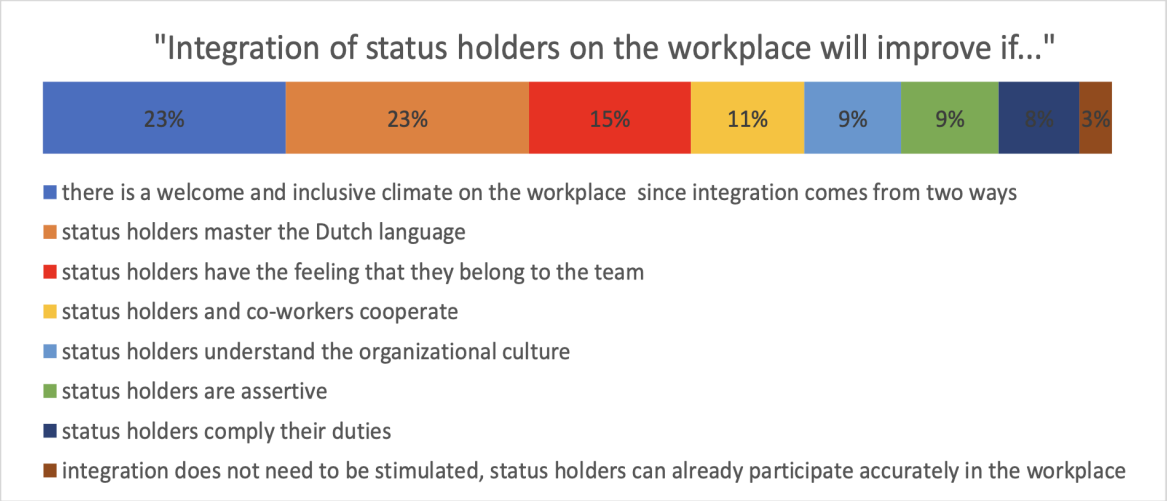
When status holders acquire specific knowledge, skills, or relevant networks in the host country, it may facilitate their entry into the Dutch labour market, a crucial step in the professional integration process. However, inclusion does not automatically come along with integration. Status holders can only feel included if they feel welcomed, a member of a team, satisfied, and valued at work. This necessitates intercultural awareness, understanding, and embracing the richness of diversity within the organization.

Individual dynamics impacting inclusion and integration within organizations have been commonly discussed in the literature, but it is often ignored that organizational factors and policy on refugee labour market integration may play a bigger role than the individual efforts. According to recent research discussed by Gorashi (2020), acquiring proficiency in Dutch and obtaining a higher education in the Netherlands do not necessarily result in feelings of acceptance or inclusion (p. 89).

To illustrate the factors that contribute to the successful integration of status holders in the workplace, the following figure presents findings from recent research on refugee employment integration. The data, gathered through qualitative research, reflects input from project managers, job coaches, and spokespersons within various organizational settings in

the Amsterdam region, identifying key elements that influence refugee workplace integration (Deen, 2021).

Figure 5. *Most important factors to stimulate integration on the workplace*



Source: Deen, 2021, p. 32

Overall, this theoretical framework explores the complexities of intercultural transitions, acculturation, cultural adjustment, and the importance of inclusion. It highlights the challenges status holders may face in the workplace during the integration process due to involuntary migration, primarily including language barriers and cultural differences.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was conducted based on a qualitative research design to explore the professional integration experiences of Turkish status holders in the Netherlands. This research approach was considered suitable for exploring the perceptions, opinions, and feelings of participants. In total, 17 participants were recruited for individual and focus group interviews.

4.1.1. Semi-structured Interviews

For this research, six individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, challenges, and strategies during their professional integration process. This method was chosen as it allows for broad, open-ended questions that encourage detailed narratives without being restricted by predefined answers (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136). The interviews followed a pre-planned guide but allowed flexibility to explore new topics that emerged during discussions (Karatsareas, 2022, p. 100). Questions began with demographic information, including gender, age, education, occupation, social status, and years of residency, and then moved to open-ended questions related to the research topics (see Appendix 9.3).

4.1.2. Focus group interviews

Additionally, two focus group interviews were conducted, each consisting of five to six participants, to capture their collective experiences and perspectives on specific topics or situations. This method was chosen to understand how perceptions or feelings on a similar topic can differ depending on various dynamics, conditions, or personalities. The interaction within the group was intended to provide valuable data by fostering a collaborative atmosphere where participants naturally reacted to one another, agreeing or disagreeing, which enriched the data collected (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144). To guide the discussion and keep the focus on the research topic, a discussion guide has been developed (see Appendix 9.4)

4.2. DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, which were conducted individually either in person at a chosen location or online based on participants' preferences and availability. Focus group interviews were conducted in person at a location where all participants felt

comfortable sharing their feelings. The length of the individual interviews varied between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on the dynamics of the conversation, the richness of the data, and the experience of the interviewee. Group discussions, on the other hand, typically lasted a bit longer, approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes, depending on the number of participants involved. The table below presents all relevant information about the data gathering process.

Table 1. *Information on Data Collection*

Participants Number	Type of Interview	Interview Space	Interview Time
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Group Discussion 1	House of the participant	1 h 15 min
7	Individual Interview	Online	51 min
8	Individual Interview	Online	46 min
9	Individual Interview	Online	30 min
10	Individual Interview	Online	43 min
11	Individual Interview	House of the participant	44 min
12	Individual Interview	Online	1 h 19 min
13, 14, 15, 16, 17	Group Discussion 2	House of the Interviewer	1 h 5 min

The data gathered for this study comprised recorded interviews (audio/video), transcripts of the interviews, their analysed codes, and notes taken by the researcher. A semi-structured interview guide was utilised to facilitate the interviews, incorporating open-ended questions shedding light to the challenges and barriers faced by Turkish status holders in the

professional integration process. This format allows for flexibility in addressing emerging topics and questions during the interview, thereby providing deeper insights into the participants' experiences. Participants were also encouraged to elaborate on relevant issues in an exploratory manner (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136). In focus group interviews, the interviewer served as the moderator, ensuring that all voices were heard, which marked a shift from the one-on-one interview approach (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 145).

This mixed-method approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic by drawing on both individual narratives and group dynamics. While individual interviews provided deeper insights into personal experiences with rich examples, focus group discussions centered around collective experiences through group brainstorming. Participants engaged in collaborative thinking, inspiring and challenging one another, and reacting to emerging issues, with the researcher moderating the discussion (Dörnyei, 2007, p.144). Similar questions were posed in both formats, based on the same topic list (see appendix 9.3, 9.4), and the interview plan was structured into four main parts, each addressing specific aspects of the interviewees' experiences, as detailed in the table below.

