“Not Just a Refugee Anymore”:

Examining the Impact of the *Incluusion* Programme on the

Social Integration of Refugees in the Netherlands.

by

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Title of Study: *"Not Just a Refugee Anymore"*: Examining the Impact of the *Incluusion*

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of the *Incluusion* programme at Utrecht University on the

social integration of refugee students in the Netherlands amidst a backdrop of stringent asylum

policies and complex integration dynamics. Through an online survey (n=64) and focus group

discussions (n=5) the research employs a mixed-methods case study approach to assess the

programme's impact on social integration. Findings indicate that the *Incluusion* programme has

a positive impact on the perceived social integration of its students, regardless of certain

demographic factors (gender, age, residency status). Additionally, a unique three-step social

integration process emerged for *Incluusion* students; a regaining of a sense of self and

individuality, the creation of their own social capital, and long-term sustainable social

integration. The *Incluusion* programme was shown to occupy a unique "catalyst" role in this

social integration process of its students, highlighting the programmes importance in the wider

immigration landscape of the Netherlands.

Keywords: refugees*,* asylum seeker*,* social integration, informal learning,
empowerment, social capital

Samenvatting

Deze studie onderzoekt de impact van het *Incluusion*-programma aan de Universiteit Utrecht op de sociale integratie van vluchtelingstudenten in Nederland te midden van strenge asielbeleid en complexe integratiedynamiek. Door middel van een online enquête (n=60) en focusgroepdiscussies (n=5) hanteert het onderzoek een mixed-methods case study benadering om de effectiviteit van het programma te beoordelen. De bevindingen geven aan dat het *Incluusion*-programma een positieve impact heeft op de waargenomen sociale integratie van de studenten, ongeacht bepaalde demografische factoren (geslacht, leeftijd, verblijfsstatus). Bovendien kwam er een uniek drie-stappenproces van sociale integratie naar voren voor *Incluusion*-studenten; het herwinnen van een gevoel van eigenwaarde en individualiteit, het creëren van hun eigen sociaal kapitaal, en langdurige duurzame sociale integratie. Het *Incluusion*-programma blijkt een unieke "katalysator" rol te vervullen in het sociale integratieproces van de studenten, waarmee het haar bestaansbelang in het bredere immigratielandschap van Nederland benadrukt.

Trefwoorden: vluchtelingen, asielzoekeren, sociale integratie, informeel leren, empowerment, sociaal kapitaal

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Introduction

The most recently elected Dutch government has proposed alterations to the

Immigratie en Naturalatiedienst (IND) procedures, which will structurally affect the asylum

process and reception of refugees in the Netherlands. These proposals include but are not

limited to a doubling of the naturalisation period to 10 years, a renouncing of other

nationalities when adopting Dutch citizenship, and those whose asylum applications are

rejected will be "deported as much as possible, forcibly if necessary" (Dutch Review, 2024;

Hoofdlijnenakkoord, 2024). The coalition are eager for the introduction of the "strictest

asylum policy ever" despite recent amendments to the European Union *Pact on Migration*

and Asylum (POLITICO, 2024; European Commission, 2024). This change emerges in the

wake of an increasingly poignant internationalisation debate happening throughout Dutch

society and echoed across a post-Brexit Europe (Condette & De Wit, 2023).

Amidst these challenges, the *Incluusion* program at Utrecht University offers

educational and social opportunities to support refugee students' integration. Recent studies

indicate that *Incluusion* students report a lower sense of belonging compared to the general

student population (*Incluusion* Midterm Report, 2023). Moreover, the looming procedural

changes for the asylum and integration procedures in the Netherlands are set to have a direct

impact on these students, highlighting the need for in-depth research into its impact on social

integration.

This case study investigates the impact of the *Incluusion* programme on the social

integration of its refugee students. The aim of this investigation is threefold, firstly

uncovering whether a positive impact is in fact experienced by students; secondly uncovering

whether certain demographic factors play a part in the impact experienced by students; and lastly to understand the distinct role the *Incluusion* programme might play in the social integration of its students. The findings will provide insights into improving integrative programs for refugees in the Netherlands and beyond.

Background and Theory

Social Integration of Refugees

The integration of refugees in the Netherlands does not exist in a vacuum, instead it is interwoven with the Netherland's historic multicultural model and its institutionalisation of cultural pluralism and "pillarism" (Scholten, 2011: 68). Essentially, distinct groups within society remain somewhat separate and linked to their distinct cultural identities (Scholten, 2011). Through this emerged the idea that for immigrant minorities (and therefore refugees) to successfully integrate, their cultural emancipation with the Dutch multicultural model was necessary for integration in Dutch society (Scholten, 2011: 68; Duyvendak & Scholten, 2012).

Nevertheless, multicultural models in refugee integration policies coexist with other prominent social discourse, ultimately affecting the policy and social integration frameworks in the Netherlands. Socio-economic perspectives on refugee integration have stressed educational and labour participation as the end goal of integration with more increased focus on "cultural assimilation". A clear example of this convergence lies in the Dutch Civic Integration Act (Wet Inburgering) which aims to facilitate the integration of migrants into Dutch society through language pathways (B1 Route), educational routes for young migrants, and various labour market and participation pathways (Expat Centre Maastricht, 2024; Civic Integration Act, 2021).

Cultural assimilation therefore "emphasises the importance of national identity [of the host country], norms and values and social cohesion in relation to immigrant integration" (Scholten, 2011: 16; Entzinger, 2005). With the focus mainly on the educational and economic spheres through language acquisition and labour market participation, the social realms of integration are often sidelined or disregarded entirely. Refugee integration in practice thus involves a lengthy process of Dutch cultural assimilation that is mirrored in a vast majority of other European countries (Joppke & Morawska, 2003). Coupled with the latest Dutch coalition proposals, social integration for refugees will soon require deeper cultural assimilation into Dutch society. Refugees and asylum seekers vary in their Dutch language acquisition (Van Tubergen, 2010), access to employment (Bakker, Dagevos & Engbersen, 2016), or creating a sense of beloning with local communities (Huizinga & Van Hoven, 2018) rendering universalistic cultural assimilation problematic for refugee social integration.

Procedure Uncertainty

The Dutch *Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst* (IND) or in English, the *Immigration and Naturalisation Service*, is responsible for all residency applications from individuals who want to live, work, or study in the Netherlands (IND, 2024). Those seeking asylum in the Netherlands must report to the IND in Ter Apel upon arrival, and once registered and identified, the IND must consider each asylum request. In May 2024, a total of 3,870 asylum applications were sent to the IND, with a 13-month cumulative total of applications standing at 20,323 (Hoofdrapport IND, 2024). The European Council of Refugees and Exiles reported the overall rejection rate for asylum applications in 2023 was 19.2% (ECRE, 2024).

