

# **Master Thesis**

## **Inclusive digital media for refugees through education:**

A case study of the UAF's mentoring program

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Master's Thesis  
July 2019

## ABSTRACT

*Along with the growing number of refugees in Europe, especially after the refugee crisis in 2015, there is a growing demand to empower the newcomers to integrate and participate in their new societies effectively. Education is seen as an essential element of integration and participation in society. However, refugees face many obstacles to access and cope with the educational systems in their new societies such as unfamiliarity with these systems and the lack of social community for them at schools. The last few years have witnessed a new notion of digitally active refugees who use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social media to search for information through different networks and to establish connections with the host society. This study investigates how this digital activity contributes to refugees' social inclusion as well as their education and access to it. This research explores the role of ICTs to support the education and integration of refugee students through the case-study of the UAF mentoring program. In the Netherlands, the Dutch Foundation for Refugee students (University Assistance Fund UAF) facilitates refugees' access to higher education and help them overcome the educational barriers in order to improve their integration process. This organization saw in social support a key for social inclusion and integration. Consequently, UAF developed the mentoring program to support the integration process of refugee students into higher education. This research builds on the qualitative analysis of twelve in-depth interviews with UAF's mentors who are Dutch students and mentees who are refugee students pursuing higher education in the Netherlands. Based on the social capital theory along with the capability approach, this research shows that ICT-based technologies and especially social media empower refugees greatly in the process of their education and social inclusion. The research proposes that social networking sites such as; YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp serve as capability enablers for refugee students in the Netherlands to; 1) participate in education; 2) practice social and professional networking; 3) maintain social ties; 4) participate in debates/society; 5) keep updated. Based on these capabilities by way of social media use, refugee students exert their urgency for education and social connectedness in order to regulate their current socio-economic status and eventually acquire social inclusion.*

**Keywords:** Refugee, Integration, Social media, Social inclusion, Education

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. EU 'refugee crisis'

As defined by UNHCR, a refugee is “a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him- or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution” (2011, p. 5). On the other hand, the term “Refugee Crisis” is problematic and contested. The term refers to a crisis or a dilemma among refugees; however, the question that is frequently asked regards: “whose crisis this is?” (De Genova, 2016 p.37). The asylum problem as defined by the European states hinges on the number of people who enter the territory of these states (Schuster, 2000). In other words, one might argue that it is a crisis but not a refugee crisis. Obviously, it is a “policy crisis” or as others call it the failure of the European asylum system (Den Heijer, Rijpma, & Spijkerboer, 2016). In fact, the term “Refugee Crisis” is principally associated with a crisis over the control of the European borders. (De Genova, 2016). A crisis such as “Calais crisis” in France near the tunnel that connects France with Britain where migrants gather in their temporary camps known as “the Jungle” (De Genova, 2016). The fluctuation in dealing with these large numbers of refugees originate from the European Union’s deficiency to respond quickly and efficiently and its failure to provide the expected support to refugees who were forced to flee the war in the Middle East (Alencar, 2018).

Furthermore, in the middle of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015, the Netherlands, as many Western Countries, have witnessed the arrival of people escaping from violence and wars, and pursuing relocation in safe places. Consequently, in the same year, the Netherlands received approximately 60 000 asylum requests (Fallon, 2018). According to the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice (IND) (2017), this number is two times higher than in 2014 and the most significant number since 1999. Syrians followed by Eritreans form the highest percentage of asylum seekers due to the ongoing violence in these countries (IND, 2017). The increasing numbers of asylum seekers have aroused the need for rapid policies and programs to facilitate the integration of these disadvantaged groups. Moreover, it is estimated that approximately 600 000 immigrants in the Netherlands need assistance in the Dutch language, which is one of the essential elements of integration (Embrace Europe, n.d.). According to Statistics Netherlands

(CBS) (2016), almost 50% of Dutch people aged 15 years and older were involved in voluntary work in 2015. In the same year, the so-called refugee crisis has attracted the attention of many of them and triggered their willingness to involve positively, regardless of the negative representation of refugees in the media.

Furthermore, the Government of the Netherlands (2018) believes that education is a key element in developing the skills of these refugees and in encouraging their participation in Dutch society. Simultaneously social media sites emerged as creative technologies to help refugees face the challenge of integration and smooth the way for inclusive education. This leads to the next topic, which discusses refugee education.

### ***1.2. The role and importance of education for refugee inclusion***

Over the last few years, many humanitarian agencies revealed consecutive reports signifying that refugees frequently encounter obstacles in education. In November 2018 the UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) issued its report titled “Global education monitoring report, 2019: Migration, displacement and education: building bridges, not walls”, (Helen, 2018) on Global Education Monitoring with the focus on the importance of education for refugees. The report emphasizes the significance of admitting refugees into national education schemes as a practice to secure inclusive and equitable education for everyone, as well as to share a responsibility to sustainable and creative communities in agreement with sustainable plans for development. During the report launch in Berlin, the UNESCO’s General Director, Audrey Azoulay highlighted the importance of education for both, refugees and host societies; she argues that “everyone loses when the education of migrants and refugees is ignored. Education is the key to inclusion and cohesion. Increased classroom diversity, while challenging for teachers, can also enhance respect for diversity and an opportunity to learn from others. It is the best way to make communities stronger and more resilient.” (Redman, 2018, para. 5).

The extraordinary circumstances of refugees require particular programs and policies to allow them to integrate successfully. In general, refugees are obliged to flee wars or persecutions, and most of the time they leave their families behind and lose their homes, jobs and education (Duke, Sales, & Gregory, 1999). Successful resettlement of refugees relies on planned programs that enable them to create a sense of belonging to their host society, such as programs

that foster the use of their skills and competencies (Duke et al., 1999). Evidence suggests that education is identified as an essential element of integration, with positive effects on employability. Interestingly, in countries witnessing economic prosperity and high demand for employees and workers, education can be vitally beneficial for both refugees and their host societies (Duke et al., 1999). In the Netherlands, reports indicate that in 2016 more than 2100 refugees sent their applications to the University Assistance Fund (UAF), which is an increase of 50% compared to 2015 (Profielen, 2017). According to UAF, highly-educated refugees come mainly from countries like Syria, Iraq and Iran. These countries are known for their good educational systems. In Somalia and Eritrea, for example, education is generally less well organized (UAF, n.d.a).

However, refugees face many barriers and difficulties in integrating into the educational systems of their new societies, like unfamiliarity with the education system as well as with employment opportunities provided by different programs (Ager & Strang, 2008). But for many refugees, schools are considered to be a central place, where they can interact with members of their host societies, serving as a leading platform in supporting the process of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). In the Netherlands, the UAF facilitates access to higher education and helps refugee students to overcome the educational barriers in order to improve their integration process. This organization saw in supporting the education of refugees the key for their social inclusion and integration into the Dutch society. Consequently, UAF developed a mentoring program to support the integration process of refugees into their educational institutions.

A seminal study in this area is the work of Teunissen, (2016) acting upon instructions from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in the Netherlands. The study included all UAF-students who started a study in higher education from the period of 01-06-2005 until 01-10-2015. The study concludes that the number of refugees accessing higher education in the Netherlands is increasing and will continue to increase in the coming years. At the same time, refugee students state that they appreciate any support from educational institutions to develop their Dutch language. The study also concludes that dropouts in the first year are higher among refugee students than other groups of students. One-third of these dropouts can be linked to financial and psychological problems such as worries and feelings of guilt toward family left in the country of origin, but after the first year only 4% of the refugee students' dropout for the same reasons (Teunissen, 2016).

On the other hand, several studies indicate that digital technologies and social media have positive effects on the education, integration, and well-being of refugees (Alencar, 2018; Gillespie et al., 2016; Andrade & Doolin, 2016; Komito, 2011). For instance, refugees' use of social media can help them learn the language of the host society and to access information related to educational programs. Besides, social media help them to maintain their social networks in both home and host societies which have positive effects on their mental health and integration. The next section discusses further the role of social media in the lives of refugees.

### ***1.3. Refugees and social media***

Across the literature, there is a growing interest among scholars in investigating the power of social media to support and facilitate the process of refugees' integration (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017; Tudsri & Hebbani, 2015). Many social media sites offer platforms for considerable communication among fragmented social groups enabling refugees to maintain and develop their social connections in their new societies and back home (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017).

Moreover, Tudsri and Hebbani (2015) examined the role of social media technologies in the acculturation of refugees in Australia and found that refugees appreciate using social networking sites, like Facebook and YouTube, to connect with their communities and "get information that was not available on Australian TV" (p. 1286). However, some researchers argued that refugees' dependence on social media might affect their integration process and might decrease their efforts in developing social ties within their host society (Komito, 2011; Brekke, 2008). For instance, migrants would use social media to maintain their social ties with their societies back home, but this remote emotional support would limit their motivation and willingness to make social contacts within their host society (Komito, 2011). In contrast, evidence suggests that maintaining social ties back home while engaging online with other communities may help refugees to address the challenge of resettlement (Elias & Lemish, 2009).

Furthermore, many refugees tend to use social media to access information related to the educational system and training programs in the host society. In her interesting analysis of refugee integration and social media, Alencar (2018) highlights the role of social media networking sites for refugees in the Netherlands as these sites are found to be supportive of language learning and cultural competences. Indeed the increasing inclination toward the use of



new communication technologies may offer favorable circumstances for social inclusion of minority groups. For example, it can benefit exchanging information for education and social discussion (Phipps, 2000).

Moreover, in her 'literature review of computers in human behavior', Tess (2013) argues that social media platforms are increasingly appearing in higher education as instructors make use of these technologies to promote active learning and to reinforce their guidance. While still a new area for research at that time, Tess already highlighted the purposeful integration of social media as an educational tool in classrooms. The pervasiveness of social media (e.g., YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook) as an integration tool into the educational systems of the host society is increasingly visible among refugee students. Further, refugees encounter challenges in maintaining contacts with their home country and developing new social ties within their host society (Damian, 2014). Interestingly, internet-based technologies have equipped refugees with new possibilities to interact with both host and home societies (Komito, 2011).

#### ***1.4. Research problem and research question***

For many refugees, schools and universities are the places where they can interact with members of the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). However, for many educated refugees, schools and universities represent an environment where they can also experience feelings of alienation. This is due to the lack of companionship and communities. More particularly, they face multiple challenges related to their integration and social inclusion within the educational systems of their host societies as well as learning a new language in a short time. Evidence suggests that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) social media can help them address these challenges and foster their social inclusion (Phipps, 2000; AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). In order to further our understanding of the way digital technologies promote inclusive education and contribute to the process of refugee integration, the central question for this research is:

*How can digital technologies support refugee integrate into higher education through mentorship programs in the Netherlands?*

In order to address this question adequately, this study will assess the role of digital technologies as a crucial factor for integration and inclusion. This will be explored in the context of a holistic case study about the mentoring program of UAF. This organization supports

motivated refugee students by offering them grants and loans, to enable them to continue their studies at Dutch universities and help them to find a job later on (Bleichrodt, 2007).

### ***1.5. Societal and scientific relevance***

The UAF is a socially relevant organization as it plays a primary role in the lives of educated refugees. UAF has developed a mentorship program to support refugees in the process of their integration into the Dutch educational system as well as fostering their social inclusion. Furthermore, the organization is engaged with a continuous funding program that involves many local communities and Dutch universities, allowing UAF for a yearly budget of approximately \$ 5 million (Bleichrodt, 2007).

The social relevance of this research is that it aims to improve our understanding of the role of digital technologies primarily social media in facilitating for refugees access to social support and education programs which are provided by the host society during their integration process. During the last few decades, many theories regarding the integration of refugees into a new society have been developed. Many scholars emphasize the importance of education for supporting refugees' integration process and as a tool for social inclusion (Kelaher et al., 2001; Ager & Strang, 2008). Indeed training programs and education are among the major components of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Moreover, statistics indicate that more than 55% of Asylum applicants in the Netherlands in 2017 were aged between 18 and 34 (Eurostat, 2016). This signifies the importance of education for this group. For example, to learn the language of the host country and to participate in the educational programs (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). Further, in the current digital era, digital technologies such as social media enable refugees to participate in education and offer them networking opportunities (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). In these days, Facebook is the world's most attractive social network with 2.19 billion monthly users as of the first three months of 2019 (Statistica, 2019).

However, across the literature, there is a lack of systematic knowledge about the impact of social media on the integration and inclusion of refugees pursuing higher education (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). Drawing upon Putnam's social capital theory (2000) and Sen's capability approach (1999), along with a case study, this thesis aims to bridge the gap in research

by investigating the role of digital technologies and social media in shaping the social networks and inclusion of highly-educated refugees in the Netherlands.

As the research question implies, the aim of this study is to investigate how digital technologies promote social inclusion for refugees pursuing higher education in the Netherlands. In order to answer the research question, this research builds on the outcomes of semi-structured qualitative interviews with 12 Dutch and refugee students. This research departs from a theoretical framework that focuses on the role of social networks and digital technologies in fostering refugees' inclusion through education.

### ***1.6. Thesis structure***

The introductory chapter will review the EU 'Refugee Crisis' circumstances and the significance of education for refugee integration into their new societies. In addition to this, the introduction will highlight the role of digital technologies and social media in the context of refugee integration and education. Later, it addresses the gaps in literature concerning the topic at stake. Then, the research question will be posed and further examined. Finally, the Scientific and societal relevance will be discussed in light of the research question. The next chapter will provide analysis and an overview of previous research, theories and practices in line with the research topic in order to develop a deep comprehension on the role of digital technologies in promoting social integration of refugees into the Dutch educational systems. Finally, the chapter will introduce a case study of the UAF's mentoring program in order to examine the use of social media for integration into education in functional context rather than symbolic. Chapter three presents the adopted research method to answer the research question. Moreover, it provides details on sampling design, participants, procedure, interview design, and data analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion about ethical considerations. Chapter four discusses the observations and findings of the collected data in consideration of the proposed research question.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings, interprets the outcomes of the analysis, and highlights their importance. Lastly, it provides a discussion on the implications, strengths, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## **2. THEORY AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

### ***2.1. Refugee integration***

Across the literature, there is a lack of consensus about the definition of integration (Korac, 2003). Complications related to the definition of the term are not limited to specific standard characteristics or patterns and extend to how we define the term 'integration' (Korac, 2003). There are two different approaches to how the term is understood; the first links integration to assimilation in the sense that refugees lose their cultural identity and adopt the host society's identity. Conversely, the second approach conceives integration in a multicultural way where refugees maintain their cultural identity with some adaptations to the host society (Bijl & Verweij, 2012). The second approach is more in line with how the EU defines integration; accordingly, the term is defined as a two-way practice where immigrants and the host society enrich that identity without losing their own cultural identities (Bijl & Verweij, 2012).