Table 2. *Interview Guideline*

Parts	Topics	Guiding context to questions
Part One	-Introduction and Demographic Questions	-Age, gender -Educational/professional background -Years of residency in Netherland -Dutch level -Language policy at work

Part Two	-Professional Integration Experience -Overview of the job search process in the Netherlands	-Description of professional background -Years of experience -Transferable skills gained previously -Experience with the job search process in the Netherlands -Particular challenges and strategies in searching for a job.
Part Three	-Challenges encountered during employment in the Netherlands -Strategies and Facilitators for Addressing	-Differences between Dutch and Turkish labour market -Specific challenges at workplace -Examples to the most difficult situations faced -Strategies to overcome this situations -General suggestions for professional integration -External factors or supports included
Part Four	-Support Systems and Resources at organisational-level -Reflection and Final Thoughts	-Support services or resources facilitating professional integration -Role of non-profit organisations -Suggestions for newcomers -Additional insights -Personal reflection on process

4.3. SAMPLING STRATEGY

The sampling approach employed in this study involved purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling techniques. Participants were chosen based on their relevance to the research question and their capacity to offer comprehensive insights into the study topic. They were identified as key respondents and were subsequently asked to refer to additional participants who shared key characteristics central to the investigation, due to the constraints of time and participant numbers (Dörnyei, 2007, pp. 126-127). The sample size was established once information saturation was reached. The inclusion criteria for participants were that they held status holder identity in the Netherlands with Turkish origin, diversified in age, gender, educational and occupational background, possessing professional experience

both in the Netherlands and their home country, and being willing to participate either in an in-depth interview or focus group discussion. Participants were recruited through personal networks and professional associations. Detailed demographic information is represented in the table below.

Table 3. *Participants' Characteristics*

Participants Number	Current Occupation	Gender	Years of Residency	Dutch Language Proficiency
1	Immigration Officer	Female	4 years	B2
2	Committee Secretary	Male	4 years	B2
3	Computer Engineer	Male	3 years	A2
4	Project Coordinator	Female	6 years	B2
5	ICT Developer	Male	6 years	B1
6	Teacher (Trainee)	Female	3 years	B1
7	Business Consultant	Female	5 years	B2+
8	Administrative Employee	Male	3 years	B1+
9	Project Assistant	Male	3 years	A2
10	Job Coach	Male	6.5 years	C1
11	Siber Security Analyst	Female	6 years	B1
12	Educational Assistant	Female	6 years	B2+
13	Computer Engineer	Male	5.5 years	B2
14	Municipality Officer	Male	5.5 years	C1

15	HR Manager	Male	6 years	B1
16	Auditor	Male	6 years	B2
17	Supply&Demand Planner	Male	6 years	B1

4.4. PROCEDURE

Participation in this research was voluntary, and data was collected with consent obtained through informed, written, and signed agreements from each participant (see appendix 9.2). Information about the research's purpose and participants' rights was communicated via an information sheet. From the beginning, it was emphasised that participants had the freedom to share only what they were comfortable with, along with the option to withdraw from the study before data processing. They were also informed about the security and privacy of the data, which would only be analysed by the researcher and shared with the supervisor. Their names and personal information would be anonymized during the data analysis (see appendix 9.1). This approach allowed participants to feel comfortable sharing their stories with specific examples, thereby making the data more comprehensive and richer. Additionally, the interviews were conducted in Turkish, the native language of both participants and the researcher, creating a comfortable atmosphere that enabled both parties to understand each other perfectly. This ensured that participants could grasp all questions in depth and express every detail without encountering language barrier, thus enhancing the value and reliability of the data.

4.5. DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

The interviews that took place in person were recorded using a mobile phone recorder, while those conducted online were automatically recorded and transcribed via Teams, all with the participants' consent. All audio/video recordings and transcriptions were stored in separate

files, accessible only to the researcher for data security reasons. Transcription files underwent visual review against the audio recordings and were edited for accuracy and contextual relevance. Any unidentifiable or irrelevant information was omitted. Both transcription text and audio files were thoroughly reviewed multiple times to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data and were coded using MAXQDA 2022 software.

Thematic analysis, a commonly used method for analyzing qualitative data, was employed in this study to discover, analyze, and report themes (Karatsareas, 2022, p. 100). This approach involves identifying themes either inductively, where themes emerge from the data, or deductively, guided by existing literature or theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). By using both methods, initial codes from the literature and theoretical framework guided the topic list, while additional themes emerged from the interview data. By employing this iterative approach, the subtle nuances in the narratives were effectively captured, enriching the data and revealing previously unanticipated themes and patterns. The codes were cross-referenced to detect repeating patterns and connections, which were then used to formulate themes. These themes underwent multiple reviews to ensure accuracy, with sub-codes subsequently merged into them.

Additionally, to facilitate natural and nuanced discussions, the interviews were conducted in Turkish, the native language of both the researcher and participants. Quotes used in the following chapter (see chapter 5) were translated by the researcher by ensuring accuracy and fidelity to the original meanings.

4.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the entire research process, ethical considerations were prioritised in alignment with the guidelines established by Utrecht University. Participants were provided with comprehensive information, including their rights regarding informed consent, privacy, and safety, as well as details concerning the collection, storage, and security of the research data and analysis. Participation was voluntary and conducted only with the signed informed consent of each participant (refer to Appendix 9.2). Additionally, participants were assured that they would receive guidance from the researcher and supervisor regarding any hesitations or further questions about the processing.

Overall, the methodological approach employed in this study, including qualitative research techniques and iterative data analysis, contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics influencing the professional integration of status holders, highlighting the most common challenges they face during this process. Examples of such challenges include language barriers, cultural differences, feelings of exclusion, and lack of networking opportunities.

5. RESULTS

5.1. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Migration naturally exposes individuals to a non-native language, often resulting in language shock or confusion (Jackson, 2020, p.180). This phenomenon stems from the challenges of understanding and communicating in a second language within an unfamiliar environment, as extensively discussed in the Theoretical Framework (refer to 3.1). In involuntary migration, language shock is a natural consequence of intercultural transitions, as migration occurs

unexpectedly without preparation or prior knowledge of the host country (Campion, E. D., 2018). Language competency has been addressed as playing a vital role in refugee workplace integration (Lee et al., 2020). It has been identified as crucial not only for finding a job but also for integrating into sustainable employment (Razenberg & De Gruijter, 2020). When considering highly educated status holders, navigating language and communication barriers becomes a critical aspect for them to overcome, as they are motivated to find jobs similar to their previous professions in order to integrate into the Dutch labour market. Aligning with the literature, the vast majority of participants indicated that an insufficient command of the Dutch language is the major challenge in the workplace.

The participants in this study had relatively high proficiency levels in either Dutch or English, ranging mostly from B1 to B2 or even higher (refer to Table 3), considering language proficiency key for their integration into the labour market. However, the challenge lies in understanding that second language socialization goes beyond simply following grammar rules and using appropriate vocabulary in context. Agar (1994) points out, "Understanding language requires acknowledging that linguistic differences extend far beyond grammar and the dictionary" (p. 16), emphasizing the importance of comprehending cultural nuances in communication. Lack of familiarity with sociopragmatic norms, such as differences in accents, cultural norms, dialects, politeness conventions, humor, vocabulary, slang, and communication styles (Jackson, 2020), emerged as a significant part of the interviews concerning language barrier. Participants often mentioned that, despite having an intermediate to upper-intermediate language level, they faced challenges in understanding the language spoken in the workplace because it sounded different and more complex than what they had learned in language courses. In one group discussion, most participants reported experiencing a similar situation when one of the group members shared her thoughts:

They behave like I have an advanced level and understand everything in Dutch. They speak very fast, using idioms and expressions that I am unfamiliar with. Sometimes, I do not understand anything at all. [Participant 4]

Furthermore, narratives from the participants highlighted language barrier as a primary obstacle to integration in the workplace as low proficiency causes other issues. Examples of those include lack of self-confidence, reluctance to give opinion, unwillingness to participate in social events, miscommunication, performing below potential skills, and experiencing demotivation and dissatisfaction at work.