As of 2024, the IND process for asylum seekers is increasingly lengthy and drawn out. The average wait times between 1st and 2nd IND interviews stands at 43 weeks, but in practice, asylum seekers must wait the 15 months it takes IND to process their applications

(Refugee Help, 2024). Asylum waiting times are directly linked to poorer emotional and physical health in refugees and asylum seekers, with women reporting worse health outcomes than men (Kalt et al. 2013). Parallel to its impact on health, 'procedure uncertainty' impacts refugee integration and has serious implications on refugees' sense of belonging and feeling of security in the Netherlands (Phillimore & Cheung, 2021; Hoekstra, 2016).

Statement of Problem

The refugee experience in the Netherlands is shrouded with uncertainty, and the lack of social integration frameworks in favour of educational and economic routes raises important questions about not only the welfare of people during this time, but also their ability to successfully integrate once their procedure is over. Refugee individuals face significant challenges in achieving social integration, as evidenced by reports highlighting their struggles with language barriers, limited access to employment, and challenges connecting with local communities.

In response, the *Incluusion* programme at Utrecht University aims to support refugee students by offering educational and social opportunities to facilitate their integration during their asylum procedures. Considering this, the increasingly hostile immigration policy in the Netherlands, and the multiple reports of lower psychosocial wellbeing for refugee and asylum seekers, investigating the impact of the programme on the social integration of its students is more important than ever. Insights into the programme are necessary for its improvement.

Theoretical Framework

Given the complexity of refugee experience, the implications of procedure uncertainty, and the importance of social integration for the outcomes of refugees in the Netherlands, it is essential that elements are drawn from multiple theories and integrated into a specific theoretical framework for this research. Namely, social capital theory, identity

theory, intersectionality, and empowerment theory. Below is an overview of theoretical

applicability to the case of Incluusion and the social integration of refugees.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory (SCT) illuminates the role of social networks, interpersonal

relationships, and access to resources in the successful social integration of refugees in the

Netherlands. Lin, a prominent sociologist and researcher of SCT, defines social capital as the

"resources embedded in social networks, including trust, norms, and social support" (Lin,

2001). Because of its emphasis on information links, reciprocity, and trust, SCT is a useful

lens through which the development of programmes for social integration should always be

seen. The work of Lin on SCT has contributed valuable measurement tools to quantify the

strength and extent of an individual's social capital, through surveys which assess social ties,

levels of interpersonal trust, and feelings of reciprocity among communities (Lin, 2001).

SCT is pertinent in the case of *Incluusion*. This theory illustrates how the programme

can facilitate the creation of new social networks for refugee students through UU course

participation, the Buddy Support, the *Incluusion* Community, or other programme

components which aim to promote intercultural trust and reciprocity. Relatedly, *Incluusion*

can foster the creation of social capital as it improves access to social resources, such as

education.

Identity theory

Identity theory centres the refugee and asylum seeker in the social integration process

as it provides a framework for understanding how identities can be reconstructed, conflicted,

and adapted over time. An individual's personal identity and their social identity are

particularly important in the social integration process. The environment of the *Incluusion*

programme manifests as 'peer support', allowing for expressions of identities and

experiences in a safe space with individuals of similar backgrounds. 'Peer support' can facilitate a process of 'identity verification', whereby *Incluusion* students are provided an opportunity to affirm multiple social identities and self-perceptions which ultimately enhances self-esteem and reconstruct self-perceptions in the Netherlands (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Intersectionality is closely linked with identity theory and considers the multiple identities that culminate in a person's lived experience. Implicit in this theory is the knowledge that (dis)advantage cannot be experienced uniformly and is compounded by the multiplicity of identity factors making up an individual's life and sense of life. This theory acknowledges that experiences of discrimination or privilege are not uniform but are influenced by the interplay of various identity dimensions (Crenshaw, 1991). A comprehensive knowledge of intersectionality is imperative to understanding the specific needs of *Incluusion* students (mainly based on demographic aspects such as age, gender, residency status) in addition to the provision of tailored support.

Empowerment theory

Empowerment is strongly associated with better well-being and mental health results, which directly links to the programme aims of *Incluusion* (Rappaport, 1987). Empowerment theory enables *Incluusion* students to be seen as active agents in their social integration process by highlighting the ways in which individuals grow in confidence, skills, and self-efficacy throughout their time at the programme (Zimmerman, 2000). These aspects of personal empowerment align with the programme's focus on personal development. However, collective empowerment and social and civic empowerment are also pertinent in the case of *Incluusion*; collective empowerment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) for its focus on building a sense of belonging within a community environment and the creation of

supportive social networks, and social and civic empowerment (Rappaport, 1987) for its focus on how *Incluusion* students can contribute to community development.

Conceptual Framework

Social Integration

This research draws on the research of Hartwell and Benson (2007), who use four main components in their conceptualisation of social integration. For them, social networks, social support, social engagement, and social capital are key to understanding the concept. However, this framework must be integrated with more specific research in the area to fully grasp the practical realities and social processes associated with it.

For example, Woolcock (1998) encompasses all four dimensions by defining social integration as a dual process of incorporation and participation. Over time, individuals are slowly incorporated into social and economic aspects of the host society and begin involving themselves in major institutions and activities (Woolcock, 1998). As per Woolcock, examples of social integration can range from something as small as developing a friendship with another person to learning the local language and dialect to enable participation in the institutional workings of the society. Additionally, research tools such as that commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) provide a clearer picture on the interpersonal and social processes that contribute to social integration by categorising them in three domains: relationships, participation, and equality (GLA, 2021). Appendix C Table 7 provides a condensed overview of phenomena to consider for each GLA social integration domain. This is a useful tool for conceptualising social integration as it considers the multiple processes that culminate in an individual's perception of being socially integrated.

Both Woolcock (1998) and the GLA (2021) contribute to a more comprehensive conceptualisation of social integration by considering the multiple processes that culminate in an individual's perception of being socially integrated. Grootaert reiterates this point:

"Scholars working in both conceptual traditions agree that it is important to recognize that social capital is not a single entity but is rather multi-dimensional in nature" (Grootaert, 2004). As this research has utilised the personal and subjective accounts of refugee social integration through the *Incluusion* programme, it is therefore also necessary to consider these facets of social integration as they are rooted directly in the individual. Additionally, as the nature and processes associated with social capital underscore the research's conceptualisation of social integration, it must be extrapolated more. Through the conceptualisation of social integration for this research, the multifaceted and multidimensional reality of social capital became an interlocked and integral aspect.