Hence, integration is perceived as a reciprocal practice rather than a kind of prescription that refugees take to integrate in the way that integration is accustomed and interpreted (Korac, 2003). However, not all European countries adopt the EU vision of integration as the lack of agreed comprehension of integration is problematic, primarily in the context of various policies and agendas of the European countries (Bijl & Verweij, 2012). Poland, for example, has no clear policy or definition of refugee integration (Bijl & Verweij, 2012). It is observed that the Polish government adopts the 'policy of non-policy' toward immigrant's integration, mainly because of the absence of political intention to attend immigrant's issues or the considerably small numbers of refugees in Poland (Bijl & Verweij, 2012).

In contrast to Poland, the Netherlands is known for adopting an assimilation approach in its integration policies for migrants (Duyvendak & Scholten, 2012). The durable aims of these policies are that minorities have equal chances and the same social stand to Dutch society and native citizens (Bijl & Verweij, 2012). It is evident for the Dutch government that such durable goals are difficult to reach if the socio-economic status of refugees is lower than the native citizens (Bijl & Verweij, 2012). In other words, refugees will not be able to have equal opportunity in employment as the native citizens, until their education opportunities become equal to the indigenous Dutch citizens (Bijl & Verweij, 2012).

Education is found to play a vital role in fostering the socio-economic status of refugees and other minorities in Dutch society. Ager and Strang (2008) investigated the key domains of ‘successful’ integration and proposed a conceptual framework which highlights a number of key areas broadly recognized as characteristics of successful integration (see Figure 1). However, they stated that it is problematic to consider advancement in these areas as purely ‘markers’ of integration since they would rather see them as “potential means to support the achievement of integration” (Ager and Strang, 2008, p.169). Their conceptual framework includes four indicators categorized according to their significance in the integration process; *‘Employment’*, *‘Housing’*, *‘Education’*, and *‘Health’* which represent the elements of the first indicator named *Means and Markets*. Ager and Strang (2008) argued that these activities are indicative of successful integration into a new society.

The second indicator, *‘Social Connections’* includes three domains and address the role of these connections in directing the integration process. In other words it discusses different patterns of relationships between refugees and other communities during their settlement in the host society. The domain *‘social bonds’* identified as connections inside a group or community like civil, ethnic or religious. The next domain *‘Social Bridges’* identified as relations outside the ethnic community like members of the host society. The last domain, *‘social links’* stands for interactions with governmental and non-governmental organizations (Ager & Strang, 2008). AS for the third indicator *‘Facilitators’*, it includes two primary domains; *‘language and cultural knowledge’*, along with *‘safety and security’*. Here, the authors address the role of the state to remove integration barriers by adopting inclusive policies.

Across the literature, language is seen as a vital indicator of successful integration (Mulvey, 2015). In the Dutch context, the proficiency of the Dutch language is considered to be a key trait in the context of integration in the Netherlands (Government of the Netherlands, 2018). Cultural knowledge as pointed out by Ager & Strang (2008) include “both refugees’ knowledge of national and local procedures, customs and facilities and, though to a lesser extent, non-refugees’ knowledge of the circumstances and culture of refugees” (p. 182). For example, refugees who had a strong relationship with their families in their home countries might feel alienated in their host society. Therefore, some refugees tend to share something from their own culture with others, which enables mutual understanding of their circumstances. The *‘Safety and Stability’* domain refers to the experience of refugees with racial harassment and intimidation.

(Ager & Strang 2008) argue that these experiences, along with health problems, reflect the influence of safety and well-being.

The fourth indicator, '*Foundation*' includes '*Rights and Citizenship*' which address refugee access to various social services such as welfare, the right to vote, and citizenship.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration (Ager & Strang, 2008)*



One purpose of this study is to assess the extent to which programs that provide social support along with social networking have positive implications related to the integration of refugees into their host society. The next section moves on to discuss some of these implications.

### ***2.1.1. Perceptions of integration***

Before investigating the perceptions of integration, the difference between the terms 'migrants' and 'refugees' needs to be identified. According to the UNHCR (2016), 'migration' is related to a voluntary process. For instance, people who cross a border seeking a better economic situation in another country. On the other hand, refugees are unable to return to their home

countries safely, and subsequently gain particular protections under international laws. In contrary to economic migrants, refugees have not self-selected for migration (Ortensi, 2015). Furthermore, migrants have a relatively good social position such as high education and stable jobs, which enable them to establish more informal contact with society. In contrast, refugees have fewer socio-economic resources than migrants and as a result, less formal education (Ortensi, 2015). Refugees also suffer from the lack of family or ethnic network support (Phillips, 2006). There are many factors related to refugee integration such as their experiences, well-being and social support (Robila, 2018). More importantly, the process of refugee integration is conceived as a two-way process determined by access to resources and how open is the society (Strang, & Ager, 2010).

Indeed the perception of the society and its members on refugees is an important factor that affects refugee integration. Previous studies suggest that representing immigrant groups in the media in a certain way, influence the views and beliefs of the public in respect to these immigrants (Coninck et al., 2018). In the Netherlands as in many European countries, the representation of refugees in the media is subject to political parties' directions and most of the time refugees are represented as poor, vulnerable and as a potential hazard to the host community (Fallon, 2018). More importantly, it can limit favorable attitudes toward newcomers (Esses, Hamilton & Gaucher 2017). Practices portraying refugees as dangerous people to social coherence are more likely to impede the process of their adaptation and integration into their new communities (Alencar, 2017). Hence, in order to understand the process of refugee integration and how society conceives them, this research will investigate the perceptions of refugee integration from both perspectives Dutch and refugee students.

## ***2.2. The role of networks for social support in the context of integration***

In most cases, refugees end up in places where they have no social connections or cultural knowledge about the new place of settlement (Duke et al., 1999). The process of settlement and integration includes developing their social networks and building bridges with the host society (Walker, Wollersheim, & Liamputtong, 2015). Social support is found to have positive effects on the integration of refugees in their host societies (Stewart et al., 2011). Scholars appear to have a general agreement on the significant role of social support as a tool for integration and social inclusion of refugees (e.g., Kelaher et al., 2001; Ager & Strang, 2008;

Simich et al., 2005; Penninx, 2005; Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher, 2017). Indeed, social support has the ability to impact refugee perception of isolation or inclusion (Kelaheer et al., 2001). While Harter (1985) defines social support as the positive regard received from others, Simich et al. (2005) have a more specific definition: “Interactions with family members, friends, peers and ... professionals that communicate information, esteem, practical, or emotional help” (p. 259).

Moreover, social networks are commonly acknowledged to be very influential in the migration context (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002). Although there is no single theoretical definition of the term ‘social networks’ in the literature, the term is broadly seen to be very significant in facilitating refugee integration (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002). For this research, the term is defined as part of the social capital framework that can provide information, support, companionship, and other tools that support refugees in their resettlement (McMichael & Manderson, 2004). The term also refers to opportunities for individuals to communicate with others, establish bonds, and benefit from the possibilities the host society offers (Markovic & Manderson, 2002).

In The Netherlands, several innovative and local projects were initiated to face the challenge of integration (Scholten et al., 2017). These programs aim to improve the social networks of refugees by supporting volunteering initiatives along with the formal education programs. The emphasis on the importance of learning the Dutch language for integration and social inclusion of newcomers has resulted in several informal projects that support refugees to improve their Dutch language skills and sense of rootedness (Mosher, 2015). For example, The Dutch Council for Refugees (VluchtelingenWerk, VWN) is an organization known for its various projects, and thousands of Dutch volunteers willing to support refugees (Dutch Council for Refugees. n.d.) has connected a large number of newcomers with Dutch language coaches. These coaches are members of the host society who challenge modern gaps among citizenship and aspire to provide refugees with a sense of rootedness to the Dutch community (Mosher, 2015).

### ***2.3. Social capital theory***

Despite disagreements on the conceptualizations of social capital (Portes & Landolt, 1996; Putnam, 2000), there is a general consensus among scholars that the term refers to individuals’ ability to access various resources and social networks that somehow improve their well-being (Allen, 2009; McMichael & Manderson, 2004). Social capital extends to include



informal social networks that help people access information and services. This notion is prevalent among fresh immigrants and known as solidarity and support practices (McMichael & Manderson, 2004). Hence, the social capital theory can provide insights into the social networks of refugees, and the effects of these networks on the process of their integration.

Migration and refugee scholars differentiate between the two types of social capital to examine the accessible resources and social networks within and outside ethnic groups in host societies (Gericke, Burmeister, Deller, & Pundt, 2018). Accordingly, the term 'bonding social capital' refers to people who share the same background or (co-ethnic) networks like friends or family affiliates of refugees. On the other hand, 'bridging capital' refers to more distant social networks of host community like workers' unions and friends originating from host society (Gericke et al., 2018). Nevertheless, Putnam (2000) highlighted the role of social networks for the vast community and especially 'bridging social capital' as an unlimited reciprocal communication tool. He also indicated that bonding and bridging social capital should not be understood as "either-or" rather than 'groups simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others' (Putnam, 2000, p. 23).

In his theory of weak ties, Granovetter (1973) identified the terms of bonding and bridging social capital. This theory addresses the useful social ties to individuals seeking career improvement. Firm ties are formed through interaction within intra-groups, i.e., individuals who share similar values, norms and backgrounds, along with a distinctive level of reciprocal trust and information sharing (bonding social capital). Conversely, weak ties can be recognized between persons from different backgrounds with weak trust and social links. These weak ties usually perform as (bridging social capital) linking various social groups together (Granovetter, 1973). In this context, weak ties support different social groups with valuable information and resources. For example, to develop their careers (Gericke et al., 2018).

However, Allen, (2009) contested the traditional bilateral concepts of social capital and argued that migrants from outside of the ethnic community can also form a valuable social capital and can provide economic support for other refugees. Allen came up with the concept of the relative social location, which consists of horizontal and vertical social capital. The former refers to social ties between people who share analogous resources of knowledge and social networks, whereas the latter refers to social ties between persons who share different social experiences and resources (Allen, 2009). In other words, refugees can benefit from the co-ethnic

networks and possibly from their diverse experiences in respect to social networks, educational backgrounds, and occupational level (Gericke et al., 2018).

Moreover, drawing on Putnam's theory, Ager and Strang (2008) proposed more diverse concepts of social capital in the context of refugee integration. The first concept (social bonds) which is related to connections inside a group. The second concept (social bridges) which is related to connections outside the ethnic community. Third concept (social links) which is related to interactions with organizations (Ager & Strang, 2008).

On the other hand, Korac (2003) criticized Dutch immigration policies related to refugee integration and argued that these policies lack the strategy for establishing bridging social capital that is essential to reaching broader social inclusion. Korac (2003) described these policies as “state measures that often do not correspond to their needs and integration goals, to which refugees, nonetheless, are required to conform because of the lack of power and ‘voice’ in the process of integration” (p.62). However, in the last few years, the Netherlands has witnessed the emergence of several innovative local projects to face the challenge of integration, and many of them have found their way into national policies (Scholten et al., 2017). A great deal of these projects supports refugees to improve their Dutch language skills and a sense of rootedness (Mosher, 2015).

In these modern days, the notion of social media is found to support the integration and social inclusion of refugees. The section that follows moves on to discuss the role of ICTs and social media in fostering social inclusion of refugees.

#### ***2.4. Social inclusion in the digital age***

There is a degree of uncertainty around defining the term ‘social exclusion’ (Parkinson, 1998). The term has been used with particular categories; one of them is to access to education and knowledge (Phipps, 2000). Even though the term undoubtedly refers to social exclusion, social inclusion is not merely “non-exclusion” (Andrade & Doolin, 2016, p 406). Objecting social exclusion can be through reducing disadvantages while encouraging social inclusion is generally associated with planning and initiating opportunities in advance (Phipps, 2000).

Social inclusion is a crucial part of any equitable and democratic society. According to the European Union (2000), social inclusion is defined as when individuals have the opportunity to fully participate in economic, cultural and social life, and benefit from the normal quality of

life in their society along with being able to access their essential rights. Similarly, Warschauer (2003) defines social inclusion as “the extent to which individuals are able to fully participate in society and control their own destinies” (p. 8). Social inclusion benefits have been linked to recovery from mental illness and promoting well-being (Wilson & Secker, 2015).

However, many governmental institutions focus on the economic aspect of social inclusion, such as engagement in the job market. This perception neglects other aspects of inclusion like social interaction, social networks, civic and political participation, and cultural identity to name a few (Phipps, 2000). In fact, inclusion entails sharing resources but having the chance to participate equally in society. Additionally, centering social inclusion on individual’s empowerment that does not take into account the social structure around individuals suggests that it is something initiated by people rather than to them (Taket et al. 2009).

More and more, the notion of an information society is crossing with that of inclusive society (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). Several lines of evidence suggest that the lack of access to information may lead to increasing deprivation (Phipps, 2000). Interestingly, ICTs have the potential of enhancing social connectedness (Phipps, 2000). The European Commission has a long history in encouraging innovative approaches related to ICTs, which can be seen as capability enablers. This includes developing policies and initiatives to reach a European Information Society (IS) (Phipps, 2000).

However, Andrade & Doolin, (2016) argued that promoting information society and ICTs may not necessarily improve social inclusion as there is no guarantee that people will engage with these technologies to feel socially included. In fact, social inclusion extends to what people are really capable of performing with ICTs (Warschauer, 2003). For example, ICTs and social media enable individuals and groups to build their social and cultural networks. Moreover, refugee’s use of digital technologies contributes greatly to their social inclusion (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). Refugees normally face the challenge of relocation in unfamiliar countries in which they need to establish connections with the host society. For example, they need the information to adapt to the new culture and comply with the regulations and norms of the new society. The lack of access to information and resources may marginalize refugees and exclude them from the host community (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). Hence, ICTs, primarily social media may facilitate refugees’ participation in their new societies and support their social networks.