5.1.1. Lack of Self Confidence

If you find yourself in a new linguistic setting without proficiency in the local language or with only basic skills, you may feel "helpless and dependent" (Jackson, 2020, p. 186). During the interviews, it was evident that the insufficient command of the Dutch language was the first important aspect negatively influencing the integration process in the workplace.
Low proficiency leads to a fear of making mistakes, resulting in a lack of self-confidence at work. A person with a background in linguistics, who also has a strong ability to learn a second language and holds a B2 level proficiency in Dutch, shared her feelings about the language barrier. She expressed how language remains a significant obstacle despite having basic proficiency, particularly impacting her self confidence at work by sharing the example below:

I was asked to share my opinion during one of our weekly meetings. As I was speaking (in Dutch), I noticed one of my colleagues secretly laughing at my mistakes, which shattered my confidence. Since then, I have been hesitant to speak up in team meetings. [Participant 7]

Participants also highlighted a parallel improvement between language proficiency and self-confidence, aligning with Kim's (2012) stress-adaptation-growth dynamic outlined in the

framework (refer to figure 3), where challenges diminish as adjustment progresses. The more individuals master the language, the more self-confident they feel:

As my language skills develop, my self-confidence also increases. This year, I feel more confident in speaking compared to last year. But language is still a barrier. [Participant 1]

5.1.2. Reluctance to give opinions

While the language barrier was being discussed, one of the most outstanding dilemmas reported were hesitation or reluctance to give opinions. Most of the participants expressed that they only speak if they have to. When the feeling behind this unwillingness was discussed, some said they find it difficult to choose the right words or expressions spontaneously, while others reported fear of making mistakes. Additionally, some participants mentioned that they choose not to give opinions because they feel that their ideas are not valued or they lack sufficient knowledge about the topic. During a group discussion one interviewee shared the following example when he was asked to illustrate the situation:

For example, during a meeting, when people are discussing things quickly, you want to ask something or intervene in a subject right away. However, when your language level is not sufficient, you find yourself saying, 'How am I going to say this now?' and then retracting. So, it is again a language barrier. [Participant 2]

Before I speak, first I think about how I can say this clearly, and second, whether my opinion really makes sense to others. [Participant 3]

5.1.3. Unwillingness to participation in social events

During the interviews, participants repeatedly expressed their unwillingness to participate in social events or lunch meetings at work. While some cited the language barrier as the primary reason, others mentioned that cultural differences also play a role. However, the majority of interviewees identified insufficient command of the Dutch language as the main deterrent.

As they use the local language in casual gatherings, you cannot catch those conversations, whether in English or in Dutch. Of course, this situation bothers you. I only participate in such events if I feel like I have to go. [Participant 4]

For me, it's more about the language than the culture. I don't want to attend such things mostly because of the language. [Participant 2]

I would be more willing to go if I didn't have a language barrier. [Participant 5]

5.1.4. Miscommunication

Referring back to second language socialization (see section 3.2), it has been discussed that understanding a language requires knowledge beyond grammar rules. Feeling the meaning of conversation goes far beyond simply recognizing the lexical meaning of words within a context (Agar, 1994). In second language socialization, cultural scripts and sociopragmatic norms also play a significant role, including differences in communication styles, greetings, refusals, apologies, or requests (Jackson, 2020, p. 235). In such cases, it is challenging to convey the real message lying behind words in intercultural conversations. Even when two parties can communicate in the same language, the same word can be interpreted differently or fail to convey the intended message, leading to miscommunication.

Challenges in adjusting communication styles were an important part of miscommunication cases during discussions, particularly regarding directness and indirectness. One participant recounted telling her Dutch supervisor that her performance was "not bad," intending it to mean "good." However, the supervisor misinterpreted this, asking, "Why? What is wrong?" In Dutch, "not bad" means "not good enough," while in Turkish, it is used to avoid sounding arrogant when something is good.

Sometimes we say 'it's not bad' just to be modest, but Dutch people are direct; they say either 'good' or 'bad.' When you say 'not bad,' they then ask what the problem is assuming that you mean not good enough. [Participant 12]

5.1.5. Performing below potential skills

The participants in this study were highly educated individuals, most of whom held high-level government, managerial, or academic roles. In addition to possessing advanced written and verbal communication skills in their native language, they also had transferable professional skills from previous work experiences that could facilitate their integration into the Dutch labor market. However, during the interviews, it was clear that a lack of proficiency in Dutch was a major barrier negatively affecting their work performance. Some mentioned being assigned low-skilled tasks due to the language barrier, which they felt were far below their potential, while others struggled to communicate effectively at a professional level or comprehend advanced, topic-specific texts. They also faced challenges in producing accurate written work, negatively impacting their performance and quality. Some mentioned that this lack of proficiency was demotivating, requiring extra effort and time, preventing them from reaching their full potential at work.

Working in Dutch hinders performance. I can only demonstrate half of the performance compared to what I could achieve in my native language or in English because of the language barrier. [Participant 14]

I could focus on my job and personal development, but instead, I spend all my energy trying to understand the language. This is very exhausting and makes me feel frustrated at times. [Participant 7]

5.2. DIFFERENCES IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

"Communication in today's world requires culture." says Agar (2014). He elaborates that culture is not only something that a similar group of people have in common but also

something that occurs when you interact with those groups, facing the differences. When you encounter mindsets, values, and norms different from your own, you arrive at a consciousness that reshapes the way you look at things (pp. 23-24). Once refugees enter a new workplace, they must adapt to the organizational culture, including the behaviors of co-workers and the norms, beliefs, and values of the organization, which may differ from what they are accustomed to so far (Foucreault et al., 2018). This is a part of the process of cultural adaptation (refer to section 3.3) and can pose challenges for status holders as individuals from different cultural backgrounds may encounter more conflicts in values compared to those from the dominant culture (Jackson, 2020, p. 278).

During the interviews, cultural differences were discussed in a variety of contexts depending on the specific values and behaviors within the organizations where participants work. However, the challenges most commonly cited were being unfamiliar with organizational values and unwritten rules at work, differences in behaviours and communication styles, and uncertainty about expectations. Some participants also expressed those cultural differences, along with language barriers, pose challenges for them in understanding context, particularly when they are unfamiliar with culture-related topics being discussed.

Yes, there are a lot of things being discussed that I don't understand during break times because I'm not yet familiar enough with Dutch culture. [Participant 6]

5.2.1. Being unfamiliar to organizational values and unwritten rules

Values are the guiding principles that shape what is ethically considered right or wrong, important or unimportant in a specific culture (Jackson, 2020, p. 278). During the interviews, it became clear that conflicts in values stemmed from differences in work ethics between the host and original cultures. Many participants noted that certain rules important in Turkish organizational culture are not valued similarly in the Dutch context, or the opposite way

around. For example, while Turkish culture emphasizes a strict hierarchical structure, Dutch workplaces tend to be more informal, affecting how individuals interact with superiors, colleagues, and their attire. Interviewees also highlighted challenges with unwritten organizational norms, such as punctuality in meetings, concise email responses, limiting personal conversations during work hours, and sticking strictly to job descriptions, which contrast with Turkish practices.