Social Capital

Pierre Bourdieu's work on the concept of social capital provides a solid base for how it is considered and applied today. His definition became a springboard for scholars to further problematise the concept: "The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119). Within this iteration of social capital, there is an inextricable link between the social, economic, and cultural realms that converge to create a person's habitus and social hierarchy.

(i) Bonding and Bridging Capital

The concept of social capital was differentiated further by Putnam (2000) who introduced the notions of 'bonding and bridging capital'. On the one hand, 'bonding social capital' refers to the strong social ties created amongst a homogenous group of individuals. In nature, these bonds promote exclusivity by reinforcing group identity through immediate support and a sense of belonging. On the other hand, 'bridging social capital' is heterogenous and inclusive in nature. The ties associated with bridging ties are weaker and more outward

facing, meaning bridging ties enable access to a wider range of social, economic, and cultural resources (Putnam, 2000: 22-24).

(ii) Informal Learning

When looking especially at social capital as it pertains to immigration and asylum seeking, Field's (2003) work is worth considering. He posits that social capital in the form of social networks and relationships are essential for refugees to integrate into a host society (Field, 2003). Again, social networks emerge as one of the most important elements of social capital formation and maintenance through the interaction with informal networks and organisations. In addition to acting as "crucial sources of support and information among refugee and asylum-seeking groups" the creation of informal networks provides informal opportunities for skill accumulation and social capital formation (Morrice, 2007; Bellis & Morris, 2003). This is what Coffield (2000) refers to as 'informal learning' or aspects of learning that exist outside the remit of formal government education or training. 'Informal learning' remains an important aspect of social capital formation for marginalised groups such as refugees and asylum seekers as it provides space for the creation of 'bridging social capital' (Coffield, 2000; Morrice, 2007). This is enhanced through the often-autonomous nature of 'informal learning', as individuals develop knowledge and understanding, improve interpersonal skills, and show a noticeable increase in self-esteem (McGivney, 1999).

The *Incluusion* Programme

Incluusion is a programme for refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands which began in 2016. To date, *Incluusion* has enabled 1,500 status holders and asylum seekers from over 40 countries to partake in courses at UU with numbers increasing each academic Block (*Incluusion* Midterm Report, 2023; *Incluusion* Website, 2024). The main aim of the programme is to offer asylum seeker and status holder students an "opportunity to further

develop themselves and to help with their social and academic integration" through participation in UU Bachelor courses, by gaining work experience with Traineeships, or by actively involving themselves in *Incluusion* Community activities (*Incluusion* Website, 2024). Approximately 2/3 of *Incluusion* students taking courses at UU are actively in the asylum procedure, highlighting the importance and unique position of the programme in relation to 'procedure uncertainty' (*Incluusion* Midterm Report, 2023).

Alongside adding extra seats to Utrecht University classrooms, there are multiple components of the programme which provide opportunities for personal development in addition to social integration. The most prominent are "Restart Training" to (re)introduce Dutch academic culture, a Buddy Support system to ease the transition back into academic life and provide occasional social and interpersonal support, and the newly formed *Incluusion* Community and online support through WhatsApp. Other elements include "Study & Work Together Sessions", library training, coffee hours with staff, and financial support for students.

When considering the refugee experience in a new host country, Bourdieu's concept is central to understanding the importance of social network formation and how this provides a basis for gaining social capital in economic and cultural arenas of the Netherlands. It is therefore a primary aspect in forming and sustaining social integration. Through Putnam's definitions, the idea of 'bridging social capital' highlights how a programme such as *Incluusion* creates important exposure to and the subsequent gaining of social capital, and therefore for the social integration of refugees. It achieves this by breaking a self-fulfilling cycle of 'bonding capital' that often occurs within refugee communities. The *Incluusion* programme is therefore a necessary form of 'informal' networking that underscores not only the creation of social capital necessary for social integration, but also empowers its participants to sustain their own social integration process after the programme.

Programmes such as *Incluusion* aim to provide fundamental support to refugee students during a period of tumult and uncertainty. Recent IND procedural proposals coupled with the uncertainty of *Incluusion*'s future as a programme in Utrecht University highlight the need for more in-depth investigation into the role *Incluusion* plays in student's social and academic integration and assessing the impact of the programme components individually. More broadly, this research can shed light on areas of improvement and future directions for integrative programmes for refugees in the Netherlands and further afoot.

Research Aims

The social integration of refugees is a critical area of study. Specifically, this research examines the impact of the *Incluusion* programme on the social integration of its refugee students and to contribute to the body of knowledge on refugee integration in the Netherlands and provide valuable insights for future adaptations to *Incluusion* and similar programmes. Therefore, the main research question is:

What is the impact of Incluusion on the social integration of refugee students?

To comprehensively address this research question, it was necessary to divide this main research question into subsidiary questions into the following three subsidiary questions:

(i)   *Does Incluusion impact the social integration of refugee students?*

To understand if there is in fact a relationship between the participation in the *Incluusion* programme and the social integration of refugee students, a survey is administered to *Incluusion* students whereby feelings of perceived social integration pre-*Incluusion* and post-*Incluusion* is quantified into 'impact scores' and analysed. This investigation uncovers

whether impact scores prior to joining *Incluusion* are significantly lower than impact scores after completing an *Incluusion* course.

(ii)   *Are there demographic factors that influence the impact of the Incluusion programme on social integration?*

To test for a relationship between demographic factors and the impact of the *Incluusion* programme on the social integration of refugee students, three quantitative analyses are necessary. Firstly, an independent t-test determines whether there is difference in the mean scores between male and female participants and their perceived impact of the *Incluusion* programme on their social integration. Secondly, a one-way ANOVA tests whether there is a difference in the mean scores of age groups and their perceived impact of the *Incluusion* programme on their social integration. Thirdly, subsequent one-way ANOVA determines whether there is a difference in the mean scores between asylum seeker participants, participants who received their residency permit while studying with *Incluusion*, or participants with had a residency permit upon starting and their perceived impact of the *Incluusion* programme on their social integration.