Furthermore, a great deal of refugees' social media practices is based on smartphone use, which emerged as a central piece of technology for them (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). The use of smartphones was indispensable for refugees on their arduous journey to Europe (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). Refugees' use of smartphones and social media prior to and during the journey to Europe has attracted scholarly attention in recent years (Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver, & Vonk, 2018). Smartphone use among immigrants goes beyond texting and calling and extends to provide access to many platforms and applications that offer them critical information about their destination. New studies indicate that social media and smartphones have become indispensable tools to 21st-century's refugees (Dekker et al., 2018). Smartphones and social media along with mobile based applications for translation and navigation, empower refugees by decreasing their dependence on smugglers for instance (Dekker et al., 2018). Being able to take advantage of the capabilities that digital technologies offer, empower refugees to function effectively in their new societies and enhance their perception of well-being. The next section expands on this topic in the context of the capability approach.

### ***2.5. The capability approach***

This research relies on the capability approach to investigate the role of ICTs and social media in the social inclusion of refugee students in the Netherlands (Sen, 1999). This approach offers a framework for assessing individual's well-being along with social arrangements (Robeyns, 2005). The capability approach involves two substantial normative statements; the first claims that the freedom to achieve well-being is of indispensable moral prominence. The second claims that the freedom to accomplish well-being is related to the individual's capabilities understanding, meaning that real chances "to do and be" what individual has to appraise (Robeyns, 2016). To illustrate, empowering individuals to reach well-being depends on the opportunities given to them to engage freely.

The capability approach is a theory that can help us to understand refugees' sense of urgency to function in their new societies. It conceptualizes notions of functioning and capabilities as well as utilizing these notions for explaining and describing social phenomena such as social change (Robeyns, 2016). Functioning is linked to individual's "beings" and "doings" which stands for diverse undertakings a person can engage with or accomplish (Robeyns, 2016). Example of the first group (the 'beings') is being educated, being part of a

supportive social network, being healthy just to name a few while examples of (the ‘doings’) can be but not limited to; participating in debates, traveling and taking care of children. On the other hand, capabilities are related to individual’s freedom to accomplish “functionings” which is related to what individuals aspire to do or be. Capability from the perspective of the liberal school of thoughts comprise the notions of freedom a person needs to accomplish a valuable life (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). Hence, in order to transform capabilities into individual accomplishments (functionings), access to various resources is necessary. However, these resources are subject to social and personal factors (Andrade and Doolin, 2016).

Another aspect of the capability approach is that it provides a framework for scholars who are interested in studying individuals’ life and human functioning (Robeyns, 2016). Furthermore, it differentiates between the objectives of agency and well-being. Agency refers to individuals’ freedom to determine and pursue their own goals. For example, well-being is connected to individuals’ quality of life (Robeyns, 2005). In the context of immigrants and refugees, both the sense of agency and well-being are seen as objectives of social inclusion such as functioning socially, economically and culturally in the host community (Wilson & Secker, 2015).

Sen, (1993) points out that the capability approach can be applied in different fields. Andrade and Doolin (2016) applied this theory successfully in the context of ICTs and social inclusion of refugees in New Zealand. The authors built on the capability approach to demonstrate how digital technologies can function as crucial tools that empower refugees to “(1) participate in an information society; (2) communicate effectively; (3) understand a new society; (4) being socially connected; and (5) express a cultural identity” (p. 409). Therefore, this thesis draws upon this approach as a conceptual framework to investigate how digital technologies can serve as capability enablers for refugee students. The section that follows continues to discuss the role of ICTs and social media in fostering inclusion of refugees into the educational systems of the host society.

## ***2.6. Refugees education in the digital age***

The past decade has seen the rapid development of internet technologies in many domains of refugee integration, particularly education. For example, Google docs offer the possibility of exchanging knowledge by sharing learning materials that support students’

learning. These technologies also have a fruitful social impact on the lives of refugees (Gillespie et al., 2016). Interestingly, social media has supported the process of refugee integration during the process of their resettlement (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). It has also shaped the practices and outcomes of refugee integration on various levels such as education, cultural belonging, and social capital (Alencar, 2018).

Refugees' use of social media as a communication tool during and after the EU refugee crisis in 2015 was one of the remarkable developments for many scholars. A recent study by Alencar (2018) concludes that refugees' use of social media networking sites plays a positive role in boosting their social capital and facilitating their learning process in addition to enriching their cultural competencies and social networks. Moreover, refugees tend to use social media technologies to stay in contact with families and friends in their home countries (Komito, 2011). In this context, social media have a bonding social capital function in terms of maintaining co-ethnic relationships among refugees while at the same time eliminating feelings of alienation through keeping in touch with their communities back home (Komito, 2011).

Furthermore, the most prominent challenge facing the integration and social inclusion of newcomers is learning the language of the host society in a short time (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). Many refugees turn to social media to satisfy their need for education and to participate in educational programs (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). Platforms such as Facebook and YouTube enable refugees to access education and interact with members of the host society (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). For example, some facebook groups in the Netherlands are designed to connect refugees seeking to learn the Dutch language with Dutch volunteers. (Scholten et al., 2017). Using digital technologies in the educational process has facilitated the life of students and made it easier, let alone the ease of accessibility and reachability to hundreds of thousands of resources at the same time. Thus, social media and digital technologies have contributed to the integration process of the students, including refugee students into their academic institutions.

Finally, this research will investigate the role of ICTs in supporting refugee education through the case study of the UAF's mentoring program. This program involves building social networks of support for refugees that can be helpful not only during their education trajectories but also for adaptation in general. In this sense, this project aims to assess how digital technologies are being used to build and maintain these social networks of education support.

## ***2.7. A case study on UAF's mentoring program***

Considering the education barriers that refugees are facing, the need for joined-up initiatives between members of the host society and organizations is urgent (Ager & Strang, 2008). Previous research has established that programs that support the education of refugees and provide information on the host society have positive effects on refugee integration in their new community (Esses, Hamilton & Gaucher 2017). Therefore, this case-study will enhance our understanding of whether social support through ICT-mediated activities (Andrade & Doolin, 2016) help refugee students integrate into Dutch society along with its educational system. It also investigates whether social support plays a positive or negative role in the social inclusion of these educated refugees.

### *2.7.1. What is UAF?*

UAF is the oldest non-governmental organization for refugees in the Netherlands. It was founded in 1948 in collaboration with Dutch universities (UAF. n.d.a) (see Figure 2). Its aim was to support the refugee students who fled to the Netherlands after the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. This initiative enjoyed significant support in the Netherlands starting from the early days of its establishment as all the eight Dutch universities in the Netherlands signed the initial statement and became actively involved in supporting this organization (Bleichrodt, 2007). The Foundation provides support for educated refugees with loans, grants, academic counseling, and job support in addition to organizing training programs and networking activities (UAF, n.d.a).

Finally, UAF is an organization that advocates the interests of refugees pursuing higher education in the Netherlands. Its goal is to influence local and national policies of the government to ensure favorable treatment for this disadvantaged group. The organization is also engaged in public debates; therefore, it pursues appropriate targeted media publicity (UAF, n.d.a).

### *2.7.2. Mentoring program*

In 2002, UAF launched a pilot scheme for its mentoring program for resettled refugees as part of 'integration model for resettled refugees' (Rogik, 2013 p.2). This program was funded by the European Refugee Fund and implemented in partnership with a number of key organizations concerned in refugee education, UNHCR, Dutch National Program, Dutch Council for Refugees,

(Rogik, 2013; UAF, 2012). Resettled refugees differ from other refugees in the sense that resettled refugees need more time to complete their preliminary programs and need to go through many adaptation stages, along with psycho-social obligations of resettlement in a new country (UAF, 2012). In contrast, refugees and asylum seekers normally tend to be more prepared to study as they have been living in the Netherlands for a while and they are expected to have a good command of the Dutch language (UAF, 2012). Therefore, the program focuses on resettled refugees.

In the beginning of 2013, the program was able to match 38 resettled refugee students with Dutch mentors (Rogik, 2013 p.2). However, the program faced many difficulties, such as an insufficient number of mentors and an insufficient level of the Dutch language of refugees (mentees) (Rogik, 2013). In 2016, the UAF launched its project Refugees @ Campus as part of its regular mentoring program to intensify the guidance of highly-educated refugees by enhancing bridges between them and the host society, and to strengthen the vulnerable social networks of these refugees (McMichael & Manderson, 2004). This project aimed to match 500 refugee students with Dutch students (mentors) in three years. The UAF expected that this project would make refugee students feel at home, which leads to more self-confidence and fewer study dropouts (Refugees@Campus, n.d). Conversely, these mentors can learn a lot about the cultures of these refugees (Refugees@Campus, n.d.). On 26 January 2016, the Dutch Postcode Lottery announced that the project of UAF for Refugees @ Campus would be supported with a large contribution of €1,510,000 (“Nationale Postcode Loterij,” 2016).

In May 2019 the UAF sponsored an ambitious campaign “speak Dutch with me”, the aim of this campaign is to recruit 10000 new language volunteers who are willing to help newcomers with Dutch language (Embrace Europe, n.d.). These volunteers can be linked with 10000 newcomers who want to practice Dutch and learn about the culture of the Netherlands. The campaign was set up by Embrace Europe, a citizens’ initiative that aims to give a warm welcome to newcomers in Europe.



*Figure 2. The first UAF students (1948) (UAF, n.d.)*



### **3. METHOD**

#### **3.1. Research approach**

The proposed research aims to investigate the role of new digital technologies in cultivating social inclusion and promoting the integration of refugees through education in the Netherlands. This research aims to explore people's experiences and their views, and will therefore make use of qualitative in-depth interviewing, which is considered the most powerful method in extracting narrative data that enable investigating individuals' behavior in comprehensive depth (Kvale, 1994).

Besides in-depth interviewing, the research question was addressed using a case-study approach to capture the complexities of the phenomenon within its natural setting using various sources of evidence (Yin, 1984). The research data was drawn from 12 in-depth interviews with Dutch students who serve as 'mentors' and refugee students who serve as 'mentees' in the Netherlands. Throughout the thesis, Dutch students will be referred to as mentors and refugee students as mentees. This chapter presents further details on the different stages of the choice of methods, sampling design, the participants, interview design and operationalization, data collection, and the methods of data analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with addressing ethical considerations as this study includes the participation of vulnerable research population.

#### **3.2. Research Methodology**

The choice of methods of this research adopts qualitative interviewing, due to the advantages of this method in learning from refugees. In-depth interviews permit an extensive explanation of the refugees' experiences using their own terms (Korac, 2003). In other words, in-depth interviewing is crucial to unfold the subjective features of integration (Korac, 2003). Similarly, Alshenqeeti, (2014) found that the interviewing process allows the interviewees to articulate their own views and enables the interviewer to "build a holistic snapshot, analyze words and report detailed views of informants" (Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 39).

Alshenqeeti, (2014) also demonstrated that qualitative interviewing methods in the context of social science research vary from quantitative approaches in terms of its capacity to evaluate the resulting data while providing enough space for participants' social life. Hence, in-

depth interviews are considered the most convenient approach to investigate the subject in question.

However, Alshenqeeti (2014) questioned the appropriateness of adopting interviews as the only transparent way of obtaining data about the interviewee's experiences, because the data generated through interviews alone is not enough to study social life. Therefore, he suggested following Scheurich (1995) who emphasizes that interviewers should focus on the "baggage they get out of the interview" (p.249). In other words, taking notes during the interviews to help researchers examine the external behavior and internal beliefs of interviewees. Hence observations as a supplement to interviews will be made as recommended by Scheurich.

Furthermore, the method also contains a holistic case-study which will be adapted to capture the complexities of the phenomenon in its natural setting and to gather information from a few entities (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987). Yin (2009) highlighted the significance of the case-study as "an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon, set within a real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). Moreover, the relevance of the case study in the context of this research is that it allows exploring individuals or organizations through a complex interaction, relationships, and programs (Yin, 2003). The case-study approach approach is valuable to evaluate programs and develop theory due to its "flexibility and rigor" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544).

Thus, the perspectives of both refugee students along with Dutch students who are members of the host society would be necessary. This is to make sure that the research question is explored through different lenses which allow a better understanding of how digital technologies support refugee integrate into higher education through mentorship programs in the Netherlands. The qualitative case-study employed in this research is an approach that enables investigating the phenomenon in its real context by way of input from various stakeholders (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

### ***3.3. Sampling design and list of participants***

A mixture of snowball and purposive sampling was adopted in the selection process of participants (Bryman, 2012). The chosen sample for this research is composed of 12 respondents (see Table 1) divided into two groups; the first group is the (mentors) which consists of 5 Dutch students aged between 22 and 57 years of whom 4 were females, and one was male. For Dutch

students, it was hard to achieve gender balance due to the difficulty in finding male mentors. This is because most of UAF's mentors were females. Potential implications to gender imbalance are limited to how females and males use digital technologies, which is beyond the scope of this research. All of the mentors were students who take or took part in the UAF's mentoring program as volunteers. All of them resided in the Netherlands at the time of the interviews, except for one of them who was abroad as part of an exchange program related to her study. All of the Dutch participants were highly educated or in the process of their education. One of the mentors who was 57 years old, was following a bachelor study in Arts after she had obtained a Master and worked for a period of time. This signifies the importance of education for Dutch people. It is worth mentioning that two of the interviewed Dutch students were the mentors of interviewed refugee students: Participant 12 is the mentor of participant 3, and participant 10 is the mentor of participant 7.

The next group is the (mentees), which consists of 7 refugee students. All of them originate from Syria except for one who originates from Afghanistan. The significance of these nationalities in the context of this research is that Syrians and Afghans are among the largest groups of refugees in the Netherlands (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, 2017). Their age range was between 19 and 36 years, five of them were males, and two were females. For refugee students, it was also hard to achieve gender balance due to the difficulty in finding female refugee students who are willing to participate in this research. This could be related to the interviewer gender; as female refugees find it difficult to tell their stories to a male interviewer (Sansonetti, 2016). All of the mentees resided in the Netherlands at the time of the interviews. All of them were students who take or took part in the UAF mentoring program and have or had a mentor to support the process of their integration into education. Also, all of the mentees were in their process of education or obtained a degree in higher education before they leave their countries and move to the Netherlands. However, their certificates were not always recognized in the Netherlands, and most of the times they needed to follow preparatory year programs to enable them to join the university (Refugees at Erasmus University. n.d.). Hence, five mentees were registered in a preparatory year program at Erasmus University. Eligibility criteria to register in the preparatory year program required from the refugee students to have a valid Dutch residence permit and to prove they have a good knowledge of both English and Dutch languages at least level B1 (Erasmus Preparatory Year, n.d.). This is important for the research as adequate

knowledge of the English language is necessary in order to conduct the interviews. As a result of using the purposive sampling method in the process of data collection, all of the selected participants in this research were digitally literate and digitally active during the last few years.