Understanding workplace culture is challenging. Additionally there are unwritten rules in culture, things that everyone naturally knows but you might not be aware of. You look strange in some cases when you don't know them [Participant 10]

5.2.2. Differences in behaviours and communication styles

As refugees navigate the process of cultural adjustment in the workplace (refer to section 3.3.), they encounter challenges stemming from differences in behaviours and communication styles from their country of origin. This results in the development of sociopragmatic competence as a coping mechanism, a skill that allows them to learn how to react to specific situations and express themselves by adjusting their verbal and nonverbal communication styles to fit the host culture (Jackson, 2020, p. 278). Communication challenges were also discussed as part of the language barrier, especially in cases of miscommunication (refer to section 5.1.4), as communication involves both language and culture. This chapter analyses differences in communication styles based on cultural scripts and norms as a barrier to workplace integration.

The use of direct or indirect language was the main part of the discussions. One participant shared that she interpreted feedback from her supervisor as criticism because the supervisor was very direct in expressing negative ideas. However, in Dutch culture, it is very common and normal to express likes and dislikes directly (Jackson, 2020, p. 277). She explained her

challenge adapting to directness in communication styles, noting that negative things are expressed more indirectly in Turkish culture. Another participant shared that he faced a challenge in giving an opposing idea to his manager's suggestion, which is not welcome in Turkish culture. He elaborated by saying:

In Turkey, we are used to agreeing with what our boss says. Reasoning or offering alternative suggestions is not welcome and seen as disrespectful. However, in the Dutch context, cooperation and participation are important. The boss expects your opinions and wants your active participation and initiative. This is something I am still having trouble getting used to. [Participant 14]

Sometimes when I ask for help to solve a problem, they do assist me, but I also sense an attitude of 'you should figure it out yourself'. [Participants 9]

5.2.3. Uncertainty about expectations

The participants also mentioned uncertainty about expectations as a barrier to professional integration. It became evident that this uncertainty stemmed from differing approaches between Turkish and Dutch cultures in requesting help, delegating tasks, and seeking support from colleagues or supervisors. In Turkey, job descriptions lack a specific framework, and additional tasks assigned by managers are typically mandatory. This contrasts with Dutch culture, where tasks are presented as requests, leaving it to the individual's initiative. Participants expressed hesitation in accepting or declining tasks, unsure if acceptance was optional. One participant shared an experience of working overtime to fulfil a task because he felt obligated to take on the responsibility.

Our team leader asked, 'Who wants to help with this task?' No one answered. I said, 'I can do that.' The next time he asked again, but still no one volunteered. Then I hesitated, unsure of what to do. I said yes for the second time, but later I had to work overtime to complete the task. I then thought to myself, 'I am the only one with low proficiency. Why did I say I can do it while no one else was taking responsibility? [Participant 2]

The uncertainty about expectations in asking questions was also mentioned. Some participants reported feeling uncomfortable when they asked successive questions, unsure whether this was welcomed by colleagues or not. They also added that they felt the opposite perception when they did not ask questions, as they could be perceived as not willing to learn.

5.3. LACK OF INCLUSION

Referring back to Jansen (2014) inclusion in the workplace refers to the extent to which an employee feels valued and respected as part of the team, meeting their needs for belongingness and recognition of their unique contributions, facilitating workplace integration. Exclusion, on the other hand, occurs when an individual is not perceived as an integral part of the organization or team, with other employees or groups being favoured over them (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1266). Ethnic minority members may experience exclusion at work when they feel devalued, isolated, or alone within the organization, or when they are excluded during breaks. (Jet van der Deen, 2021).

Well, my language is not fluent. When they talk I start missing a part of the conversation and then the rest [....] Then you feel excluded and lonely. There is no way. [Participant 5]

Not surprisingly, status holders who perceived a higher sense of belongingness at work also reported a higher sense of inclusion. However, the majority of the participants noted that despite progress in integration, they still lack inclusion and feel disconnected from the team. The most frequently mentioned feelings were being ‘’othered, lonely, or excluded’’.

One respondents shared the following quote:

It was the 2nd or 3rd month. I felt like a stranger because I knew nobody. So, who should I talk to now? Will people come to me or I will go to them? What kind of environment is this? But then the next time, for example, since I gained a little more intimacy with 2-3 friends compared to others, I hung out with them [....] Then I had a more comfortable time. But I think that relations with colleagues in the work environment is important. [Participant 3]

One participant added to the discussion his perception of inclusion as follows:

It is not about being one of them, it is also staying as yourself while adapting. [Participant 15]

Discussions also addressed misperceptions and stereotypes towards status holders, emphasizing how differences are perceived. Participants stressed the significance of improving language skills and understanding cultural differences as essential to fostering inclusion. Narratives on coping strategies highlighted that inclusion and integration involve efforts from both status holders and co-workers, as outlined in the framework (see section 3.4). Furthermore, some participants underscored the importance of organizational-level actions, such as promoting intercultural awareness and embracing workplace diversity as policy priorities.

5.3.1. Feeling Excluded and Lonely

Especially those working in organizations where Dutch culture is dominant mentioned feeling lonely and excluded compared to those working at international companies or non-profit organizations where there is more diversity in employee backgrounds. A participant working at a non-profit organization shared the following quote when explaining why he changed his first job:

I was the only refugee at my first workplace. Despite the efforts of my coworkers, somehow I couldn't feel at home. I couldn't find my place there. [Participant 10]

Another person narrated a similar story introduced followingly:

I couldn't stay there because of excluding behaviours of my ex colleagues. Now I am working at an international company where everyone respects each other [….] I feel more happy here. I can definitely say I belong to the team here. [Participant 11]

The predominant sentiment expressed was ‘’not feeling at home’’. Most participants mentioned feeling that their presence is not understood or valued in team settings, particularly in cases where language barriers and cultural differences become more apparent due to the dominance of the host culture. One participant described feeling excluded when her presence was consistently overlooked by team members, despite the organization's international perspective. She illustrated her feelings with the following quote:

Everyone was laughing at a joke. No one was aware that I didn't understand. At least they could have turned and asked, ‘’Do you know what we are laughing about?” [Participant 1]

Another participant shared:

I have positive one-on-one relationships, but I don't feel like I belong to the team as I can not contribute much. [Participant 7]

5.3.2. Stereotypes and Hidden Bias

Misconceptions about individuals who differ from us in various aspects such as age, gender, race, accent, physical appearance, or religion can harm the workplace integration. This tendency, known as stereotyping, involves assigning generalized traits to individuals based on perceived group membership. These stereotypes are driven by false assumptions rather than reality, unfairly categorizing every individual associated with a particular group (Jackson, 2020, p. 281).

During the interviews, it was evident that stereotypes directed at status holders in the workplace were excluding them with a label of being 'other,' which was narrated as a significant barrier to professional integration. The important thing discussed was that refugees’ being disadvantaged minority. Ghorashi also illustrates this point through a story where refugees are portrayed as ‘’a problem rather than part of the solution’’ (Ghorashi, 2017). Interviewees emphasized their disappointment, noting their high education and skills

which contradict this stereotype. Additionally, they attributed this misconception to difficulties in fully expressing themselves in a second language. One participant noted that:

When someone with a language barrier struggles to express himself, colleagues may wrongly assume he also struggles with other tasks. [Participant 17]

5.3.3. Cultural Blocks and Threads

Cultural blocks and threads represent two different perspectives in intercultural communication. Cultural blocks focus on observing and comparing practices and values between cultures. This perspective limits intercultural understanding to recognizing differences. On the other hand, cultural threads emphasize the interconnectedness of cultural experiences focusing on similarities instead of differences. While cultural blocks build boundaries and restrict cultural exchange, cultural threads promote openness and facilitate cultural sharing (Holliday, 2018). Agar (2014) says ‘’Differences are not a threat; they are an opportunity.’’ (p. 29).