(iii)   *What is the role of the Incluusion programme in the social integration of refugee students?*

This research collects qualitative data on students' experiences to uncover the specific role the *Incluusion* programme plays in the social integration of refugee students as it is imperative to understanding its overall impact. The transcripts of two focus group discussions are coded thematically and subsequently analysed with narrative analysis. Together, this comprehensive process provides insight into the role of *Incluusion* in the social integration of

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

refugee students in the Netherlands This subsidiary question integrated the previous

quantitative results with narrative analysis of focus group data.

Methodology

Participants

This research used purposive sampling because of the necessary prerequisites for

participation; the sample population of this research was current and past *Incluusion* students.

Incluusion students are educated refugees or asylum seekers currently residing in the

Netherlands. To be eligible for this research, participants must have actively participated in at

least one in-person course at Utrecht University through the *Incluusion* programme. There

were no other requirements for participation. This is apt as the research required "respondents

that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information" (Kelly, 2010: 317).

Over 600 past *Incluusion* students were invited to participate in an online survey on

Qualtrics about their experiences of social integration before and after the *Incluusion*

programme. In total the survey received 76 responses, of which 64 were eligible for analysis.

Key demographic breakdowns can be seen in Appendix A, Tables 1 through 5. A diverse

group of focus group participants were chosen using additional purposive sampling was

employed for a second time to ensure a mix of age, gender, and country of origin of

participants. Fifteen people were invited, and ultimately two focus groups were arranged with

a total of five participants. Key participant information can be found in Appendix A, Table 6.

Research Instruments

This research utilises two main instruments: a quantitative impact survey and

qualitative semi-structured focus group interviews. The impact survey employs Likert scale

statements informed by the theoretical framework and incorporated topics from the GLA's

(2021) and Hartwell and Benson's (2008) social integration lists. Through SPSS, it was

possible to quantify the impact of *Incluusion* on social integration, in addition to providing a springboard for further qualitative analysis. Focus group discussions followed a semi-structured format using GLA topics and integrated a storytelling approach to explore participant narratives and lived experiences (Ferneley & Sobreperez, 2009; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). This is a useful technique in this instance as it enables the gathering of "information on past or present behaviours or experiences" (Harrell and Bradley, 2009: 24).

Design and Procedure

This research is first and foremost a case study. Case studies "investigate a phenomenon in its real-life context" and required a very specific cohort of *Incluusion* participants (Yin, 2009: p18; Priya, 2021). To develop a deep understanding of the case, it is necessary to employ multiple modes of data collection. Therefore, this research employed a mixed methods approach. More specifically, an explanatory sequential research design wherein quantitative data is collected first, and emergent themes are investigated further through qualitative data collection. Appendix C, Figure C1 provides a condensed overview of the explanatory sequential workflow, adapted from the framework in Toyon (2021) and specified to this research. This mode of investigation was chosen for its dual purpose: the quantitative survey offered empirical insights into participant demographics and program effectiveness, while the qualitative focus group interviews delved into personal narratives and factors influencing social integration. This mixed methods approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of *Incluusion*'s impact on refugee social integration.

The impact surveys (Appendix C) were administered through anonymous links (May 2024) on Qualtrics, and participants were given the option to enter themselves into a prize draw. Through this, respondents self-nominated for focus-group participation. Two focus groups of 1 hour 12 minutes and 1 hour 39 minutes respectively were held at Utrecht University Science Park (June 2024).

Analysis

There were two separate courses of analysis. Firstly, the quantitative survey was analysed through SPSS using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to gain a deeper understanding of the participant demographics. Reliability analysis was carried out to ensure the data from multiple Likert scales was reliable and could be transformed into composite Likert scales for ease of analysis. Composite Likert scales were thus used as 'impact scores' to quantify perceived social integration. Subsequently, inferential statistics (t-test, ANOVA) tested for statistically significant difference between variables and impact scores. Secondly, thematic and narrative analysis were employed to focus group transcripts. Thematic analysis highlighted recurrent themes and patterns to "provide a framework for organising and reporting" by first making informal memos and thematic codes of the transcripts (Braun, Clark, Hayfield, 2015: 2). Narrative analysis was also employed to garner a more accurate "spatial and temporal context" of participants' stories of their social integration with *Incluusion* (Mattingly & Lawlor, 2000). It is also useful in garnering a more in-depth chronological understanding of the social integration process, to mitigate the non-longitudinal nature of this investigation.

Ethical Considerations

The sensitive nature of this research topic and the existence of a vulnerable research cohort meant that informed consent was integral to each aspect of this research. To achieve this, I provided both an information document and a physical/digital consent form to all participants. The information document and consent form can be seen in Appendix B. To maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants, I ensured IP address anonymity via Qualtrics and employed pseudonyms directly after transcribing (Allen & Wiles, 2016). Interview ethics for sensitive research were of utmost importance during focus

group interviews and it was necessary to ensure safety of both myself as the researcher and

my participants during the interview process. The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social

and Behavioural Sciences (FERB) of Utrecht University approved this study.

Results

(i) Does Incluusion impact the social integration of refugee students in the Netherlands?

H1. There was a significant difference in feelings of social integration scores before and after participating in the Incluusion programme.

The social integration scores before (*M=6.03, SD=2.52*) and after (*M=7.82, SD=1.91*) the *Incluusion* programme are compared using a dependent t-test. The difference in means is statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is rejected $t(60) = -6.367$, $p < 0.001$. This t-test indicates that participants reported more positive perceptions of their own social integration after completing the *Incluusion* programme.

(ii) Are there demographic factors that influence the impact of Incluusion programme on social integration?

H0: There is no significant difference in the mean impact scores between males and females.

Given that only one participant reported themselves as "non-binary/third gender", they have been excluded from this component of analysis. Male participants' scores (*M=96.94, SD=38.70*) and female participants' scores (*M=101.33, SD=43.90*). This demographic factor as it pertains to the impact of the *Incluusion* programme on social integration is compared using a two-way independent t-test. The difference in means is not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis could not be rejected $t(61) = -0.372$, $p=0.711$. From this t-test, the impact scores do not vary based on the gender of the participant.

H0: There is no significant difference in the mean impact scores for at least one age group compared to the others.

The social integration impact scores are compared across four age groups using a one-way non-repeated ANOVA: below 25 (*M=82.5, SD=29.22), 25-34 (M=18.12, SD=42.6), 35-44 (M=91.31, SD=38.28), and 45-54 (M=90.67, SD=37.86).* The difference in means across all age groups is not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, *F (3,60) = 1.077, p=0.366.* From this ANOVA, the impact scores do not vary based on the age group of the participant.

H0: There is no significant difference in the mean impact scores of participants based on their residency status in the Netherlands.