Furthermore, the population of this study included a refugee population who is relatively hard-to-reach group as they might be reluctant to participate due to their traumatic experiences, gender implication and other legal issues (Haene, Grietens & Verschueren, 2010). For privacy concerns, most of the respondents mentioned that they prefer to remain anonymous; therefore, their names and places of residence are not exposed. As alternatives, pseudonyms have been used in order to identify the participants.

Moreover, purposive and snowball sampling methods enabled the researcher to establish primary contact with a small group of participants who fit the pre-selected criteria of the research (Bryman, 2012). After establishing contact with some refugee students, they were able to nominate other participants including mentors and mentees. Another way to reach this specific group was through the project manager of the preparatory year program at Erasmus University. This preparatory year program was developed by the Language & Training Centre at Erasmus University (Erasmus Preparatory Year, n.d.) to provide refugee students with the qualifications to obtain a degree in higher education. The project manager assisted in referring potential participants to join the research.

As this research is concerned with investigating the role of digital technologies on the integration and social inclusion of refugees in the context of the UAF mentoring program, the criteria used in recruiting participants required from all participants to be familiar with digital technologies and social media. Therefore, the eligibility criteria for the first group (mentors) required the following:

- Participants should have the Dutch nationality.
- Participants have (or have been) part of UAF's mentoring program
- Participants have a good command of the English language.
- Participants are familiar with digital technologies and social media

As for the second group (mentees), the eligibility criteria required them to be participants or previously participated in the UAF's mentoring program which means that the refugee student has already fulfilled specific criteria concerning education and language qualifications (UAF, n.d.b). More specifically, the following criteria have been applied:

- Participants had to be refugees who have been residing in the Netherlands for no longer than 6 years. (this is to ensure they are still in the stages of education and integration)
- Participants have to be status holders, which means they possess a valid residence permit in the Netherlands. (this differentiates them from asylum seekers which means they can access education in the Netherlands)
- Participants should be in the process of education or registered in a preparatory year program.
- Participants should be supported by the UAF and have a mentor or (had a mentor before).
- Participants should be familiar with digital technologies and social media.

Table 1: *overview of participants*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Current level of education</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>
<b>1</b>	Respondent 1	19	Male	Preparatory year program	Syria
<b>2</b>	Respondent 2	36	Male	Pre-master student	Syria
<b>3</b>	Respondent 3	21	Female	Preparatory year program	Syria
<b>4</b>	Respondent 4	33	Male	Bachelor student	Syria
<b>5</b>	Respondent 5	28	Male	Preparatory year program	Syria

<b>6</b>	Respondent 5	23	Male	Preparatory year program	Syria
<b>7</b>	Respondent 7	23	Female	Preparatory year program	Afghanistan
<b>8</b>	Respondent 8	23	Female	Bachelor	The Netherlands
<b>9</b>	Respondent 9	24	Female	Bachelor	The Netherlands
<b>10</b>	Respondent 10	22	Male	Bachelor	The Netherlands
<b>11</b>	Respondent 11	57	Female	Master	The Netherlands
<b>12</b>	Respondent 12	23	Female	Bachelor	The Netherlands

### ***3.4. Procedure***

It was not an easy task to recruit participants with very specific criteria to participate in this research. A number of persons and organizations were contacted by phone, email, and in person to recruit both mentors and mentees who are part of the UAF's mentoring program. Among the persons who played a crucial role in recruiting interviewees was the manager of the preparatory year program at a Dutch University who helped in contacting some refugee students in his program. The researcher sent an invitation to participate in research by email to the program manager. The email included some information about the researcher, some info about the research and a consent form which included a description about the research, risks, and benefits, time involvement, participants' rights and contacts info of both the researcher and the supervisor of this research. Later on, the program manager forwarded the email to his students

and asked them to contact the researcher directly if they were interested in participating in the research. After a couple of days, some interested participants contacted the researcher and expressed their willingness to participate in the research. This was the starting point to recruit more refugee students using the snowball sampling procedure, which is considered to be the most convenient method to collect information from specific ethnic groups (Arber, 2001).

The manager of the preparatory year program also assisted in recruiting Dutch participants (UAF mentors) by initiating contact with the UAF organization due to his good relationship with them. In the same way, the researcher sent an invitation to participate in a research by email to the program manager. Later, the program manager forwarded the email to the person in charge of the mentoring program in the UAF who in his turn forwarded it to all mentors. As a result, only one mentor responded to the invitation and expressed his willingness to participate in the research. The rest of mentors were recruited through snowball sampling procedure and more specifically via the mentees who referred other mentors. It is worth mentioning that two of the mentees referred their mentors, which indicate the good relationship between the mentors and mentees.

Prior to the process of interviewing, all participants received an informed consent form, which includes information about the research, their rights as participants and ensures the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviews. All of the participants signed a consent form (see Appendix A) except for two of them who preferred to consent orally for privacy concerns. All interviews were audio recorded by the researcher and carried out face-to-face except for one of them, which was carried out via Skype as the participant was abroad at the time of the interviews. In order to ensure a comfortable atmosphere and to build a sense of trust among participants, the interviews took place in convenient locations for the participants (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008) such as public places, online or homes of the participants. Since the participants are students, eight of them were interviewed at Erasmus University in Rotterdam as this place was convenient for them and the researcher too. One interview took place in a public library in Rotterdam (Binnenhof). Another interview took place in a cafeteria in Rotterdam, and one took place in the home of the participant. The last interview was done online via Skype. The semi-structured interviews lasted on average 46 minutes and were conducted between March 26 and April 29, 2019.



### ***3.5. Interview design***

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner due to the appropriateness of this method in capturing an insightful qualitative analysis (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). This particular method enabled the interviewer not only to control the process of the interviews but also enabled the interviewees to express their own perspectives (Gill et al., 2008). Adopting this method enabled the researcher to create a proper structure of the interviews and to formulate proper questions that enabled nuanced and flexible answers.

Furthermore, most of the qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted individually and face to face. The flexible design of the formulated questions enabled the researcher to delve into the responses of the interviewees and to lead the dialogue at the same time (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). It is worth mentioning that an interview guide that included the main themes and questions was the established plan for gathering information.

Moreover, the main questions were designed in light of the “responsive interviewing” approach, which focuses on the interpretation of participants’ personal experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Follow up questions were used to build on the answers of the respondents to elicit a deeper understanding of the given answer (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Hence, the interview guide was designed based on the main concepts of this thesis. The main questions were asked to encourage the participants to reflect on them, then the researcher listens carefully and asks follow-up questions on the answers that address the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). It is worth mentioning that the researcher developed two interview guides; one for the mentors (see Appendix B) and the other one for the mentees (see Appendix C). The main topics were almost the same in both interview guides, but some questions were different and were formulated to suit the population’s background. For example, it is not logical to ask a Dutch mentor ‘how long you have been living in the Netherlands?’.

Moreover, the researcher started the interview by providing information about the purpose of the research to put the participants at ease (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2001). After that, the researcher obtained the respondent’s permission to audio record the interviews. The first part of the interviews contained introductory background questions to get to know the participants. The next section focused on their education and the UAF’s mentoring program, more specifically about the interaction between the mentor and the mentee. The following part dealt with participant’s social networks and social life in general, for instance, the mentors were

asked questions related to their relationship with their mentees and the role of social support in the context of refugee integration.

On the other hand, the mentees were asked questions related to their social networks and the process of their integration in Dutch society. The fourth part of the interviews aimed to generate a better understanding of the role of social media in the everyday lives of participants. Questions focused on the different patterns of using digital technologies and social media for educational purposes. The last section of the interviews contained closing questions related to the aspirations and future plans of the participants.

### ***3.6. Data analysis***

After conducting the in-depth interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed and followed by thematic analysis to allow for refinement of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method that determines, analyzes, and describes patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, thematic analysis varies from other analytical approaches in the sense that it tends to describe themes in the context of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts were analyzed in a 5-step process model of thematic analysis as proposed by Piercy (2004): The first step in this process was by reading the transcripts many times to become more familiar with the data then adding preliminary observations to capture the main ideas discussed by the participants. It is worth mentioning that in this stage many notions were captured and noted in a preliminary codebook. The second step of analysis contained developing and interpreting initial observations derived from the transcripts and the study's conceptual framework into primary descriptive and interpretive categories. It should be noted here that the coding was done manually, and no software for qualitative data analysis was used.

After having developed observations and pattern codes in the first two stages, the third step of the analytical framework was through careful analysis of these preliminary codes and identifying the themes that are relevant for the research question. The following step was to define the initial themes "by examining clusters of comments made by respondents and memos made by the researcher" (Piercy, 2004, p. 6). At this stage, a preliminary coding book was created, and specific statements from the interviews were coded to one or more codes. In the final stage of the thematic analysis, themes were examined from the data of the conducted interviews in order to identify the prevailing themes. A comparative method of analysis was

followed to examine how cultural differences within the research sample influence the respondents' perception of digital technologies and their social integration.

Furthermore, a complementary process of selective coding was applied to help the researcher identify relevant connections between the established theoretical framework and the themes that emerged from the data. Hence, the researcher has focused on themes reflecting the social networks of the participants and how the use of digital media technologies foster their social inclusion through education. This followed a process of extracting and merging codes into related categories. At the end, the codebook contained themes related to digital technologies use patterns, refugee education, social support refugees and mentorship programs, perspectives on refugee integration, and finally, participating in an information society. Figure 4 presents an overview of the selected codes. Based on these prevailing themes in the codebook, an analytical conclusion was drawn in order to answer the research question.

### ***3.7. Ethical considerations***

Prior to commencing the interviews, strict ethical considerations were taken into account during the process of data collection, as part of the participants in this research are refugees. This category forms a socially vulnerable research population due to the traumatic nature of their experiences (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010). As recommended by the European ethical guide for research engaging refugees, many sensitive issues for refugees were taken into consideration like; religion, sexual orientations, and cultural values (European Commission, n.d). Hence, participants in this research received a consent form to be signed by both the participants and the researcher. This form contained information explaining their rights along with the benefits and risks of their participation in this research. Furthermore, the consent form ensured the anonymity of the participants and stated clearly that their data would be treated as strictly confidential as well as they have the right to stop the interview or refuse to answer any question at any time or stop the interview. After informing the participants about their rights and the risks involved in their participation, they were given the option of giving oral consent instead of written one in order to protect their identity. In addition, the approval of the participants was requested to record the interviews. Moreover, at the time of developing the interview design, the researcher avoided any questions that may elicit emotional distress or discomfort among the respondents.

Finally, my own background as a refugee student enabled me to function as an insider researcher who can potentially establish a more meaningful connection with all participants and make them feel comfortable in sharing their experiences. Previous research has confirmed the effectiveness of the insider's shared identity and knowledge in conducting interviews (Shah, 2004). Shah (2004) concludes that "A shared cultural identity is less threatening on the one hand, and on the other, shared cultural knowledge enables maneuvering of flexible adaptations and alignments across and within interviews" (p. 560). Shah also points out that insider's awareness of forbidden issues, taboos, and other priorities help to avoid embarrassment (Shah, 2004). The chapter that follows includes results and analysis.

#### 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The objective of this study is to investigate how digital technologies promote social inclusion for refugees pursuing higher education in the Netherlands. After transcribing the interviews, their content was classified into different categories based on the presented theoretical framework. This part of the paper presents the central themes and sub-themes that were derived from the interviews (see Table 2). The findings are presented in the form of paraphrasing and quoting fragments of the conducted interviews.

Table 2: *Main themes and sub-themes*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
<b>General patterns of Digital technologies use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>The use of smartphones</b></li> <li>● <b>Social and professional networking</b></li> <li>● <b>Importance of social media</b></li> </ul>
<b>Refugees education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Past and present experiences</b></li> <li>● <b>Difficulties in education</b></li> <li>● <b>Participating in education through social media</b></li> </ul>
<b>Social support and mentorship programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Dutch volunteering culture</b></li> <li>● <b>Inclusive education through mentorship programs</b></li> <li>● <b>Supporting refugees education</b></li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>The role of social support and friends in the host society</b></li> <li>● <b>Maintaining social ties through social media</b></li> </ul>
<b>Perspectives on refugee integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Integration through the lens of refugee and Dutch students</b></li> <li>● <b>Perception of refugees before and after interacting with them</b></li> <li>● <b>Cultural differences</b></li> </ul>
<b>Participating in an information society</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Participating in debates/society through social media</b></li> <li>● <b>keep updated through social media</b></li> </ul>

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#### ***4.1. General patterns of Digital technologies use***

As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this study, digital technologies and social media have not only supported refugees in connecting with their host societies but also facilitated the process of their education. In order to answer the research question, it was necessary to examine the role of digital technologies in the lives of interviewed participants and to understand if these technologies support their social inclusion through education. Most of the participants revealed that they primarily use two digital media tools. Echoed by previous research, these tools include smartphones and laptops (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). The daily used digital device by the participants is the smartphone. In this study, smartphones represent the entry point of refugees' use of ICTs and social media.

#### 4.1.1. The use of smartphones by refugees

It is not surprising that refugees attach high value to their smartphones (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). Smartphones were not only crucially useful tools for refugees during their journey to the safe shores of Europe but also after their arrival to the Netherlands as it helped them in their stages of integration. The possibility to access various social media channels at a low cost, anywhere and anytime empowered refugees with an ultimate tool of connectivity (Leurs & Smets, 2018). This tool is crucial for them in their new societies to participate in an information society as in the Netherlands and to communicate with their families back home.

Smartphones represent a central ICT tool in the hands of refugees to access many innovative apps on their phones such as Google, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, to name a few. All of the interviewees mentioned that they could access the Internet on their smartphones, which means that they can navigate through various social accounts whenever they want. For example, one interviewee noted some of the possibilities her mobile phone offers, when being asked about the platform that she uses to communicate with her family:

Actually, I have my mobile I have my laptop and there is a lot of applications ... WhatsApp, Facebook and yes Skype, messenger, Instagram a lot of them and more and more in thousand applications and it's different from person to another to do it  
(Participant 3)

Smartphones offer refugees the opportunity to log in on their social networking accounts whenever they want, which allow them to improve their social connection (Alencar, Kondova, & Ribbens, 2018). The same participant noted that she could not imagine her life without her mobile phone: *“Everybody now is active you go to the metro station, and you see the Arabic persons and each person with the mobile in their hands I cannot imagine our life without this small screens anymore”* (Participant 3). Another participant was more extreme regarding the amount of time she spends on digital technologies and social media per day: *“every time if I have my mobile on my hand, then I will use definitely ... yeah so if I thought like this yeah first time, I will say like 24 hours, but then I said no 24 because I sleep”* (Participant 7). Refugees’ use of smartphones is not limited to communication rather, it extends to participation in educational programs in the host society. One participant explained the value of having some apps on his mobile phone in the process of his education:

I can share my documents via google document or via email in order to check to each or to have a mutual assignment or group assignment with other colleagues, so it's also very important to do to to have this in your mobile phone.