It was evident from the narratives that discussing differences and focusing on barriers in the workplace was leading to a lack of inclusion. Rather than focusing on differences, finding similarities fosters the sense of belongingness. Some participants expressed that focusing on differences lead to stereotypes, while similarities build bridges, develop tolerance, and foster a positive perspective towards other cultures. A participant discussed the importance of how to address differences, as they may be perceived as both challenges and opportunities, and shared his experience with the following quote:

In the workplace, perspective towards newcomers is also important. For example, if a coworker has conservative thoughts, they may hold a negative attitude towards refugees. But some people are more open-minded and liberal. These individuals build relationships by focusing on your skills and experience rather than your refugee identity. [Participant 14]

5.4. INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES

To address the research question effectively, interviewees were asked about their strategies for navigating the challenges and barriers discussed earlier. While they shared personal strategies they found useful, they emphasized that integration cannot be achieved solely through individual effort. They highlighted the importance of organizational-level strategies to facilitate workplace integration. Participants noted that integration is a gradual process that evolves over time, aligning with the adaptation depicted in the u-curve model (see Figure 3).

5.4.1. Improving Language Proficiency

Given that insufficient command of language was cited as the main barrier to professional integration, most participants highly recommended focusing on language improvement from the beginning upon arrival in the host country. They noted that language courses provide basic theoretical knowledge, which is beneficial initially. However, practising language is an important aspect of second language socialization, as it also involves cultural norms and values (refer to 3.2), facilitating the understanding of cultural differences. The most frequently discussed strategy was practising with language coaches or participating in language cafes or speaking clubs. Some participants also emphasized that high level proficiency is not only important at work but also crucial when searching for a job, highlighting its importance with the following quote:

My advice to newcomers is to first improve their Dutch language. What I've seen from my own experience, this is the key thing. Once you achieve B2 level, many more doors open. [Participant 14]

For me it is essential to become proficient in a language not just theoretically but also in practice, and to be as active as possible in social life. [Participant 9]

One participant also noted that language skills will naturally improve as adaptation progresses, highlighting the role of time. This aligns with the u-curve adjustment model, which illustrates how barriers diminish as adaptation grows:

The biggest barrier is language, but it's something that will be overcome with time. This is a process that may become normal within 5 or maybe even 10 years. [Participant 8]

5.4.2. Developing Host Community Network

Despite refugees often being more educated than other immigrant groups, they encounter significant challenges due to limited social connections and weaker fluency in the host country's language (Bloch, 2004). This is often due to their migration being unplanned and inadequately prepared. The lack of a social network poses two major barriers for refugees. Firstly, it hinders their familiarity with the host culture, which is essential for cultural adaptation. Secondly, host community networks play an important role in finding employment, so having fewer connections means reduced access to job opportunities (Campion, 2018). To navigate this challenge, status holders prioritize building networks in the host country. The importance of networking was extensively discussed during interviews for various reasons, including language practice, social integration, and career advancement.

As discussed by Kim (2012), when newcomers interact with unfamiliar values and norms, they tend to develop host communication competence as a coping mechanism (refer to 3.3). It was apparent from the narratives that the more status holders build networks within the host community, the more easily they adapt to the culture, helping them to develop host communication competence. The following quote is an illustrative example of this point:

In the beginning when people said 'no' to me directly, I used to feel rejected. But as I got to know the work culture, now I know it's normal. [Participant 9]

It was also evident that building a network is a way to share culture as a thread facilitating positive relations. One participant shared his strategy illustrating how he uses networking as a cultural thread:

I always look for opportunities to come together with people. For example, I like tennis and I joined a tennis club to communicate with people at this common point. Somebody else who likes books can do the same. For me, it is the way I feel better. In this way, you can stay yourself while learning new things about culture. [Participant 8]

Contacting neighbours, making friends, involving parent communities, and participating in voluntary jobs or social events, visiting libraries were some of the suggestions for facilitating host community networks. Additionally, some people also mentioned the importance of staying in touch with the Turkish community. Two participants shared their experiences followingly:

I also recommend newcomers to stay in touch with their Turkish friends while building a Dutch network. I learn lots of things as well from the people who experienced the same process before me. [Participant 9]

I can say that Turkish network is also very important. I found my current job through a friend for example. [Participant 13]

5.4.3. Utilising From Support Systems

The majority of the participants cited that they find it very useful to contact government, non-profit organizations, or universities about facilities or services provided to refugees, such as being a member of organizations that provide support for refugees. These organizations organize networking events, start career development initiatives, and build bridges between refugees and organizations providing job opportunities. They also provide tailor-made vocational trainings or traineeships for status holders where refugees can gain both skills and job experience in the Netherlands. More than half of the participants stated that they found

jobs through these organizations. The ones who could find a job with personal efforts, still recommended staying in touch with those organizations to be able to utilize optional opportunities such as advanced language courses or intercultural competency trainings. The following narratives represent the general perception of the majority:

I have been admitted to this traineeship through the xxx organization. [Participant 11]

I highly recommend newcomers to stay in touch with these organizations. Even though I have a job, I am still registered there. If I come across something interesting, I share it with my friends. [Participant 9]

I found a job myself. But of course, they are organizing useful activities. Everyone should connect with them. [Participant 15]

5.5. ORGANIZATIONAL SUGGESTIONS

5.5.1. Enhancing Intercultural Awareness

The difference approach highlights cultural diversity as both a disadvantage and an opportunity (Holliday, 2018). This perspective underscores the importance of intercultural training to prevent misunderstandings and hidden bias, embracing the richness of diversity (Foucreaults et al., 2018).

Participants critically addressed the lack of intercultural awareness within some organizations and employees, discussing this as an issue that needs to be developed at the organizational level, as integration comes from both sides (refer to 3.4). They shared the common feeling that ‘’most people assume that we are the ones who need to integrate’’, highlighting the lack of effort needed from coworkers. Two participants expressed similar feeling with the following narratives:

It is not easy to communicate with colleagues when you start working. Language is usually the main barrier. In general, there is no training given to other employees like how to establish a relationship with newcomers etc. [Participant 10]

For example, I take a day off for the Feast of Ramadan. When I come back, no one asks about it […] One time I told them I feel excluded when people don't care whether I understand what they are talking about. My colleagues said, 'Oh, we usually forget about your language level.' So where is the intercultural awareness? [Participant 1]

5.5.2. Developing Workplace Diversity Policies

National and local policy approaches have recently become more focused on refugees' early integration and participation in society as many studies have criticized the policy's impact on refugees' integration (Gericke et a.l, 2018). While this shift is expected to yield positive results, a more comprehensive and reflective approach towards inclusion is necessary. For effective societal and organizational policies, it is essential to consider refugees' past and present experiences to address and overcome both visible and invisible obstacles to inclusion, including organizational bias (Gorashi, 2020).

In the Netherlands, organizational approaches to diversity have been largely influenced by the deficit perspective, attributing the lack of diversity in organizations to perceived qualifications among minorities (Ghorashi, 2020). This perspective is rooted in the historical context of guest labor migration, where migrants were often stereotyped as low-skilled and relegated to low-income jobs without career advancement opportunities (Gericke et al., 2018). Many participants emphasized the negative impact of the deficit approach on their professional integration, which focuses more on the skills status holders lack rather than recognizing their positive qualifications. The following quote is an example to this:

Hiring a status holder isn't just a favour; they bring valuable out-of-the-box thinking, knowledge, and experience to your team. In other words, providing them with a job opportunity can also benefit the company. It's essential to train people on this perspective. [Participant 14]

Gorashi (2020) also addresses the same issue, highlighting the need for collaboration between policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders to develop inclusive policies and programs for refugee integration into the labor market. This collaboration is crucial for addressing societal and organizational biases and creating genuinely inclusive spaces.