The social integration impact scores are compared across all residency statuses upon starting with *Incluusion* using a one-way non-repeated ANOVA: had a residency status *(M=86.63, SD=38.56),* did not have a residency status *(M=100.45, SD=40.78),* and got a residency status while at *Incluusion (M=114.89, SD=34.60).* The difference in means across all residency statuses are not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, *F(2,61)=1.897, p=0.159.* From this ANOVA, the impact scores do not vary based on the residency status of participants.

Q (iii) What is the role of Incluusion in the social integration of refugees in the Netherlands?

The *Incluusion* programme emerged as a catalyst in the social integration of its students. As a catalyst, the opportunities, support, and guidance offered by the *Incluusion* programme facilitate a distinct three-step social integration process for its students. This three-step process is interconnected and dynamic in nature, whereby each step is dependent and reliant on the previous one. Step one allows students to regain a sense of self and individuality, which subsequently enables students to maintain control over their own social

capital creation. Eventually, through this social capital creation, students are equipped with the resources and knowledge necessary for long-term and sustained social integration in the Netherlands.

Step One: Regaining a Sense of Self and Individuality

The first and foundational step is the regaining of a sense of self and individuality. All focus group participants reflected on their time before *Incluusion* to illustrate their regaining of a sense of self and individuality through the programme. In the Asielzoekerscentrum (AZC) and their interactions with Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers (COA), participants were denied their individuality and compounded in a singular and restrictive 'refugee' identity. Fuad, a 23-year-old *Incluusion* student from Turkey alludes to COA's restriction of identity by saying: "It was just another camp. [The COA employee] told me you're not here to achieve your dreams". Continuing in this vein, Fuad concludes that to COA, and within the AZC space, "you are just the number". Being seen as "just a number" was pertinent in all participants' testimonials, highlighting the prominence of a loss of sense of self among *Incluusion* students prior to starting the programme. Participants mentioned a myriad of ways in which their sense of self and individuality was hindered during the asylum process. Notably, participants being denied access to a BSN and subsequently a lack of control over their finances, COA allotted and immovable laundry times, unstructured leisure time, exclusion via language, and loss of complex identity. These aspects culminated in a perceived removal of individuality for students prior to *Incluusion* and severely impacted their sense of self.

Through the *Incluusion* programme participants were able to regain a sense of self and individuality by reconnecting with various aspects of their identities which were important to them. Firstly, focus groups indicated that the initial stage of applying to the *Incluusion* programme begins this process by providing students with a choice of courses and

the opportunity to revisit and utilise their past education and professional experiences.

Gaining access to the University was expressed as fundamental to reconnecting with past

achievements for Naimi: "In my werkgroep...I would say things...before I learned this maybe

we can look on that...otherwise, I would forget my experience. I would forget what I have

done for the last years then. I did nine years of experience before I was on hold for two

years".

More specifically, participants reported scenarios such as being able to communicate

in a common language, reconnecting with a queer identity, and regaining a multifaceted

identity as being integral to their regaining of a sense of self. For one female participant, Ani,

language barriers within her AZC were a prominent aspect of exclusion prior to *Incluusion*.

She expressed:

> most people used to still speak Arabic. I don't speak Arabic…I don't understand but I
>
> am like a really social person I really like to talk to people so you feel isolated…I
>
> don't feel like I'm friends with them…I also want to be part of the fun conversations
>
> or the you know, the like fun gossip.

The language barrier she experienced in the AZC disconnected Ani from her sociability and

personality which she considers important to her sense of self. This was therefore an

incredibly exclusionary experience for her.

However, upon joining *Incluusion*, Ani regained her social life:

> my first buddy group… I was just lucky to get the nice [Buddy] yeah, but in the
>
> group, I made like really, really, really good friends… We were all like going back
>
> from an *Incluusion* event. And we were at the train station. And it was me [and other
>
> *Incluusion* students] who all speak Arabic, you know, all five of them. But none of
>
> them spoke in Arabic, just because I was there. It changed overnight. Like literally, I

was crying because it was such a huge difference…my heart was broken. Just because

of happiness.

Ani attributed her deep friendships created with her 'Incluusion Buddy', and the earnest

nature of her Incluusion relationships have contributed significantly to her regaining a social

life while living in the AZC, and therefore regaining a fundamental part of her identity.

Participants also referred to specific aspects of their identity that were lost in their

interactions with COA and the asylum process. Haziqah is a 19-year-old non-binary person

from Sudan, who was pursuing a bachelor's degree until April of 2023. They recounted how

upon entering the asylum process in the Netherlands they were forced to conceal their gender

identity, and return to living as the gender they were assigned at birth:

Because one thing about me is that I'm queer…then suddenly, to have that all like,

kind of, like, stripped away from me [in the AZC]…I'm closeted to my mom".

Upon starting a course with Incluusion, the programme facilitated a regaining of queer and

non-binary identity for Haziqah by providing a space where they can "meet other queer

Incluusion students. Haziqah gained access to the wider University queer community as a

student following a course at Utrecht University and reconnected with their own sense of

queerness as a result.

With Incluusion, participants noticed a more multifaceted sense of self return: "I am

not just a refugee anymore". Participants attributed this to being taken out of the AZC and

thus moving away from the singular "refugee" identity awarded to them in that environment.

Step Two: Creating Social Capital in the Netherlands

The formation of social capital was inextricable from this regaining of a sense of self.

Once participants reconnected with certain aspects of their identity, they then had control

over creating their own social capital. Incluusion was evidenced as providing a solid

foundation by facilitating first meetings through Buddy Support and Incluusion Community

events, which ultimately led to participants taking control over their friendships, social ties, social mixing, and civic participation. Participants interconnected their creation of social capital on their regaining of a sense of self, solidifying the idea that *Incluusion* students' creation of social capital is contingent on this regaining of a sense of self.

Once a sense of self and individuality is regained, or at least in the process of being regained, participants were aware of how they assumed an active role in the creation of their own social capital in the Netherlands. Fuad's testimony highlights agency when creating social ties stems from this regaining of a sense of self:

after a long time of like being isolated to finally like having like seeing people who are there who are more like you who are more similar to you and yeah, there's that sense of hope... sense of making connections.

Participants were able to create social ties through the *Incluusion* programme. More specifically, many social ties were created through active participation in Buddy Support. For Ani, her regained sociability allowed her to make deep connections with her Buddy Maria:

I don't want the buddies to be my buddy as a job…maybe it's like a job for them…but she is a friend." Ani acknowledged how *Incluusion* initiated this meeting with Maria, but that their friendship deepened through reciprocal social and interpersonal support: "she was she was always like, texting me and I was always texting her...she invited me to come to a show she was putting on... in the end you know like my friend. She was just not a buddy, you know.