(Participant 2)

In general, most of the participants noted that they tend to use their smartphones to access useful applications which help them to communicate with their families and the host society as well as accessing information critical to their integration process. A recent study by Alencar et al., (2018) about the use of smartphones by Syrian refugees who are settled in the Netherlands found that smartphones are linked to refugees' communication with their families, friends and other migrants. The findings of the present study fall in line with Alencar's results and imply that smartphones increasingly are playing a central role in the lives of refugees (Alencar et al., 2018).

#### *4.1.2. Social and professional networking*

Much of the literature emphasizes the positive role of social networks in the integration of refugees by providing emotional and practical support (Boswel, 2011; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). Most of the times, refugees are obliged to leave their communities and start a new life in a new place. Their process of integration into the new society starts by establishing social networks and connections. The results of this research show that social and professional networking on/offline, along with social media groups, helped the participants in their education, social life, pursuance to integrate into a new society and its educational environment. For instance, one refugee student who had a tremendous social network when he was in his country of origin, highlighted the role of social networking for newcomers. When he arrived in the Netherlands, he immediately started building a new social and professional network for himself to feel at home:

Social networking is very important for everyone ... who comes to a new society to a new community because without people you cannot live alone. So, when you start networking with people, you will start also know more people and those people will introduce you to more people. When I came ... in 2016, I knew a small group of people who were ... working in the municipality and they also tried to introduce me to new people, so that was also very important opportunity for me to know more



people in the Netherlands ... to feel at home at least you know so many people you can talk to them you can meet them you can have an interesting and useful time with them. (Participant 2)

The same participant continued to explain how he strategically navigated the early stages of his professional network in the Netherlands using social media, more specifically, using LinkedIn, which is a social media application crucial for building professional networks.

Because I would like to enlarge my network expand my network in the Netherlands, especially because I'm in a new society I don't know so many people and I would also to maybe get a chance and opportunity for work or traineeship or just keeping keep in touch communicate in Dutch that's also important for me. So yeah whenever I meet people, I try to add them on LinkedIn. (Participant 2)

Recent research indicates that the social networking site (SNS) LinkedIn enormously benefits professional networking growth of individuals (Kim & Malek, 2018). The participant mentioned above, stated that he was not active on LinkedIn when he was in Syria, but when he came to the Netherlands, he realized that he needs to use social media as a tool to bridge the gap between his past and present.

Other two participants who are refugee students in the preparatory year program at Erasmus University notified that social networking groups helped them to interact with other colleagues at the university. This interaction helped them to learn the Dutch language and discuss problems related to their education:

My social and professional networks by use more applications in the social media that it's a smart application that you can get a connecting with another people that you don't know and maybe you need ... help with your study maybe you need a help with any language you learn. So maybe you need a help or you need friends. (Participant 6)

*“Actually in the preparatory year in Erasmus University we have a group on WhatsApp we can connect with other with other mates to speak with them about problems or something like that.” (Participant 5).*

The use of digital technologies fulfills a need for people who have relocated and moved to live in new societies with unfamiliar cultural surroundings (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). With the growing literacy of digital technologies, a great deal of the participants of this study appeared to enjoy using social media groups to establish social and professional networks in the host society. For many participants, social media groups are used to support their process of education in one hand and maintain transnational and local social ties on the other. Both refugees and Dutch participants reported that they are members of social media groups. In all cases, the informants reported that they are members of two main groups; the first is related to education, and the second is related to maintaining social ties. For example, one refugee student who is 23 years old expressed that he enjoys connecting with new people to practice the Dutch language and to socialize at the same time:

I am in a group in Instagram group that is Erasmus University and there you can find a lot of friends and they are studying ... in the same university so you can get connecting with them and I get a connect with some friends on social media also in preparing year. (Participant 6)

On the other hand, the popularity of social media groups extends to involve Dutch students who also use these groups strategically. More specifically, for education and social relations. As one Dutch student who studies a master at Erasmus University emphasized the tactical uses of social networking groups to share information and materials related to education:

we have a social network group with a lot of friends, so a multiple groups to/ with friends and as well Facebook for my master there is Facebook group that's really useful to share information, ask questions, share documents and so kind of with a purpose as well. (Participant 10)

Similarly, another Dutch student who is studying a bachelor in arts reported that she was actively involved with different groups on social media to maintain her social ties, but when she started with her study, she had to involve with new groups in her university to keep up with her studies.

I was already active, but with my studies, I have more groups now for everything they (university) have the group and it's quite intense but I had already groups here

in the neighborhood. For example, we have a group with my family. (Participant 11)

The above quotes reflect the fact that the role of social networking groups has prominently evolved to facilitate education and maintain social relations for both refugee and Dutch students. However, from the interviews, it is clear that refugee students have more urgency than Dutch students to involve in social and professional networking groups in order to improve their social capital and socio-economic status. In contrast to Dutch students, refugee students are still in the process of rebuilding a new social capital in their new society. The significance of social networks and social capital for refugees was intensively emphasized in many integration theories (Cheung & Phillimore, 2014). For example, to access education, community, and employment.

#### *4.1.3. Importance of social media*

When asking about the amount of time spent on social media per day, a significant number of refugee students 4 out of 7 mentioned that they spend more than 6 hours a day. Consequently, the average time spent on social media among refugee students was also 6 hours a day. However, the average time spent on social media among Dutch students was 3 hours a day. This indicates how refugees embrace social media to navigate their way through the host society. For example, one refugee student reported that social media become part of his body and life:

I can't live without the social media because if I yes I. I feel if that happens that I live without social media for one hour, so I feel like mmm I I get to lose part of my body or part of my life. (Participant 6)

Adjusting to life in the Netherlands for refugees students involves active use of social media to participate in an information society. For example, interviewees described their experiences of using social media to learn about activities around them and express their opinions in debates on social media. When being asked about the role of social media in his adaptation process in the Netherlands, the same participant reported:

I got a lot of events ... from social networks ... activities that I did ... when I was new here in Rotterdam I didn't know ... how it is going here and I got a lot of events to concerts and activities to make with Dutch people and that's... that could

help me with the language at the first and with my social life to get to a connect with other people and yes that's that that's play a big role in my social life here in Netherlands. (Participant 6)

Social media and digital technologies also enable refugees to participate in transnational and local networks which satisfy their sense of belonging to society through consuming online cultural and educational contents. As one of the refugee students who spends 7 hours a day on social media expressed:

Without, for example, WhatsApp or email or LinkedIn, how could you connect to the whole world not only how could you also to know about events about interesting events that you like to attend. How do you know new people? How can you get also information about the Netherlands about the history of the Netherlands about the language itself? (Participant 2)

This quote indicates that refugees are keen to learn the culture and language of the host society in order to feel included which social media made it easy and at their fingertips. Even though Dutch students' use of social media is much less than refugee students, it is still significant in their social lives. For instance, when asking about the benefits of social media, one Dutch student reported: *"because I think it can be beneficial for me to use to gain more information but also to socialize when I think about WhatsApp and Instagram and yeah to use the benefits of it"* (Participant 9). For this participant, social media benefits are related to getting information and socializing. But the difference between this participant and the one before resides in a manifestation of the agency to use social media (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). In other words, refugee students use social media to exercise their agency for integration into the host society in order to regulate their current and future status, while locals have no agency to regulate the regulated. This means that unlike refugee students, Dutch students do not need to re-established social networks and cultural knowledge in order to function in their society.

One essential ingredient of integration is education, which is not an easy process for refugees as the interviews reveal. Hence, the next section spotlight some of the prominent difficulties that were found across the interviews.

## **4.2. Obstacles in refugees' education**

Refugee's education is an essential element of integration. Studies confirm the central role of education in supporting refugees in rearranging themselves in a new social and economic structure as well as making them feel part of a community (Morrice, 2007). Many refugees arriving in the Netherlands have a background in higher education; some of them already have completed their education and have certificates; others were in the process of education. Highly educated refugees face the demand for rebuilding their lives in their new societies. For instance, learning a new language, gathering information about the new educational system, and pursuing higher education, all of these are essential tasks for the majority of them. However, these tasks have never been easy for refugees in the Netherlands. For example, access to education is only possible after obtaining a residence permit (Glastra & Vedder, 2010) (this recently changed). Obtaining training or education takes three to eight years, depending on the choices of education (Maagdenberg, 2004). After spending many years in this process, and when refugee students get access to education, they face two primary challenges; the first is related to differences in the educational systems. The second one is related to their social inclusion within their new schools.

### **4.2.1 Past and present experiences of education**

Most of the times, refugees are forced to flee their homes and their educational institutions because of violence and wars in their countries. For example, one female student who is a refugee from Afghanistan mentioned: *"I was studying like BBA bachelor in business administration. That is also a university, so then I could not complete because I have to move here"* (Participant 7). Refugee students in the Netherlands face the challenge of dealing with the differences between the educational systems in their original countries and in the Netherlands. For example, one of the participants was studying pharmacy (second year) in Syria before she had to stop her studies and leave the country due to the continuous war there. After she came to the Netherlands and obtained her residence permit, she immediately wanted to continue her study in the new country, but she couldn't prove that she had studied 2 years pharmacy in Syria and the only solution for her was to enroll in a preparatory year program to be able to study pharmacy again, which means she needed to start all over again. However, when comparing the educational systems in both countries, she admits that she lacks some skills which were not essential in her

country of origin: *“It’s very different in Syria yeah. For example, in Syria we don’t do presentations” (Participant 3).*

*“Not just online even the system in Syria you just gonna to take the curriculum and take your lesson and you didn’t have a chance to train that eh also a new talent” (Participant 3).* In the same vein, the Dutch mentor of the previous participant acknowledged the problem and expressed her sympathy with her mentee:

She did an education in pharmaceutical studies, but it cannot be transferred to the Dutch system, so she has to do like you know HAVO diploma ... it’s a long process yeah and I think it might be quite frustrating because she already almost finished her studies. (Participant 12)

Similarly, another Dutch student who volunteered as a mentor to help a refugee student integrate into the new educational system shared a similar story of his mentee. His mentee is a female refugee student who is highly educated, she wanted to continue her studies, but in order to be able to attend a higher education program in the Netherlands, she had to study a preparatory program as a base year (Erasmus Preparatory Year, n.d.):

Originally in Syria, she did accountancy, and she wanted to do that as well but to study accountancy in the Netherlands, she needs to do kind of ahhh maths, economics, Dutch language, English language. So it’s like this year is just to show that she has a certain level and then she can apply for accountancy. (Participant 10)

The experiences of refugee students with the new educational systems extend to reach the social life in the university. For many refugees, schools and universities are the places where they can interact with members of the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). However, for this refugee student, the university is a new environment where he feels unwelcome. This is due to the lack of companionship or community that makes him feel included:

When you, for example, come to a new environment like the university uh you might feel sometimes alone, or it might be that you are not welcome or not feel at home. So when you know someone from the same environment from the same community, you will feel more comfortable about being here between, among Dutch students. (Participant 2)

Many refugees face obstacles before and during their education process in the Netherlands. The next section discusses some of these difficulties.

#### *4.2.2. Difficulties in education*

Many refugee students face difficulties in accessing education. The biggest challenges in education for refugees in the Netherlands is the need to learn the language effectively and in a short time and the need to get their already obtained certificates recognized. After receiving a residence permit in the Netherlands, refugees younger than 30 years can apply for a loan to study (Van Heelsum, 2017). The first step is by learning Dutch or English, depending on their educational choices. Primarily young Syrian students, who were in the middle of their studies in their home countries take this opportunity (Van Heelsum, 2017). Older Syrians usually have certificates. However, according to the Dutch Organization for Internationalization in Education (Nuffic) (n.d.), the certificates the refugees hold are sometimes poorly attuned to the Dutch educational system. This results in the failure to recognize the level of education the refugees already achieved in their country of origin. Consequently, refugee students have to follow the Dutch admission procedure in order to follow a vocational or higher education. One of the participants, for instance, indicated that he had a bachelor certificate in English Literature from Syria, but this certificate was not recognized in the Netherlands:

I started to work here in the Netherlands, and they told me you can't work with your license here with your diploma here in the Netherlands. This is why I started looking for some organizations to help me study and go on further in my education (Participant 4)

Due to the differences in the educational systems between Syria and the Netherlands, participant 4 is now redoing the same study he already finished in Syria. Another participant indicated the first problem that refugee students pump into when they start pursuing an education in the Netherlands and how ICT based technologies helped her overcome this difficulty:

I just only need the language actually it's the bigger step in.. in my journey here in the Netherlands in my education also because I must do the researches the all my projects and my master also in the future eh in .. in Nederlands taal ..in Dutch language. So, yeah it (social media) help me also in my education to know

more about my future study and about more about pharmacy more about websites that can help me to also find information about study here in the Netherlands.

(Participant 3)

Indeed, learning the language of the host society is a key to education as the former participant described. Social media is found to be an effective tool by many participants to assist them in learning the language of the host society. For instance, one of the participants who is a mentor of the UAF explains how she helps her mentee to overcome difficulties in learning the Dutch language through social media platform (WhatsApp): *“When she struggles with Dutch language. For example, I help her with texting because we text a lot so I correct her via WhatsApp”* (Participant 9). Texting via WhatsApp is found to be a creative way to learn the language; this indicates the positive role of ICTs and social media on refugees’ education.