5.5.3. Providing Guidance and Feedback Sessions

Participants stressed the importance of regular evaluation meetings and feedback sessions for workplace integration. They found these meetings essential for discussing both work-related and personal issues, as well as receiving professional feedback. Additionally, they highlighted the necessity of a buddy system, especially in the first year of employment. This system pairs status holders with senior colleagues to provide initial guidance on any challenges they may encounter. Most participants agreed that both systems are crucial for fostering a sense of inclusion and integration. They described feeling 'safe' and 'supported' with a platform to express themselves and receive assistance. While regular evaluation meetings are common, some organizations lack a buddy system, which participants identified as crucial for the successful integration of status holders.

It is important to consider the development of an employee and provide support for how they can improve themselves within the organization. Do they feel safe? Do they feel at home? Matters related to diversity and inclusion, improvements, providing a safe atmosphere to express feelings and discomfort; these are things that did not exist in Turkey. Generally, positive aspects that are crucial in the workplace. [Participant 10]

Overall, driven by the real experiences of highly educated Turkish status holders in the Netherlands, this study identifies language barriers as the primary challenge in workplace integration, alongside difficulties adapting to cultural differences and perceived lack of inclusion. While the study initially focused on strategies employed by status holders to overcome these challenges, the research also uncovered the importance of inclusive perceptions and attitudes within organizations and among co-workers, emphasizing that successful integration requires a mutual effort from both sides.

6. DISCUSSION

The resettlement process typically revolves around two primary objectives: finding employment and securing social support (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003), which facilitate the integration of refugees into the host countries. However, as migration is usually unplanned in involuntary cases, refugees encounter specific challenges in adaptation to their new environment in the integration process (refer to chapter 3.1). Factors such as language barriers, unfamiliarity with the host culture, and a lack of social networks and experience make employment in their host countries particularly challenging (Ward et al., 2001) which has been broadly discussed in theoretical framework referring to findings in similar studies (refer to figure 4). However, integration is not complete once refugees enter the labour market, as adaptation continues over time. This has been illustrated in Kim's (2012) stress-adaptation growth dynamic (see Figure 3), highlighting the theory that barriers will be eliminated as adaptation grows, which also aligns with the findings of this study (see Results 5.1.1).

This qualitative research set out to explore the challenges and barriers at the workplace faced by Turkish status holders, as well as the strategies they use to navigate these barriers, utilizing both individual interviews and focus group discussions. While individual interviews

facilitated a deeper understanding of personal narratives, enabling participants to share their stories and perspectives in a private and uninterrupted setting, focus group discussions strengthen the dynamics of group interaction, providing multiple perspectives on specific examples and facilitating brainstorming among participants. In these group discussions, participants could react to and build on each other's contributions. The combination of these methods allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of the research topic by facilitating different perceptions on similar cases through focus group discussions, in addition to capturing deep, detailed personal insights in individual interviews (refer to 4.2).

The research question was initially formulated to analyse coping strategies applied by status holders to the most salient barriers faced. However, during the interviews, it became evident that personal-level strategies alone are insufficient for overcoming these barriers, aligning with theories discussed in the framework (see chapter 3.4) as integration is identified as a two-way process requiring continuous efforts from both sides (Phillimore, 2010). Integration may mistakenly be perceived as language and cultural assimilation, but it is, in fact, an adaptation process. Meaning that newcomers value maintaining their own culture while also being open to engaging with the society and culture of the host country. Therefore, effective integration requires a connection between the dominant culture and newcomers to foster the emergence of new values and identities.

Berry (1997) highlights the importance of analyzing both the cultural traits of individuals and the broader political, economic, and demographic conditions in their home countries to understand their motivation for adaptation in involuntary migration. Turkish status holders are individuals, most of whom are highly educated and skilled, having held prominent positions in their home countries. When discussing their motivations, they reported that their

desire to integrate into the Dutch labor market stems from a willingness to participate in society, work in similar professional roles they previously held, develop themselves professionally, achieve job satisfaction, and gain financial independence.

Language competency has been addressed as playing a vital role in refugee workplace integration (Lee et al., 2020). It has been identified as crucial not only for finding a job but also for integrating into sustainable employment (Razenberg & De Gruijter, 2020). Aligning with the literature in theoretical framework (refer to 3.1), the vast majority of participants indicated that language and communication barriers, also addressed as insufficient command of the Dutch language, is the major challenge in the workplace, followed by cultural differences in organizational values and lack of inclusion.

In the discussions about language and communication barriers during interviews, it became evident that the challenge stems not only from weak fluency or low proficiency but also from a lack of sociopragmatic norms, such as differences in communication styles, gestures, and politeness rules aligning with the discussion by Jackson (2020) in the framework (refer to 3.2). Therefore, language barriers and cultural differences were revealed as interrelated factors, as language requires cultural context and culture involves language (Agar, 2014). To address the research question properly, participants shared some personal strategies they found effective for successful integration, such as improving language proficiency, developing networks, and utilizing support systems offered to refugees.

However, the data revealed that although a lack of inclusion seems to result from language and cultural barriers, organizational factors have an equal, even more in some cases, effect on status holders feeling 'different' and 'excluded'. Most participants reported that despite

improving their language proficiency and striving at a personal level, they still do not feel ‘at home’, adressing a lack of effort from their coworkers and the organization. Kim (2012) refers to this as 'host receptivity' (refer to 3.3), defined by Jackson (2020) as "the degree to which the receiving environment welcomes and accepts newcomers into its interpersonal networks and offers them various forms of informational, technical, material, and emotional support" (p. 202). Participants working at international companies or non-profit organizations with diverse employee backgrounds reported a higher sense of belonging, feeling that they are not perceived as different’ where everyone is "different". In contrast, those working in environments dominated by Dutch culture experienced a high sense of being "othered", referring to the bias directed towards them as "unskilled, disadvantaged minorities", despite their high qualifications and education.

This misperception towards highly skilled refugees has been discussed by Riemsdijk and Axelsson (2021), who criticize the policies of countries like Sweden and Germany. In these nations, refugees with similar profiles to those in the Netherlands face similar demotivational cases due to being perceived as low-skilled and "a burden on the welfare system" (p. 4). This issue is also critically discussed by Gorashi (2020), who highlights the experiences of Iranian refugees in the Netherlands in a similar way. Consequently, the findings of this research can be representative of the experiences of highly educated refugees from various ethnic backgrounds, as migration-related issues are universal.

Individual aspects and national elements like governmental policies and programs have been broadly discussed in the literature regarding the factors facilitating and hindering refugees' workplace integration and vocational behaviors (Knappert et al., 2018). However, there is a notable lack of studies exploring how organizational practices influence the inclusion and exclusion of refugees, and how these practices intersect with both national contexts and

individual experiences (Jong, 2016). This has also been discussed by Gorashi (2020), who additionally addressed the lack of refugees' own voices and experiences in the existing literature regarding this issue. Addressing this gap, therefore, is significant because inclusion and exclusion are fundamental to psychosocial well-being, impacting mental and physical health, performance, and career opportunities (Shore et al., 2011). Therefore, this study not only addresses the existing gap by analyzing the first-hand experiences of status holders in the Netherlands but also informs organizations and policymakers about their challenges and the role of personal strategies and organizational practices in navigating these challenges for professional integration.