Haziqah attributed their ability to create their own connections to the *Incluusion* programme. The Buddy Support was a supporting mechanism for the creation of social networks, but they ultimately took control back: "I'm coming here myself. To learn and like meeting people myself." Theirs is a unique example, having been born in the Netherlands but returning to Sudan as a child. A lot of Dutch social ties were predestined by their family's

history in the Netherlands. Ultimately, they attributed their access to the queer and *Incluusion* networks in the University to the creation of social ties that were their "own."

For participants who did not participate in the Buddy Support, they still created social ties through actively corresponding with their teachers. After introducing herself to the teacher at the beginning of her course, Naimi mentioned how her professor constantly "tried to accommodate" for her in the classroom setting after hearing of her difficulties.

These social ties were ultimately linked to social mixing for participants. Upon creating deep connections with Maria, other Buddies, and other *Incluusion* students, it was possible for Ani to blend the academic and AZC spaces through "inviting a group to the AZC to play board games." Additionally, Ani offered her experience and perspective in a group project for *Incluusion* course:

> then I give the idea. Let's work on how to make the AZC more sustainable. And all
> the group mates like it. And then okay, let's do it. And then they were also really
> excited because they never been inside [an AZC]. And as I said, they never met a
> person who lives at an AZC.

Enabled by this social mixing and social capital in the UU classroom, Ani was able to participate in a project that centred her active civic participation and contributed to the betterment of her direct environment. This blending of the AZC space with external networks facilitated subsequent social capital creation in the Netherlands.

Step Three: Long-Term Sustainable Social Integration

The final step focuses on achieving long-term, sustainable social integration. The regaining of a sense of self leading into the creation of social capital culminates in this long-term and sustainable social integration for *Incluusion* students. Once *Incluusion* students regained their sense of self and took a more active role in their social capital creation were they then able to report feelings of sustained social integration in the Netherlands.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

Incluusion's impact is evident not only through quantitative survey data, which suggested that participants report higher levels of perceived social integration after the *Incluusion* programme, but also through focus group participants' testimonies. Hamid is a Yemeni *Incluusion* student who has taken multiple courses with *Incluusion* since 2021:

> If it wasn't for the social aspect of *Incluusion*, I don't think I would have been able to apply [to a Masters course] because I got a lot of help from the friends, I made with the *Incluusion* program.

This highlights the critical role of social networks formed within the programme, and the way in which they support long term social integration in the Netherlands. For Hamid, his social ties through *Incluusion* provided the confidence and motivation needed to continue his educational journeys.

Additionally, participants felt a sense of purpose and direction after participating in *Incluusion*. Fuad shared that "after *Incluusion* you have a mission, even if you are not out of the [asylum] system just yet". This sense of purpose appeared crucial for participants' long-term integration, providing the drive to move forward despite challenges. Another participant emphasized the transformative power of reconnecting with peers: "you are not sharing the same things in the AZC, but once you come to *Incluusion* and reconnect with people like you, you see your future". Long-term impact is not always actively achieved by participants, but their perceived outlook on their own social integration in the Netherlands is long-term and forward thinking.

Participants appeared genuinely connected to society. As another participant mentioned, "So in some ways it's *Incluusion* that can connect us with life in the Netherlands". The social ties from step two expand social circles and fostered a sense of belonging within the larger community with ultimately sustained feelings of being social integrated. Overall, this three-step process (regaining a sense of self, creating social capital, and fostering long-

term integration) demonstrates the effectiveness of *Incluusion* in helping students transition from being seen as "refugees" to becoming fully integrated members of Dutch society.

Discussion

Incluusion is indeed an example of 'informal learning' (Morrice, 2007) through its existence outside governmental structures, but also for the ways in which it fosters social capital formation necessary to the concept. *Incluusion* is synonymous with 'bridging social capital' (Putnam, 2000), and participants provided multiple examples of their newly formed weak ties. Notably, through the Buddy Support scheme, interaction with classmates and teachers, seeking assistance with applying to higher education, or accessing the wider University student body. In emphasising 'informal learning', *Incluusion* supports the long-term integration of its participants, helping them adjust to their new environment in the Netherlands while empowering them to take control of their own social integration.

The impact of *Incluusion* on social integration must be accredited to its flexible and varied approach which allows students to navigate integration at their own pace. This flexibility is important in addressing the varied needs and backgrounds of refugees and asylum seekers from all over the world; the diversity of *Incluusion* student backgrounds is evidenced in Appendix A, Tables 1 through 6. The inherent intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) reality of the programme is apparent through the diversity of participant testimonies. *Incluusion* students take what they need from the various elements of the programme: friendship and sociability or access to the wider University for example. Additionally, the universality of the programme's effectiveness across multiple demographic factors in (i) and (ii) echo the programme's ability to act as a catalyst for a diverse group of refugees and asylum seeker students.

As catalyst, *Incluusion* has a clear impact on the empowerment of its students; this is evident through the regaining of confidence and self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000) that allows

Incluusion students to take an active role in their social capital creation. By offering the Buddy Support to students, *Incluusion* facilitates the initial steps of 'peer support' which eventually leads to 'identity verification' through the reconstruction of various aspects of participant's identities (Burke & Stets, 2009). This result highlights the importance of combining intersectionality with discussions of identity, especially as the programme links students with the university environment that celebrates and reunites them with identities that are important to them.

'Bridging social capital' is instrumental in helping students integrate into broader societal structures and access diverse resources. Without it, participants are not equipped with the networks and resources to showcase subsequent 'civic empowerment' (Rappaport, 1987). Nonetheless, the impact of the programme on creating ties is demonstrated through Ani, who shows clear signs of 'civic empowerment' having used her access to the University environment as a mechanism of change in her AZC and to provide insight for the development of new waste strategies. On this, Ani's experience of *Incluusion*'s impact aligns with Woolcock's (1998) definition of social integration as a dual process of incorporation and participation. Firstly, with the help of the programme she became incorporated into the academic environment, and could therefore participate in active community development.

Incluusion stands as a beacon of hope for refugees during a time of intense tumult and uncertainty, offering them a semi-structured and supportive pathway to integration and empowerment. The programme fosters empowerment by helping students grow in confidence, skills, and self-efficacy, which contributes positively to their direct environment through their classes at Utrecht University (Zimmerman, 2000). This growth is evident in the supportive social networks students build and their engagement with their new community.