#### 4.2.3. Participating in education through social media

The results of this research show that all refugee students depend extensively on social media, especially YouTube to access education and to boost their learning capabilities, while Dutch participants tend to use YouTube for entertainment. Refugee students use their agency to navigate social media platforms for information about educational programs and access to it. Hence, the needs and situation are completely different and can shape their social media use accordingly. The theory of social shaping of technology states that the way different groups understand technologies and the world around them will shape their uses of these technologies (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999). For instance, one of the participants explained how YouTube helps him to find information related to the registration process and more in Dutch universities: *“I use YouTube and look for videos to explain to me how I can ... enroll for this study how can I follow the first year, second year, what are the choices after I finish my study”*. (Participant 4). Indeed, social media empower refugees to access and participate in educational programs in the host society (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). One of the participants reported her appreciation to the digital system that enables her to apply online for education in the Netherlands, unlike the system in her home country, where she had to follow many bureaucratic procedures:

Social media can help you a lot actually in the Netherlands it’s very common to ... to register yourself to university. So, when I am gonna to register myself in



university, I should do it online, and in Syria, I just take a lot of papers and envelopes with me. My identity card, my all my things that yeah give information about me and go to the university and to have an appointment. (Participant 3)

Refugees turn to ICTs and social media to satisfy their agency for education (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). Interestingly more than half of the participants who happen to be refugee students reported that they don't just use YouTube for information about the educational programs but also for learning the Dutch language, doing their homework. For example, one of the refugee students reported how YouTube helps him to learn the Dutch language:

Social media has big big big very extensively impact in my Dutch language because I can find on YouTube a lot of Dutch lessons from Dutch people. So I can listen. Very good very well for them, I can understand them, I can get the grammar in a good way not ehh.. better than the books. (Participant 5)

This fragment shows the advantages and benefits of social media when it comes to language learning. Specifically, YouTube appeared to be a significant platform among refugees for language learning. When asking the same participant Why YouTube? He explained its benefits as follows: *"Because I can study with it. I can enjoy with it I can find what I wish and choose what I want to see in the time whom I decide"* (Participant 5). Furthermore, In line with participant 5, Participant 2 also revealed that YouTube and Google enabled him to learn a great deal of the Dutch language by himself specifically, until level B1 which is a higher level than the one required for the integration exam in the Netherlands. This corresponds with the capability approach Sen (1999) the assessment of capabilities proceeds mainly "on the basis of observing a person's actual functionings" (p.131). Hence, being educated is one of the functionings of this participant: *"I learned the language also from zero to B 1 by myself via WhatsApp via YouTube and Google and some Google resources."* (Participant 2).

On the other hand, Dutch students seem to use YouTube for entertainment more than for education. When asking them about the use of YouTube, they mostly combine it with entertainment such as music, talk show programs and documentaries: *"a lot of people just go on YouTube and watch Netflix a lot. I barely do that I use it yeah. Now if I go on YouTube, it is for music."* (Participant 8).

*"I use it more for TED talks and music and some documentaries and stuff."* (Participant 9).

Both refugee and Dutch students enjoy using various ICTs and digital media platforms, but in different ways and for different purposes. This is depending on their sense of agency, which is related to individuals' freedom to determine and pursue their own goals (Robeyns, 2005). For refugees to function effectively in a new society, they need to use ICTs in the way that suits their agency and enhance their well-being.

So far, the discussion came across many supportive examples to how ICT technologies and social media help refugees in the process of their integration and education. The next theme moves on to examine how digital technologies supported the interaction between mentors and mentees through the mentoring program of UAF.

### ***4.3. Supporting refugees through mentorship programs***

As mentioned earlier in the theoretical framework, this research will investigate the role of digital technologies in promoting social inclusion of refugees through the UAF mentorship program. Studies suggest that interpersonal communication with members of the host society in the process of cross-cultural adaptation is vitally significant for non-natives to be socially included (Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013). Digital technologies and social media have played a crucial role to bring natives and non-natives together as many participants expressed. As this theme examines the mentoring program of the UAF from the perspective of both mentors and mentees, reviewing the Dutch volunteering culture would be necessary.

#### ***4.3.1. Dutch volunteering culture and inclusive programs***

Despite the assumption that the largest non-profit sector worldwide exists in the USA, studies indicate that the Netherlands is relatively stronger in this sector followed by Ireland and Belgium (as cited in Meijs & Karr, 2004). While the US has a service tradition, the Netherlands has a membership tradition where members have a central role in deciding what they should do (as cited in Meijs & Karr, 2004). Cultural institutions in the Netherlands play a central role in well-being, citizen participation, education, integration, and forming a social cohesion. Organizations that involve volunteers in their development policies encourage cooperation between all kinds of social organizations such as UAF. As a result, the social cohesion is strengthened, and volunteers can use their passion for culture effectively (“Vrijwilligers

bepalen”. n.d.). When asking one of the mentors, how she learned about the UAF mentoring program, she reported:

I was googling because I heard about all the stuff going on in Syria and all that and then there was this whole thing on social media about the wars and the refugees and that puzzle negative and like causing problems. So I wanted to to do something or like be involved in that but not in a negative way in a positive way. So I googled and I found UAF. So I just signed up because it sounded right. (Participant 8)

Despite the busy schedule of this participant who studies medicine, and works at the same time, she decided to volunteer with UAF to help a refugee student feels at home. This indicates the value of volunteering in Dutch culture. Interestingly, digital technologies and social media have played a crucial role in this process as the former participant expressed. Images of the war in the Middle East and refugees with their children crossing the European borders were in the center of the media attention and in the everyday news in Europe, especially on social media. These images were circulating in various groups and creating positive and negative sentiments among Dutch citizens. In line with the previous mentor, when asking the same question to another mentor, she also mentioned that she was googling for voluntary work, and she saw the advertisement of UAF online:

I was looking into doing some voluntarily, but I didn't really know what to do and what will be like interesting also for me, so I think I was Googling it and then at once when I got like an advertisement on it and then I was in touch with them. (Participant 12)

Another Dutch participant mentioned that he was not thinking to do a voluntary job, but he saw an advertisement about the UAF mentoring program on a website he was visiting: *“I didn't really search for it, but it came into me on a website I was visiting.”* (Participant 10). At that period of time, the UAF was striving to recruit Dutch volunteers and it seems that the UAF have used online advertisements to reach the target of five hundred volunteers effectively. This indicates the effectiveness of ICTs and digital technologies in the context of social work.

The information society, along with volunteering culture in the Netherlands helped the UAF to recruit 500 Dutch volunteers and match them with 500 refugee student to fulfill the

mentoring program (Refugees@Campus, n.d.). Surprisingly, the last mentor and mentee involved in the mentoring program Refugees@campus were among the participants of this research (participants 9 and 7). In the following quote, one of the five hundredth mentors mentioned that she and her mentee appeared on TV in an interview talking about their experiences through the mentoring program. When asking her why she and her mentee were chosen to tell their story on TV, she mentioned: *“because we were the 5th hundreds couple yeah so we were the last couple of the project.”* (Participant 9). Undoubtedly, programs such as the UAF mentoring, help refugee students in their pursuit for education and social inclusion. When asking a refugee student about the importance of mentoring programs, she reported:

Yeah, it's very important because uh because I'm new in here so totally the education system is different, but also the language then if you have a mentor then she will help you with your study mm because I made lots of mistakes. (Participant 7)

The role of the mentor in supporting the mentee is not limited to understanding the education system, but also extends to helping them with language and the access to education programs that are interesting to them.

#### 4.3.2. Supporting refugee education

By analyzing the findings, we can observe that most of the respondents acknowledge the benefits of the UAF mentoring program on their process of education. A significant number of mentee respondents /Five out of seven believe that the mentoring program has helped them to develop their Dutch language. For instance, when asking respondents about the role of the mentoring program in their education and language learning, they gave similar responses: *“In my educational process uhh yeah the mentor played a very big role actually to develop my taal (language) and yeah if I develop my taal I can get the exam that I need to”* (Participant 3). Another participant acknowledged the positive effects of the mentoring program on his language learning and social life because language is a key trait to integration into Dutch society (Government of the Netherlands, 2018). This participant also linked the mentoring program and language development to his social life: *“The best way to practice your language to speak with a native speaker with that language. So that's how I develop my language and that is a big example to how the mentoring program influenced my social life”* (Participant 6).

The results of this research show that mentors have also supported mentees to access educational programs. Two out of five mentees mentioned that they helped their mentees to access education. For instance, one mentor mentioned that she attended with her mentee an open day about education in one of the Dutch universities and helped her with understanding different educational programs: *“we also went to mmm to the Rotterdam University it’s a Hogeschool Rotterdam in Dutch because she wanted to check out a few studies over there so I went with her to analyze a little bit” (Participant 9)*. Similarly, another mentor mentioned that she supported her mentee to apply for a master study. One of the requirements to apply for that master was writing an essay which was a challenging task to this newcomer who just needed some reassurance of his capabilities: *“I think we had during a certain period, period of contact about get accepted at university ... I tried to improve the writing style he had to write an essay, so I tried to help him to write it himself” (Participant 11)*. Writing an essay to apply for a master study could not be an easy task for many students, then what would be the case for a refugee student who went through traumatic experiences not only war and journey experiences but also anxiety about family and friends left behind (Van Heelsum, 2017). Fortunately, as advised by the mentee, with some support in writing an essay, her mentee succeeded in getting acceptance to study a Master at Erasmus University. It is obvious that the mentee already had the required skills to write the essay, but he just needed somebody to encourage him to go further and eventually regain his self-confidence.

#### *4.3.3. The role of social support and friendship in the host society*

As mentioned earlier, social support can impact refugees’ perception of isolation or inclusion (Kelaher et al., 2001). In order for refugees to feel at home in their new societies, they need to feel connected not only with their families and friends back home but also with locals in the new society. Many refugee students find it difficult to integrate into campus life as well as the education systems of the host society. For instance, some of them need to interact with locals and eventually learn the language and culture in an informal manner, others, need friends who can rely on in different situations. Definitely, the mentoring program fills in a gap in the social lives of many refugees. From the interviews, it seems clear that the mentor plays a crucial role in their lives. Interestingly, five out of seven refugee students acknowledged the role of their

mentors in filling in this gap to a certain extent. For instance, a female respondent, who is 21 years old and lives on her own in the Netherlands mentioned:

The upward that you can get from the mentoring is very big, and it have also an effect on your daily life social life your language and also on your personality sometimes if this person can give you maybe tips or tricks to do things here in this yeah strange place. (Participant 3)

In fact, the mentoring program was designed to last for six months (UAF, n.d.c). However, the relationship between some mentors and mentees have developed to a friendship which might last forever. It is important to note that two participants mentioned that their relationships have developed and they become friends with their mentors/mentees. For example, a female mentee mentioned that she and her mentor become good friends: *“Actually she is not my mentor we become friends like good friends so that why we don’t deal with each other like a mentor or mentee”* (Participant 7). In the same vine, when asking her mentor about the kind of relationship she has with her mentee, the mentor advised the same and added that they even become like sisters. The mentor also mentioned that her good relationship with her mentee enable both of them to help each other in a better way which means that we are talking about an equal relationship which for sure create a sense of comfort and inclusion for any refugee:

Because especially when I help (participant 7) it’s more like we’re friends actually we call each other like sisters ... so it’s like we have a good relationship with each other that’s why we can help each other in a better way. (Participant 9)

This participant signified an important factor in the lives of refugees, which is friends in the host society. In this context, it is worth mentioning that from the interviews with the mentors, more than the half of the mentors 3 out of 5 reported that the most valuable thing for refugees in the host society would be friends as the previous participant continued to say:

I think they need more friends because they know like nobody and it’s very difficult to make from friends in the age of like 23 in a culture you don’t know anything about because everyone already has their family their friends their college friends so they’re not real like looking for new friends but the refugee does so that’s I guess what they really need

(Participant 9)

The participant explained why it could be difficult for refugees to make friends in a new culture, which was also explained in the theme of cultural differences. Indeed, the friendly environment helps refugees create a sense of belonging, which enables them to make friends and create a kind of social life (Matthews, 2008). However, not all interviewees had the chance to develop their relationship with their mentors/mentees. Three mentees expressed their disappointment due to the lack of time from the side of their mentors. For example, one mentee strikingly expressed his frustration from his mentor who was so busy to the extent that she couldn't meet with him except for a few times due to her busy schedule: *"these students are very busy they are university students my mentor has busy schedule, and we barely have time to meet, and she barely have free time to meet with me because she has full schedule"* (Participant 1). Participation in the mentoring program requires from both the mentor and mentee to meet approximately two hours a week (UAF, n.d.c). However, some mentors are busy with many activities, and gradually they meet less frequently with their mentees, which might limit the amount of support provided to the mentee. This is an example of the difference between being a mentee and being a friend, as participant 9 explained. In fact, the differences in the socio-economic status of both mentors and mentees play a role in relationships forming. For example, mentors already have education, work, families, and friends. Thus, their priorities and free time might be different from the mentees.

#### 4.3.4. Maintaining social ties through social media

Studies indicate that the social support provided by co-ethnic relationships among refugees, such as family and friends back home can eliminate feelings of alienation (Komito, 2011). In this context, social media perform as bonding social capital for refugees in terms of facilitating the communication with their families back home and reducing feelings of loneliness in the new societies. One participant argued that maintaining social ties with her family back home using social media affects her well-being positively:

My family was in Syria and a lot of uhh persons from my family in Syria still in Syria till now and during the war also... It's very dangerous, but they have internet. Yeah and that is very very very important because social media is a way that can

help a lot of students to become more open and to have the opportunities to talk with their families and to have a good communication with their friends... to not feel like I don't have anybody here. To not feel alone they have they they maybe spent time with talking with their family and have a great great and positive feelings about it and not feeling alone and not feeling depressive. (Participant 3)

The same interviewee also mentioned that social media, especially WhatsApp, helps her to communicate with her mentor: *"It was a weekend, and she had an exam. I was very sick, and we just do the interview together on WhatsApp"* (Participant 3). Another participant who is a Dutch student explained the benefits of communication via WhatsApp with her mentee. As both of them are students and have different schedules, calling might not be the best option to reach each other, but via WhatsApp, they get more freedom in replying back at their convenient time.

When you're both busy and do things besides studying, then it is definitely hard to find the time that you can both call. So WhatsApp is great for that. So I just send out a question, and he can reply whenever he likes it and the opposite way as well. (Participant 8)

Furthermore, access to the internet empowers refugees to maintain their social ties (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). The ability of various ICTs to combine audio, video, text, and image satisfy the communication needs of refugees with both home and host societies (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). When asking one of the interviewees who is a refugee student about the tools he uses to communicate with his family or friends, he answered as follows:

Just I have the Internet. So it mean that social media I have Instagram, Facebook I can make a contact via WhatsApp. So I can make a video call or just a normal call or just chatting to get know ehh about them and and how is it going there. So, I make a connect with my family via via the Internet tools. So, I have my own smartphone, and they have also smartphones. (Participant 6)

Hence, digital technologies, and smartphone-based ICTs, along with the various social media applications, provide a sense of social connectedness for both mentors and mentees. Importantly,



refugees need this in their integration process. The following section focuses on different perspectives on integration.