6.1. RESEARCHERS' REFLEXIVITY

The researcher's role as a status holder herself significantly enriched the analysis. Being part of the same community and having experienced a similar integration process, as well as sharing the native language and cultural background with the participants, provided comprehensive insights. This commonality facilitated effective communication and comfortable expression, eliminating language barriers and enabling a nuanced understanding of shared cultural norms. These personal insights from an in-group perspective enabled the researcher to deeply analyze the study's findings, enhancing their validity and applicability beyond Turkish status holders to other highly educated refugees facing similar migration-related challenges globally.

6.2. LIMITATIONS

This study, while providing valuable insights into the participants' experiences, has several limitations that should be addressed. One of the primary limitations was the constrained word count and limited timeframe, which restricted the number of participants to 17, preventing the

inclusion of more perspectives from diverse occupations. Although there was a high level of saturation within the group, more diversity in occupational backgrounds may have revealed different findings. Secondly, the initial research question aimed to analyze all barriers and challenges faced in the workplace. However, due to the word count limitation, it had to be reformulated to focus on the most salient ones. Consequently, some detailed findings that still negatively affect professional integration had to be omitted from the discussions, which could have further enriched the study. These findings include a long career break in their curriculum vitae, a lack of a professional network in the host country, and hidden discrimination based on their refugee identity. These challenges were primarily cited as barriers when status holders look for jobs and continued to negatively impact the workplace, though indirectly, rather than being the main obstacle.

Another limitation is the potential bias introduced by the researcher's own position as an ingroup-member of the target community. While this insider perspective can provide valuable contextual understanding based on the shared values and language of participants, it also carries the risk of subjective bias. The researcher’s personal experiences and preconceptions could have influenced the interpretation of the data, possibly leading to unconscious bias.

Despite these limitations, as a researcher, I do hope to make a meaningful contribution to understanding the professional integration challenges of highly educated refugees in the Netherlands and provide a foundation for future studies. While the personal narratives of the status holders contribute to filling the gap in existing literature, the findings can also highlight the need for further research on the topic.

6.3. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Managing diversity challenges in the Dutch labour market has been a topic of discussion for decades, given the country's long history of migration and diversity, which has recently been compounded by the growing populations of refugees from different countries including Syria and Turkey.

While the benefits of diversity seem to be highlighted in policy, the reality does not align with the official case. The prevailing approach has been the deficit or deficiency perspective, as discussed in previous chapters (refer to 5.5.2). This perspective focuses on the skills refugees lack such as language, preventing recognition of the potential and additional values they may bring to organizations (Ghorashi et. al, 2017). While the Dutch government has implemented policies that prioritize integration and inclusion (Kymlicka, 2017), the persistent Dutch image of immigrants as low-educated and low-skilled hinders their equal participation within organizations, fostering hidden bias and misperceptions towards refugees (Ghorashi et. al, 2017).

This study was initially set up to investigate the challenges and barriers of status holders to professional integration, analyzing participants' coping strategies as well. However, the data results highlighted the significance of intercultural awareness lacking in organizations, which influence refugees' sense of belonging, aligning with the gap in the literature previously discussed (refer to 5). Due to the word count limit, the comprehensive effects of organizational behaviours and the current 'deficiency approach' in policy could only be superficially discussed, as this topic was not initially planned for detailed analysis. Therefore, future analyses may benefit from further investigations on this topic. Addressing organizational practices for the integration of refugees in further research will not only raise awareness about hidden biases but also contribute to filling the existing gap in academic

literature. Additionally, as the voices of refugees are often missing from diversity studies in organizations (Ghorashi, 2018), their individual experiences should be more comprehensively included in subsequent research in relevant studies.

To provide a broader understanding of the challenges discussed, it would be beneficial to incorporate stakeholder perspectives and quantitative data reflecting integration and inclusion rates within organizations. This approach would offer external evaluations and objective measures of professional integration, enhancing the reliability and richness of the data. Including diverse perspectives from various participants could help address the limitations of qualitative research.

Additionally, the research results align with the u-curve adjustment model (refer to figure 3) as participants have been experiencing a transition from culture shock to the adaptation phase, which is expected to be completed within the time durations illustrated in the model. However, the u-curve model has been criticized for excluding personal circumstances and demographic factors in the integration process, meaning the length of adaptation process may differ for each individual depending on external and demographic factors. Kim (2012) elaborated on this by introducing the 'Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation,' (refer to chapter 3.3) which she developed as a critique of the u-curve model. As the participants in this research have lived in the Netherlands for no more than six years (between 3-6 years), their adaptation stage may further be researched by analyzing the influence of organizational approaches and demographic dynamics on time factor.

Overall, further research could address limitations by expanding the sample size, using mixed methods, and extending the study period for comprehensive data analysis. This approach

would contribute to a deeper understanding of integration challenges among highly educated refugees in the workplace.

7. CONCLUSION

Considering the increasing number of highly educated refugees in the Netherlands, the professional integration of these individuals is vital both for their well-being and for the socio-economic development of the country. This study aimed to explore the barriers and challenges faced by Turkish status holders in the Netherlands during the professional integration process, as well as the strategies they employ to overcome these barriers.

The following research question was formulated to guide this study:

RQ: How do Turkish status holders in the Netherlands navigate the challenges and barriers to the process of professional integration?

To address this research question, the following sub-questions were proposed:

SQ1: What are the most salient barriers faced by Turkish status holders in the Netherlands in the workplace?

SQ2: Which strategies do Turkish status holders employ to facilitate professional integration in the Netherlands?

The study utilized qualitative analysis, based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 17 Turkish status holders who have been living in the Netherlands for 3 to 6 years. All participants were highly educated and experienced individuals, holding Bachelor's or Master's degrees, who were employed in high positions before becoming refugees. Given their successful academic and professional backgrounds, they are highly motivated to

integrate into the Dutch labor market and develop their transferable skills to gain socio-economic independence. However, as their migration was unexpected and adaptation takes time, they face certain barriers and challenges at their workplaces, preventing them from performing to their full potential.

The first and most significant challenge cited was the language barrier, followed by cultural differences in organizations and a lack of inclusion. To fully address the research question, participants were also asked to share the most useful strategies they employ to overcome these barriers. Improving language proficiency, building networks, and utilizing support systems were among the most commonly used personal strategies. However, in terms of inclusion, participants critically discussed the lack of intercultural awareness among colleagues and the deficiency approach in diversity policy at organizations. It was evident that personal strategies were inadequate when there is a lack of awareness within society, as inclusion and integration require effort from both sides.

By exploring how Turkish status holders navigate common barriers in the work environment and discussing the support needed from organizations and society, this study can inform newcomers, researchers, and policymakers, addressing gaps in literature and policy. Further analysis on this topic can provide comprehensive insights into the issues affecting their sense of inclusion in the workplace. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective strategies to foster workplace inclusion and facilitate smoother integration. While the study's focus is specific to individuals with Turkish origin, it ensures the transferability of the data by addressing issues that other highly educated refugees from different nationalities may potentially face, as migration-related challenges are often universal.

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9. APPENDIX

9.1. Information about Participation

Utrecht University

Information about participation in
a Study on the Professional Integration Experiences
of Turkish Statusholders in the Netherlands

1. Introduction

You are being asked to take part in scientific research. The study will be conducted in person at a convenient location for you, or online using Zooms or Teams meeting software.