Furthermore, *Incluusion* helps students develop networks that integrate social and educational realms within Dutch society (Bourdieu, 1992). *Incluusion* not only supports the

immediate needs of refugees and asylum seekers but also contributes to their long-term success and well-being in their new home. As Fuad proports, *Incluusion* allowed him to see that even as refugees "we can have a life we can make... Remind us that we are a part of something that is connected" to Dutch society.

In conclusion, the *Incluusion* programme has a profound impact on social integration. It acts as a catalyst for participants, facilitating a transformative three-step process that significantly enhances the social integration of refugee students in the Netherlands. Initially, it helps students regain a sense of self and individuality that is often impacted with 'procedure uncertainty'. Allowing students to reconnect with their past education, language skills, and personal identity is crucial for their self-perception, their active creation of social capital through meaningful friendships and social ties, and ultimately long-term social integration. The fundamental aim of the programme – of providing students the opportunity to further develop themselves – is alive in the research participants. *Incluusion*'s comprehensive and multifaceted support system transitions refugee students from being perceived merely as "refugees" and "case numbers" by COA to taking charge of their own integration into Dutch society, equipped with the social capital and empowerment needed for a self-directed life.

Implications of Research

The lack of focus on labour pathways and modelling Dutch norms and culture (Scholten, 2011: 16; Entzinger, 2005) evidenced by participants in this research, specifically in the focus groups, infers that this might not be necessary for social integration. This showcases potential pitfalls of the *Dutch Civic Integration Act* (2021) and its emphasis on cultural assimilation. Increased attention on the social realms of integration may be necessary for the long-term sustained integration of refugees in the Netherlands.

Avenues for Future Research

Future research on the *Incluusion* programme should consider demographic factors of participants thoroughly. Specific focus on how age, gender, and other demographic variables impact the effectiveness and outcomes of the *Incluusion* programme would allow for informed and more insightful adjustments to be made to the programme's implementation and structure, ensuring that it continues to meet the needs of all participants.

Limitations of Research

Social integration is a robust concept drawing on various dimensions, including social networks, participation in community activities, and a sense of belonging. These dimensions are interconnected and influenced by individual, social, and institutional factors, making it challenging to create a comprehensive and cohesive conceptual framework. Moreover, it is a highly subjective concept, making it difficult to generalise. Incorporating intersectionality into the theoretical framework of this research was an attempt to mitigate this.

Since the role of *Incluusion* emerged as a "catalyst" for social integration, in-depth longitudinal assessments tracking this process are necessary for understanding the long-term impacts of the programme.

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SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

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To all the Incluusion students I now get to call my friends: thank you for your time and your laughter over the past six months. You have taught me about resilience, kindness, and courage. There is something in each of you that I admire.

In Gaeilge we have a saying, *ní neart go cur le chéile,* or *there is strength in unity.* Incluusion is community personified.

The people who so kindly gave their time to this research, the future of Incluusion is indebted to you.

APPENDIX A

Demographic Characteristics of Survey and Focus Group Participants

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

Table 1

Demographics of survey participants: gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Valid	Male	48	75.0	75.0	75.0
	Female	15	23.4	23.4	98.4
	Non-binary	1	1.6	1.6	100.00
	Total	64	100.00	100.00	

Table 2

Demographics of participants: age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Valid	Under 25	4	6.3	6.3	6.3
	25-34	25	39.1	39.1	45.3
	35-44	33	50.0	50.0	95.3
	45-54	3	4.7	4.7	100.00
	Total	64	100.0	100.0	

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

Table 3

Demographics of participants: residency status while following a course at Incluusion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Valid	Yes	24	37.5	37.5	37.5
	No	31	48.4	48.4	85.9
	Got while studying	9	14.1	14.1	100.0
	Total	64	100.0	100.0	

Table 4

Year of first Incluusion course

	Year	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Valid	2018/2019	1	1.6	1.6
	2019/2020	5	7.8	9.4
	2020/2021	14	21.9	31.3
	2021/2022	7	10.9	42.2
	2022/2023	8	12.5	54.7
	2023/2024	22	34.4	89.1
Invalid		9	10.9	100.0
	Total	64		

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

Table 5

Country of origin of participants

	Frequency
Afghanistan	2
Burundi	1
Cameroon	1
Egypt	2
Ethiopia	2
Iran	2
Iraq	1
Libya	1
Nigeria	1
Pakistan	2
Palestine	3
Russia	6
Sudan	2
Syria	11
Turkey	14
Uganda	3
Uzbekistan	1
Yemen	8
Total	64

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

Table 6

Key demographic characteristics of focus group participants

	Focus group	Gender	Age	Country of Origin
Ani	1	Female		Pakistan
Naimi	1	Female		Syria
Fuad	2	Male	23	Turkey
Haziqah	2	Non-binary	19	Sudan
Hamid	2	Male	28	Yemen

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Information for Participants

Please read the following information carefully before consenting in the online survey!

Below you will find a participant overview of the research that I am conducting on the impact of Incluusion on the social and academic integration of its students. It details everything you need to know in order to make an informed decision about your participation in this research. Please read carefully, and recognise the various points of contact should a complaint or data protection issue arise.

Title Open Doors and Extra Seats: the role of Incluusion for refugee students' integration in the Netherlands.

Research Question What impact does Incluusion have on the academic and social integration of refugee students, and what components of this programme contribute to this impact?

Researcher Fern Kelly-Landry f.l.kelly-landry@uu.nl Youth Education and Society (EFIS track) Msc. Pedagogical Sciences Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Supervisor(s) Dr Joyce Endendijk, Assistant Professor j.j.endendijk@uu.nl Ragna Senf, Project Manager Incluusion r.senf@uu.nl

UU Complaints Officer The email from the UU complaints officer (in case there are formal complaints about a study one is participating in) is: klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl

UU **Data Protection Officer** Questions and complaints about privacy can always be submitted to the DPO of Utrecht University via fg@uu.nl

Most important points to note

1. The goal of this study is to assess the overall impact of the Incluusion programme and its components on the social and academic integration of refugee students. More specifically, Restart 2-day training, the Buddy System, and the Incluusion Community.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

2. Potential outcomes of this study include the results being used to further direct and enhance the Incluusion programme.

3. This investigation will use a mixed methods approach by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data in a survey questionnaire, and qualitative data through focus group data collection.

4. This research will use audio recordings for transcription purposes. After transcribing, all recordings will be deleted.