#### ***4.4. Perspectives on refugee integration***

Many scholars describe refugee integration as a complex and multidimensional design implying integration into different situations such as the economic, educational, and social contexts (Robila, 2018). The following section discusses integration from the lenses of refugees and locals.

##### *4.4.1. Integration from the lens of refugees and Dutch students*

Perceptions of integration can vary from one person to another, depending on how resourceful is the individual (Strang & Ager, 2010). A significant number of the interviewed mentees 4 out of 6 mentioned learning the language when being asked about their perception of integration. As one Syrian respondent (36-year old male student, living in the Netherlands for three years) explained: *“Integration ahh Integration has so many aspects actually to talk about. Integration is learning the language of the new country and the host country” (Participant 2)*. Another fellow countryman (19-year old student, living in the Netherlands since two years) confirmed the role of learning the language in the process of integration and added the role of social interaction for someone to develop feelings of belonging to the new society.

Getting used to the language and the country with its values and with its lifestyle and ... Making people feel that you are not an outsider but that you can interact with them the same way they interact with you without feeling aaa awkward or uncomfortable. So, integration feeling that I am not feeling I am unwelcomed in and I feel like one of the people in the country. (Participant 1)

For this respondent (1), integration is not feeling as an outsider and socially excluded rather than feeling included and accepted as any other person in the society. Moreover, for him, integration means assimilation in the sense that refugees adopt the host society’s identity in order to feel included.

Another participant who is a male student, married, have one child and living in the Netherlands since five years mentioned that integration for him is work, but he came back and stressed the role of learning the language of the host society:

Integration means work, work and sustenance...yes maybe you can work, but you cannot ehh connect contact with your neighbors. So, you are not completely integrated, but if you have work and you can speak with them in all of situations you are 100% integrated. (Participant 5)

Indeed, employment is believed to foster the integration of refugees into society as it allows interaction with members of the host society, establish connections and increase the chances of learning the local language (Phillimore & Goodson, 2006).

In addition to language learning, social inclusion, and work; cultural adaptation was a recurrent theme of integration among the interviewees. The interviews revealed the need to develop a new cultural pattern in the sense that refugees can mix their own culture with the new culture. One participant was aware of the complexity of the term 'integration' and tried to put it cautiously in the context of cultural understanding:

It is a big word. It is a big word... integration means that you have to bring your culture to this country and make it mix with the Dutch culture and you have to cope up with the traditions here in the Netherlands. Traditions are different. The culture is different and whatever you do should be in the light of their culture or their education, and their traditions. (Participant 4)

For this participant mixing his own culture with the Dutch culture seems to be a good combination, which is in line with how some mentors exposed in regards to the meaning of integration in the next section. Even though some participants in the study seemed to have an assimilatory strategy towards integration, results shows that refugees' general perception of integration is more in line with the EU definition of integration mentioned in the theoretical framework where integration is perceived as a two-way practice in which refugees and the host society enrich without losing their own cultural identities (Bijl & Verweij, 2012). In other words, both the host society and refugees are responsible for successful integration (Ager & Strang, 2004)

Now turning to the perspective of Dutch students about integration. As already pointed out, the perception of integration varies from one person to another. However, the general perception that emerged from interviewing the mentors did not show a significant discrepancy from the perception of mentees. For example, both mentors and mentees agree on the role of mixing the cultures and learning the language of the host society as essential ingredients of integration. All mentors agreed that refugees don't need to forget about their own culture but they need to understand the Dutch culture and to be aware of the cultural differences as one female mentor who is 23 years old expressed: *"It's not necessarily throwing away their old culture but just like maybe mixing them or just being aware of the difference the culture has so you can understand the two cultures maybe"* (Participant 8). A slightly different opinion was expressed by a male mentor who is 22 years old student. This participant used the guest's metaphor to explain that refugees need to respect the culture of the host society and adapt to it:

I see it as especially in the beginning you're kind of a guest so like it's if you're visiting your neighbor's house you you can't do in their house everything that you normally do in your house so you have to adapt your style and you cannot forget your own culture but you need to be open to change your own style in the first place and later on... of course then you can introduce more of your own culture but first you have to be very open-minded for someone else because you are kind of a guest.  
(Participant 10)

Throughout this metaphor, the participant wants to indicate that refugees should be open to change some aspects in their cultures to fit the new culture, especially in the beginning. However, he did not mention what preparations this 'neighbor' should do in order to make his guest feels welcomed. Previous research indicated integration as a two-way ordering in which both refugees and the host society communicate in favor of establishing mutual understanding by respecting the cultural differences of each other (Alencar, 2017). Moreover, in line with mentees' perspectives of integration (participants 1 and 2), a female mentor who is 57 years old stressed the role of learning the Dutch language as the top priority for integration: *"Learning the language for me is very important that's for me number one, if you don't speak the language you can't live in a country I think. I'm with a very strong opinion about it"* (Participant 11). The previously mentioned fragments correlate with Ager & Strang (2008) domains of integration

explained in the theoretical framework, specifically the third indicator *Facilitators*, which include *language and cultural knowledge*. In addition, mixing two cultures seems to be a mutual concept between both mentors and mentees. However, previous research, as well as the results of this research show that combining the culture and traditions of the home country with the culture and traditions of the host society is a challenging task for refugees (Van Heelsum, 2017).

#### 4.4.2. *Perception of refugees before and after interacting with them*

The focus of this section is on the knowledge about refugees before becoming a mentor. Stereotypes published by various media platforms are considered to be the main factor in forming audience attitude towards a particular issue (Jacobs et al., 2017). From the interviews, it seems clear that the media has affected the perceptions of Dutch people on refugees. More than half of the interviewed mentors /three mentors expressed their concerns with how the media refer to refugees. The same was reflected when asking one of the mentors who is a female and 23 years old about her knowledge on refugees before she became a mentor and before she had direct contact with them:

It was just I only knew one side I think because we are very easy to just believe whatever the news says whatever the TV says and we only see one side and we only see the problems like oh refugees are coming in the country they're taking like houses or now people have no place to live like it's over exaggerated mmm, mmm while of course you also see that the war that's happening and all the violence is going on in their country, so you understand why they're leaving. (Participant 8)

Above quote reflects clearly the negative representation of refugees in the Dutch media. In the same vein, another female participant who is 24 years old also admitted that her knowledge about refugees before she interacted with her mentee was much less due to the media which portrays refugees as totally different people with a lot of struggles:

I think it was a lot less because it's more we just see on media and the news it's always like refugees they have a lot of problems, and they seem like struggling with everything, and you would think that they leave everything in their homeland and

come with nothing, but when you meet the refugees ... we are the same but they just came to the Netherlands a year ago or a few years ago. (Participant 9)

Refugees are commonly portrayed as poor people who come to the Netherlands for economic reasons. A relatively recent Pew Research survey shows that 44% of the Dutch people conceive refugees as an economic burden by consuming jobs and social benefits (Wike, Stokes & Simmons, 2016). The same idea was expressed by a male mentor who is 22 years old and studies a bachelor in supply chain management:

I find that some refugees have a bad reputation in the Netherlands because people think they are leaving their country because of money issues and stuff like that, but those refugees who want to study they want to continue with their life they want to really work and really change something. (Participant 10)

This participant also described his previous knowledge of refugees as stereotypical, which conceive refugees as poor and uneducated. However, from his interaction with his mentee, he was able to see the other side of the truth: *“I think it was quite stereotyped that they left everything behind, they are really poor not educated, and so yeah I think that way”* (Participant 10). This image of refugees in the media can influence how the host community deals and interacts with refugees and can affect the amount of social support these refugees receive. Now turning to the perception of refugees after becoming a mentor and interacting with them.

The results show that the UAF program served as a platform for a lot of mentors to get exposed to refugees' life in the Netherlands throughout interacting with them away from stereotypes circling in the media. When being asked about their perception of refugees after participating in the UAF mentoring program, a great number of the mentors, 4 mentors, confirmed that their perception of refugees has changed. In other words, they become more aware of the refugees' needs and circumstances. As one mentor who is involved in the mentoring program for more than a year described:

Instead of also describing the positive effects it has on the community it's only sending us the negative effects basically because the news just somehow loves all

the negative news. So I think it was very just one side and I think now after the UAF program I've learned more about the other side. (Participant 8)

This participant is not satisfied with media coverage about refugees, which only focus on the negative sides and ignore the positive one. In addition, learning about the other side did not come by chance and was after reciprocal communication with a refugee student who was doing his best to improve his socio-economic situation through education in order to function in the new society. Similarly, another mentor acknowledged that her opinion of refugees did change in the sense that refugees are able to figure things out themselves and just need some advice:

I think I did change it a bit because mmm yeah because first refugees were in my opinion it was more like they really need a lot of help, but actually they need just a little of help because they already do so much by themselves. (Participant 9)

The most challenging obstacle for refugee education is learning the language of the host society (Teunissen, 2016). One of the mentoring program goals is helping mentees to learn the Dutch language (UAF, n.d.c). This is a difficulty that one of the mentors recognized throughout his interaction with a female mentee:

I did learn that the Dutch language is more difficult to learn we use a lot of sentences and words that have double meaning, so that is really difficult to learn, and I learned as well from her that there are a lot of refugees who want to move forward or more Western than we think and we think really, or many people think that refugees are those strange people from the Middle East, but they are one of us actually. (Participant 10)

Participant 10 was trying to help his mentee in learning the Dutch language; therefore, he realized the difficulties refugee students face in learning to speak Dutch. He also realized that refugees are normal people who just want to move forward and not as viewed in the media as 'strange people from the Middle East'.

On the other hand, another mentor who is 58 years old said that her perception of refugees had not been changed after interacting with her mentee. This is because she was involved with the UAF long time ago, and she was already familiar with refugees:

well no I don't think so no no it's more confirming in a way also of what I thought and also what I know from the 25 years of being well kind of a member of UAF [laughter] and I like to read all the stories I like to read all the individual stories that is what I'm very interested in. (Participant 11)

The UAF normally keep her members updated through a newsletter that is dispatched regularly to their emails. This newsletter contains success stories for some refugee students and other updates. Participant (11) is very interested in following these stories. This signifies the role of Digital technologies conveying the positive side of refugees to the host society. Hence, the results of this research show that interpersonal relationships and interaction with refugees foster mutual understanding and clear stereotypes which may limit favorable attitudes toward newcomers (Esses, Hamilton & Gaucher 2017).

#### 4.4.3. *Cultural differences*

The moment refugees arrive in the Netherlands; they are confronted with many cultural differences. Similarly, when members of the host society interact with refugees, they also come across different social norms. Throughout the interviews, both of the mentors and mentees reported that they encountered cultural differences during their interaction together. The most prominent difference is related to differences in communication through social media. For instance, a female Dutch mentor who previously mentioned that she is communicating with her mentee via WhatsApp all the time reported that her mentee was sending her many messages and voice calls via WhatsApp:

At the beginning I had to give a little bit more boundaries, because I receive so many messages and like so many voice messages so that it was just too much in a sense at that point I was just telling her like ok I'm sorry, but I really want to help you, but this way of communication for me is really too...cost me too much energy. So, it could have been different, so in that sense then we set a little bit boundaries. (Participant 12)

This fragment signifies the cultural differences in the way mentors and mentees use social media. Texting many times seems bizarre according to the Dutch cultural norms, while it is something normal in the culture of the mentee who is 23 years old Syrian female living in the Netherlands

on her own. This same Syrian mentee has reported another cultural difference in communication with Dutch people. She reported that in the Syrian culture, asking a personal question seems to be normal, while in the Dutch culture it is the opposite:

It is kind of culture that they find it not good they find it really umm yeah harmful if you ask a personal question. It is not easy like that we tend to do in Syria ask just in ehh in just a spontaneous manner you don't think about it even.

(Participant 3)

A second cultural difference experienced by participants is related to social inclusion in education. Classrooms are a central place where refugees interact with members of the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). However, for an outsider such as refugees this interaction might be difficult due to specific cultural norms as a female mentor who studies medicine explained:

I was also becoming more aware of our country and maybe that we are because we can be a little closed up groups sometimes. For example, in colleges, people, the country is so small that when you step into a classroom the chances are that you know some people already, so groups form pretty quickly and then for people who come and who are not from this country and they come as outsider it might be hard to get to know people because we're also like closed up which I totally didn't realize I was probably doing it myself as well, but I think I've also like besides knowing his culture I also became aware of my own culture a little bit more. (Participant 8)

The above-mentioned quote summarizes one of the struggles of refugee students in their pursuance of social inclusion into the Dutch educational system. A previous study by Van Heelsum (2017) confirmed that it is difficult for refugees to establish connections with Dutch people. Hence, this research shows that cultural differences play a role in relationships forming and social inclusion of refugee students into the educational systems.

A third cultural difference is related to social networking and engagement. For instance, one of the mentees reported that in his culture, he did not have to make an appointment if he wanted to visit someone, while in the Dutch culture, this is something necessary:



we were social people and we still ... we get to connecting without anything that you can if you need to speak to someone or get a visit get a visit by someone that you don't have to make an appointment with them. You just go there and drink coffee or tea with them. (Participant 6)

A fourth cultural difference is related to power positions. Mentors and mentees reported that they meet each other on campus or in public places. Who pays for the coffee is an issue that is related to power positions in some cultures. As one Dutch interviewee reported that in his first meeting with his Syrian mentee, he wanted to pay for the coffee they had, but the mentor was surprised when his mentee did not like the idea of someone paying for her coffee:

They don't like if you pay everything for them you know the first time I saw her I thought ohh she probably don't have that much money let's offer her something, but she was not that way at all ... she said ok this is the first and only time you do this, you help me I want to give you something back so the rest of the time I'm going to pay your coffee.... yeah so like it was more that we're kind of equal we have the same...we are in the same situation ... I think yeah that was over culture... because her culture because she said in our culture if somebody does something for you, you want to do something back, so it's kind of to be balanced." Participant 10)

In the culture of the Syrian mentee, there should be a balance in the relationship to avoid feeling inferior or in a weak position. Similarly, a female mentor mentioned the same situation with Syrian male mentee who insisted on paying for her coffee because in his culture, males usually pay for females. The mentor reported the story as follows:

I didn't know anything about the culture at all like even for example, I think it was the first meeting we had I still remember it because it was so funny ... I wanted to pay for the coffee we had ... and he was just like no no no... in our country in our culture the guy pays, and we take care of the things and we take care of our family and I was like God it's so funny because here in the Netherlands we want to be independent and like as a female I just want to be like paying the exact same. (Participant 8)

Hence, refugees' tendency of not preferring others to pay for them highlights an inherent cultural norm on the one hand and their pursuance of equal relationship in which refugees feel they have the same power position to locals on the other hand.