2. What is the background and purpose of the study?

In this Masters research project, we would like to learn about the challenges and barriers encountered in the workplace during the professional integration process of Turkish Statusholders in the Netherlands. This is an educational research project.

3. Who will be carrying out the study?

Kübra Kizil, Master's student of Intercultural Communication at Utrecht University will be conducting the research. She can be reached at k.kizil@students.uu.nl. The data controller and research supervisor for this project is Dr. Rena Zendedel, she can be reached at r.zendedel@uu.nl.

4. How will the study be carried out?

For this study, individual and focused-group interview models will be used. Participants will be invited to share their experiences and insights regarding the challenges they faced during their professional integration process. These interviews will take between 30-60 minutes.

5. What will we do with your data?

We will make a recording and transcription of our interview, for educational purposes only. This audio and transcription text will only be shared with our data controller and supervisor, Dr. Zendedel. The transcription data will also be anonymised and your name will only be known to us.

Utrecht University

6. What are your rights?

Participation is voluntary. We are only allowed to collect your data for our study if you consent to this. If you decide not to participate, you do not have to take any further action. You do not need to sign anything. Nor are you required to explain why you do not want to participate. If you decide to participate, you can always change your mind and stop participating at any time, including during the study. You will even be able to withdraw your consent after you have participated. However, if you choose to do so, we will not be required to undo the processing of your data that has taken place up until that time. The research data that has already been processed will not be removed.

7. Approval of this study

If you have any doubts or questions regarding the processing of personal data, please do not hesitate to reach out to the researcher (k.kizil@students.uu.nl). We will assist you through this process.

8. More information about this study?

Supervisor: Dr. Rena Zendedel, r.zendedel@uu.nl
Kübra Kizil: k.kizil@students.uu.nl

9. Appendix:

Informed Consent Form

9.2. Consent Form Template

Utrecht University

DECLARATION OF CONSENT for participation in:

a Study on the Professional Integration Experiences of Turkish Statusholders in the Netherlands

I hereby confirm:

- that I have been satisfactorily informed about the study through the information letter;
- that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and that any questions I asked have been satisfactorily answered;
- that I have had the opportunity to carefully consider participation in this study;
- that I voluntarily consent to participating.

I consent to the following:

- the data collected will be obtained for educational purposes and retained as stated in the information letter;
- audio recordings will be made for educational purposes.

I understand that:

- I have the right to withdraw my consent to the use of data, as stated in the information letter.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____ Date (d/m/y): ___ / ___ / ___

Town/city: _____

To be completed by the researcher carrying out the study: I declare that I have explained to the above-mentioned participant what participation in the study entails.

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: ___ / ___ / ____, _____

9.3. Topic List and In-Depth Interview Questions

1. Introduction to the research (aim) and consent procedure

-Obtaining written consent form and recording of the conversation

2. Demographic information

-Age, gender, country of origin (Turkey)

-What is your educational level? What did you study? When did you graduate?

-Arrival date in the Netherlands and current official status.

-How long have you been working in the Netherlands?

-What is the language policy at your workplace?

-What was your language level when you started working?

-How many languages do you speak and at which level?

3. Professional Integration Experience

-Description of professional background in Turkey.

-What was your recent job in Turkey?

-How long did you work there?

-Did you also have work experience at another organisation/institution?

-Which personal/professional skills did you improve in your previous job experience?

4. Overview of the job search process in the Netherlands

-Could you briefly describe your experience with the job search process in the Netherlands?

-What methods or strategies did you use to search for employment opportunities?

-Were there any particular challenges you faced during your job application process?

-How did you cope with those challenges during your job search?

5. Challenges encountered during employment in the Netherlands

-In what ways do you perceive the Dutch labour market to be different from the job market in Turkey (any differences in workplace culture or professional norms, for example)?

-Since starting your job in the Netherlands, what specific challenges have you encountered in the workplace? (anything about cultural/traditional differences, communication difficulties, language/identity barrier, personal/professional skills, network, work ethics or hierarchy, carrier switch, lack of knowledge, discrimination, bias or any other things that are important to you)

-Can you provide an example of the most difficult situation you've faced in your workplace and what did you do to navigate this?

6. Strategies and Facilitators for Addressing Potential Challenges in Dutch Workplace

- - What personal strategies have you found effective for career development and maintaining motivation and perseverance during your professional integration process?

- What types of support or resources does your organisation provide to assist you in your professional integration and development?

- Are there any specific support systems or resources you've found helpful in overcoming your workplace challenges?

- Can you share some of the most significant moments or milestones you've experienced/achieved during your integration process?

-From your experience, what are the key factors that contribute to successful professional integration and advancement in the Netherlands for Turkish status holders?

7. Support Systems and Resources at organisational-level

-What support services or resources are you aware of that are available to assist status holders in their professional integration process in the Netherlands, such as language courses,

job training and career switch programs, mentorship programs, and any career-related support from ministries, municipalities, or other non-profit organisations aimed at assisting refugees?

-Have you utilised any of these support services to aid in your professional integration? If yes, could you specify which one(s) you have utilized and briefly describe your experience with them?

-What suggestions do you have for informing and enhancing support services aimed at addressing the challenges faced by status holders during the professional integration process?

8. Reflection and Final Thoughts

- Looking back on your professional integration journey, what are your overall reflections and thoughts?

- How do you feel you have grown or changed as a result of your experiences with professional integration in the Netherlands?

- Are there any additional insights or reflections you would like to share about your professional integration journey?

- What lessons have you learned that you believe could benefit other status holders or individuals going through a similar integration process?

- Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't discussed yet regarding your professional integration experience?

9.4. Focus Group Discussion Guide

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINE

1. Can each of you share a brief overview of your professional background and experiences in Turkey?

2. How have your individual experiences influenced your expectations and experiences of professional integration in the Netherlands?

3. Based on your previous job experience in Turkey, are there any specific skills or competencies you have acquired that you believe could enhance your performance in your current work environment in the Netherlands?

4. What methods or strategies did each of you use in your job search processes? How long did this process last?

5. Can you identify any common challenges you faced during your job application processes? What is the key thing that you think facilitated your finding a job?

6. What was the biggest challenge you faced so far at your workplace? What did you do to manage that?

7. How do you perceive the differences between the Dutch labour market and job market in Turkey, based on your experiences?

8. Can we identify any patterns in the types of support services that have been most beneficial to us as a group?

9. What personal strategies have you found effective for career development and overcoming workplace challenges?

10. Have any of you utilised support services or resources to aid in your professional integration, and if so, what were your individual experiences with them?

11. Reflecting on our discussion, what do you think are the key factors for successful professional integration for Turkish status holders in the Netherlands?

12. You are in a meeting and everyone is giving an opinion on a specific problem that needs to be solved in the organization. You also have a very good idea that you think even better than the others', but you feel like your language level is not enough to explain yourself, when it comes to your turn what do you say? Do you try to share your idea or just give no opinion or what else do you do?

13. When it comes to social gatherings like '*uitjes*' or '*borrels*,' do you sometimes feel hesitant to participate? Why or why not?

14. How do you perceive your contributions' impacting the team's success?

15. Do you ever feel isolated or left out at work?

16. What do you think about the role of non-profit organizations in professional support? Can you share your experience? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

17. If you need to put one word only that you think is the most important in this process in general, what would it be?

18. Would you like to put some final words or do you have any suggestions for newcomers?