5. This research is required for the partial fulfillment of a Masters degree in pedagogical sciences from Utrecht University. Therefore, it is student research.

6. If a scientific publication takes place on the basis of the data, the retention periods mentioned in the Guideline for Archiving Scientific Research for Dutch Faculties of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Version 2, July 2017 apply. If it is an unpublished thesis it is 7 years, and if it is a published article it is 10 years.

7. If any conditions of the research change, you will be notified and given an opportunity to renegotiate your consent and participation in this research.

8. Voluntary withdrawal is possible at any stage of this research project.

9. All contact information is given at the top of this document.

10. Please be advised that some of the topics broached in this research and the associated methods of data collection are of a sensitive nature. Questions and topics pertaining to: a. Mental health b. Religious and cultural beliefs c. Sexual orientation d. Refugee experience After partaking in this research, there will be a follow up/aftercare email sent out to all participants signposting university and associated mental health supports.

11. Confidentiality and privacy are of utmost importance to us, and any data collected will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for the purposes outlined in the consent form. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation, please do not hesitate to contact

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

myself (Fern) or either of my supervisors with your questions. I appreciate your willingness

to be involved!

12. If you have any complaints throughout the research period, you can contact the UU's

Complaints Officer or the UU's Data Protection Officer directly. Their emails are available in

the top section of this document.

Upon consenting to the online survey

1. You are consenting to participating in an online survey for Masters research at the UU

Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences.

2. You are also consenting to having your data stored for the duration of the research period

ending June 2024.

3. GDPR does not prescribe retention periods. Incluusion have decided that storing data for a

maximum of 6 years is an acceptable timeframe for the retention of data collected within the

orgnisation. By clicking consent in the survey, you are consenting to your data being stored

for a maximum of 6 years by Incluusion, and a minimum period ending June 30th June 2024

Consent form for Focus Group

Title of Study/Project: Open Doors and Extra Seats: the role of Incluusion for refugee

students' integration in the Netherlands.

Researcher: Fern Kelly-Landry f.l.kelly-landry@uu.nl

Purpose of the Study: The goal of this study is to assess the overall impact of the Incluusion

programme and its components on the social and academic integration of refugee students.

More specifically, Restart 2-day training, the Buddy System, and the Incluusion Community.

Confidentiality: Any information collected during your participation in this study will be

kept strictly confidential. Your identity will be protected by assigning you a unique identifier

or pseudonym, and all data collected will be stored securely. Only authorized personnel

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

involved in this study will have access to the data, and they are bound by confidentiality agreements. Any results or findings from this study will be presented in aggregate form, ensuring that individual participants cannot be identified. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. If you have any concerns about confidentiality or privacy, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your participation and trust in our study.

Procedures:

- I consent to partaking in an online questionnaire.

- I consent to partaking in a focus group discussion.

- I consent to being audio recorded.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and understand the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of participating in the study/project/event described. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I voluntarily agree to participate and understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I consent to the use of any data collected during my participation in accordance with the outlined procedures.

Participant Signature: **Date:**

Printed Name:

Researcher Signature: **Date:**

Printed Name

APPENDIX C

Research Instruments

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE INCLUUSION PROGRAMME

Table 7

Greater London Authority Social Integration Topic List

Domain	Topic
Relationships	Diversity of relationships
	Social mixing
	Social trust
	Hate crime
	Loneliness
	Use of digital networks
Participation	Participation in leisure activities
	Informal help to others
	Civic participation
Equality	Unfair treatment

Qualtrics survey

Administered to Incluusion students

Incluusion_Impact_Survey.docx
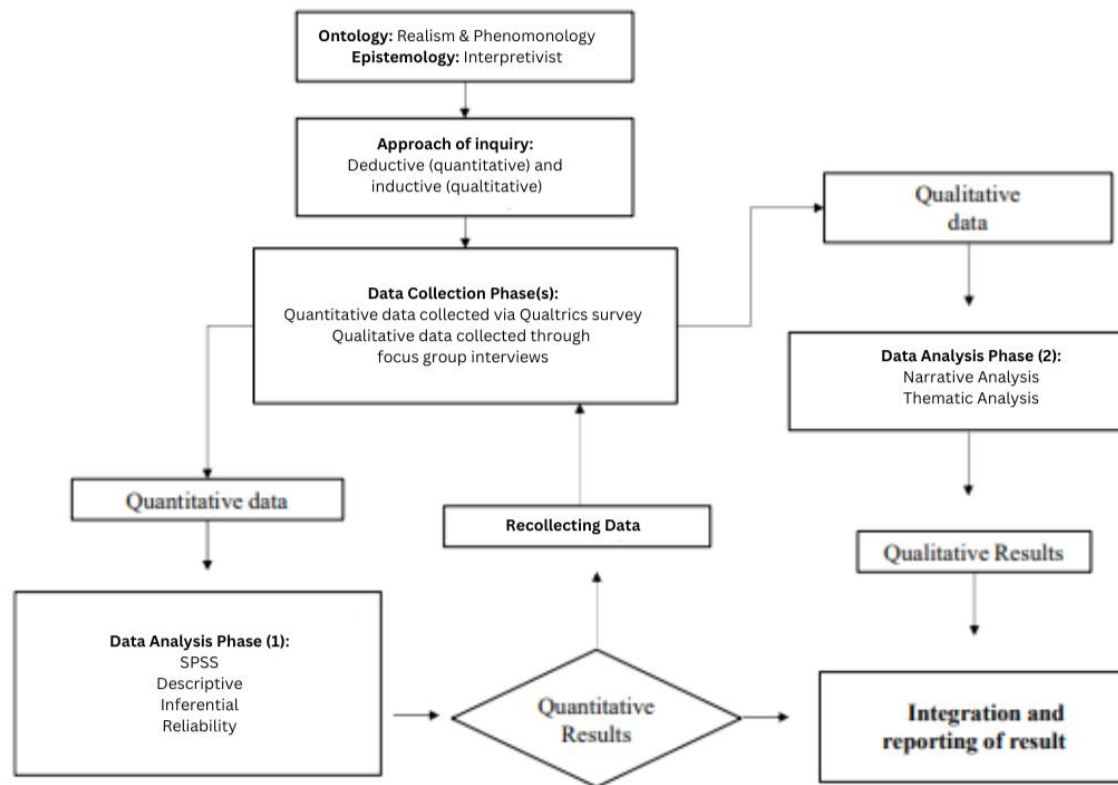
Figure C1. Adapted methodological framework from Toyon (2021) and utilised in this research