#### ***4.5. Social connectedness in the digital age***

Digital technologies enable individuals and groups to build their own connections (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). The results of this research indicate the need for the participants to be digitally connected in order to access information, establish social life and function in an information society where digital technology is the key to get hold of everyday life (Andrade & Doolin, 2016).

##### *4.5.1. Participating in debates/society through social media*

Social media also offer refugees a platform to involve in various online discussions and debates, particularly the ones talking about them to express their opinions and react to stereotypes. For instance, one of the refugee students who lives in the Netherlands since five years and speaks good Dutch and English reported that he is using Twitter to participate in debates: *“I try always to follow what they are saying about refugees about Arab people. For example, about the Middle East. How do they talk about Syria in their news on Facebook on Twitter” (Participant 4)*

I comment when somebody ... write something that's not true about Syria I try to correct them and give them the right idea. This is why I keep in touch with the social media here in the Netherlands... For example, if they say that refugees are here because they want to be here or most of them are here in search of work or jobs or money or because Europe is their dreamland I tell them no. Most of the people didn't think about leaving Syria at all. They had no idea about leaving Syria just because of war that they are here. (Participant 4)

The interviews showed that participants place importance on social media, which help them function in their new society and enable them to speak about themselves instead of others speaking about them. For instance, one of the participants who is a female refugee student and

lives in the Netherlands since four years mentioned that she and her friends are trying to establish channel on YouTube to create awareness of refugees' experiences:

I actually try to do a personal channel, but it does not work with me alone. So I'm now I prepare it now with a lot from of my friends to do a channel on YouTube and to present our experience with a lot of things here in the Netherlands. (Participant 3)

Hence, refugees increasingly are participating in outspread social networks (Andrade & Doolin, 2016) that constitute a boundless world where involving in society is a matter of accessing informal networks. This leads us to the next topic, which discusses the role of social networks in fostering social inclusion and participation in society.

#### 4.5.2. Keep updated through ICTs and social media

Most of the participants reported using ICTs and social media to keep up to date on different aspects of their lives. For example, refugees respond to the challenges of being in a new environment and far away from their families and friends in the home society by seeking interaction via social media. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp emerged as primary available tools in this pursuit. A refugee student who is an active user of social media described how he keeps in touch with his family back home in Syria on a daily basis via social media: *"I use social media most of the time I'm following their news on Facebook or on Twitter, and I call them ...I'm in touch with them almost every day, especially my father and mother and my family."* (Participant 4). Moreover, many refugees turn to social media to keep an eye on the latest news and updates in the Netherlands. For instance, a refugee student who has an excellent command of the Dutch language reported using social media to keep track of the latest news about refugees in the Netherlands:

When you read something, you read an article for example, via social media via LinkedIn or online news on something about the Netherlands refugees' numbers about refugees' integration about the laws of the Netherlands about the history also all of this context you are going to read online. (Participant 2)

Furthermore, ICTs and social media can transcend geographical and temporal boundaries

(Andrade & Doolin, 2016). For example, one Dutch participant who is active on Facebook recalled the story of a female journalist in Syria. This journalist used to broadcast live news on Facebook from dangerous zones. Her videos quickly went viral via social networking sites:

So I think there was this girl she actually went viral. For example, she showed she was making videos out of Syria. Like in this danger zone and she was broadcasting them on Facebook and a lot of people since she was she went viral. A lot of people started seeing and they were like Oh my God it's so way more heavy and way more terrible than we thought it was. (Participant 8)

Hence, being able to access various social networks, resources and keep up to date with their home communities can positively affect the social inclusion and well-being of refugees (Allen, 2009; McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Gifford & Wilding, 2013). Indeed, social media and ICTs have a bonding social capital function in terms of maintaining co-ethnic relationships among refugees while at the same time eliminating feelings of alienation through keeping in touch with their communities back home (Komito, 2011).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The present research aimed to examine the role of digital technologies and social media in supporting refugee integration into higher education through mentorship programs. In order to adequately examine refugees' use of social media to integrate into the Dutch educational system, this thesis focused on their interaction with members of the host society. More specifically, with UAF mentors. Examining this interaction enabled a greater comprehension of social media use patterns that emerged from the literature to build on them and go further.

Additionally, the insights from social capital theory and capability approach were necessary to investigate participants' digital behavior in the context of their integration and social inclusion. Consequently, the research revealed that social media technologies are greatly integrated into the lives of refugee students and play a pivotal role in supporting the process of their integration into the Dutch educational systems as well as fostering the process of their social inclusion. Also, the interviews revealed that many refugees relied on ICT to learn the Dutch language in the early stages of their asylum process.

This research found that the entire participants engaged in educational programs, voluntary work, social networking, and professional networking activities. All of these opportunities were found online and on various social media platforms. However, the study also established that participants not equally make use of digital technologies. Refugee participants reported different patterns of social media use in comparison with Dutch participants. The former group tends to use social media more strategically to navigate the internet for information essential to their acculturation and participation in an information society. For instance, refugee students revealed that YouTube is the most preferred platform to help them find information related to their education and cultural knowledge. More specifically, watching YouTube videos helped refugee students to access education, overcome difficulties in it, and foster their learning process of the Dutch language. On the other hand, the findings of this research showed that Dutch participants tend to use the same platform (YouTube) more for entertainment, such as watching talk shows and listening to music. Hence, social media was found to satisfy the expectations and needs of both groups according to their needs.

Generally speaking, education and language skills are viewed as being critical for successful integration. The introductory chapter of this research described some of the challenges that refugee students face in the process of their integration into the host society and its

educational systems. For instance, most of the refugee participants expressed their disappointment with the poorly recognition of their previously achieved level of education. The lack of clear information and rules that regulate this process make it difficult for refugees to evaluate their educational choices. Another difficulty the participants emphasized was acquiring a high level of knowledge in the Dutch language in order to be able to access education. One of the participants for instance, described it as the ‘biggest step’ in her journey in the Netherlands (Participant 3). However, the interviews also revealed that digital technologies are extensively present in the lives of refugees as a great source of knowledge on different aspects of their lives.

Altogether, the participants of this research commonly adopt assimilatory views of integration. Much emphasis was placed on education cultural knowledge and social networking to achieve successful integration. Both refugee and Dutch participants conceive integration as a two-way process, much like the literature presented in the theoretical framework (Bijl & Verweij, 2012). In the same context, all participants agreed that refugees do not need to lose their national identity in order to be seen as integrated into the Dutch society, but some cultural understanding and adaptation would be necessary in this process. Digital technologies emerged as helpful tools to enhance cultural knowledge and mutual understanding.

One of the significant findings that emerged from this study is related to the role of ICTs and social media in promoting social support. As discussed in the theoretical framework and the results section, social support has a significant impact on refugees’ isolation or inclusion (Kelaher et al., 2001). Digital technologies, especially smartphones, enabled refugee participants to connect the two worlds together. Maintaining their social ties with home and host societies is found to be pivotal to their well-being. Some of the participants even described their phones as part of their bodies to signify the critical role of these devices in their lives. Although Dutch participants acknowledged the role of social media in facilitating education and communication with their families and friends, their daily usage of social media hasn’t exceeded to reach half of the refugees’ time spent on social media. Interestingly, all participants acknowledged the role of social media groups in supporting the process of their education, such as exchanging information and documents. They also demonstrated that social media groups helped them maintain transnational and local social ties.

Another overarching theme that was identified throughout the findings was the importance of friends and companionships for refugees in the host society, especially in their

schools or universities. In order to feel included, refugees need to have a kind of community or friends to exchange information and initiate social discussions (Phipps, 2000). This can be challenging for many refugee students who find themselves in a new environment. However, the UAF mentoring program offered a great chance for establishing and developing interpersonal relationships between mentors and mentees. Indeed, at least two couples reported that their relationship has developed into a strong friendship rather than dealing with each other as mentors and mentees. Refugee participants repeatedly indicated the importance of having Dutch friends in order to create a sense of belonging, practice the Dutch language, and eventually feel included in their new society (Matthews, 2008). At the same time, most mentors signified the importance of social interaction for their mentees. Throughout their interaction with their mentees, the mentors concluded that friends would be the most valuable thing for refugees in the host society to feel included. ICTs and Social media are found as creative channels that can bridge the social distance between refugees and locals through facilitating their interaction together.

Finally, this research focused on analyzing the use of Digital technologies and social media by refugee students. The purpose was to explore how these emerging technologies contribute to their social inclusion. The research suggests that social inclusion is identified as the extent to which refugees are able to “function effectively in their new society and regain control over their displaced and disrupted lives” (Andrade & Doolin, 2016, p. 413). The contribution of this study has been to highlight the role of digital technologies and social media empower refugees: to practice social and professional networking; to participate in education; to maintain social ties; to participate in debates/society; to keep updated. Hence, it has been found that social media serves as capabilities enabler for refugees in their pursuance of social inclusion, particularly into education and into their host society in general.

### ***5.1. Implication for practice***

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. Overall this study strengthens the idea that ICT use promotes social inclusion within a new environment and setting. Previous studies confirm this idea (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). The findings of this study prove that social media can support the social inclusion of refugee students into higher education through mentorship programs. Further, it can be assumed that refugees’ reliance on social networking sites for education and social

inclusion will continue to increase in the coming years. Mentoring programs were found to have positive effects in this process as they provide online and offline social support, along with guidance for refugee students. Therefore, the results of this research can provide meaningful insight for policy-makers working on refugee' digital behavior, and its impact on the process of their integration in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, the findings of this study highlight the need for tailored digital platforms that contains information about the educational system in the Netherlands and link them with local students to exchange information. However, it is undeniable that the degree of the socio-economic position of refugees in the Netherlands remains a vital variable in which refugees exercise their agency to use Digital technologies and interact with members of the host society. For example, some of the interviewed refugees interpreted (the lack of time) of their mentors as a kind of prejudice. This is mainly due to the relatively low socio-economic position of these refugees compared with locals, which make refugees feel inferior to their Dutch peers. However, this might be less visible online, which would encourage refugees to avoid face to face interaction with locals and compensate it online. Hence it is important to pay attention as refugees might use the strategy of 'moving instead of moving' in order to avoid any kind of prejudice. In this case, the fear is that ICTs might be isolating instead of connecting. For example, one of the research findings that can be linked to the 'moving' on social media is that the amount of time refugee students spend on social media is twice as much as of the Dutch students. To put it differently, more time spent on social media means much lesser time spent on socializing in person.

## ***5.2. Strength and Limitations***

One of the key strengths of this research lies in the background of the researcher, who is a Syrian refugee living and studying in the Netherlands since five years. As half of the participants were Syrian refugees, the researcher was able to function to a certain extent as an insider researcher. Previous studies highlighted the significance of insider's shared identity and knowledge in the process of interviewing along with the insider's awareness of taboos (Shah, 2004).

Another key strength of this research lies in the use of a holistic case-study which enabled exploring the research problem in its natural setting (Benbasat et al., 1987). In the



context of this research, the case study allowed the researcher to evaluate the UAF mentoring program, explore the complex interaction between mentors and mentees and develop a theory (Yin, 2003; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

On the other hand, this research has several limitations. The first is related to the research sample, which contained a heterogeneous population. Even though the heterogeneous sample enabled selecting participants from different cultural backgrounds in order to compare their digital behavior, there are challenges in using heterogeneous sample (Robinson, 2014). For instance, the diversity of data made it difficult to generate meaningful cross-case themes during the analysis (Robinson, 2014). Hence, finding common themes between refugee and Dutch students was a matter of compromising and eventually choosing themes that are more relevant to the research question rather than choosing the prominent themes from the interviews. Another limitation of the research is related to the small size of the sample. Focusing on one Afghan and six Syrian refugees do not allow for generalizations of the results to the entire refugees' community in the Netherlands.

Finally, this study is limited due to its focus on one aspect of integration, which is education. Considering the effects of social media use for other domains of integration (i.e., employment, health, and housing) would definitely support the argument that position social media as a key factor of integration and social inclusion into the host society.

### ***5.3. Future research***

As mentioned in the limitations, interviewing two nationalities with refugee backgrounds do not allow for generalization of the findings. Thus, future research might include various demographic groups of refugees, e.g., Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, etc. Comparing the digital behavior of different cultures will enable more generalizability.

Future research might also widen the scope of this research by examining the role of digital technologies in supporting the employment of refugees in the Netherlands. More specifically, the last few years witnessed the emergence of many initiatives to foster refugees' digital livelihoods. Hence, analyzing the role of coding programs on refugees' employment, for example, might be an interesting area of investigation, especially for policy makers.

Finally, digital privacy might influence the way refugees consume and use social media. But what are the perceptions of refugees on social media privacy and trust in their host and home

countries? Hence, future research is necessary to investigate perceptions of refugees concerning digital privacy on social media, along with trust and surveillance.

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## **7. APPENDICES**

### **7.1. Appendix A**

#### **CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH**

#### **FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:**

Researcher name: Alaa Khalifeh

Address: Schermerhoek 64, Capella a/d Ijssel

Email: 475785ak@student.eur.nl

Tell: 0031 61 765 2500

#### **DESCRIPTION**

You are invited to participate in a research about the role of ICTS and digital technologies in the integration of refugees through education. The purpose of the study is to understand how digital technologies especially social media affects the integration process of refugees pursuing higher education into Dutch society.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed.

In general terms,

- The questions of the interview will be related to your experiences and interactions with your mentors/mentees.
- My observations will focus on your interactions with your mentors/mentees and how the UAF mentoring program plays a role in your lives.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape to record the interview.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

#### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

- A.** As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information not in

the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by [measures that will be taken: pseudonym, general identification only mentioning age and gender, etc.].

**B.** I am aware that the possibility of identifying the people who participate in this study may involve risks for the participant's reputation, help, social relations, etc. For that reason—unless you prefer to be identified fully (first name, last name, occupation, etc.)—I will not keep any information that may lead to the identification of those involved in the study. I will only use pseudonyms to identify participants.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

### **TIME INVOLVEMENT**

Your participation in this research will take approximately 80 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

### **PAYMENTS**

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

### **PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

### **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish— Dr. Amanda Paz Alencar  
Tel: +31 10 408 8629 | +31 631938282 | email: [pazalencar@eshcc.eur.nl](mailto:pazalencar@eshcc.eur.nl)

### **SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM**

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name                                      Signature                                      Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name                                      Signature                                      Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

## ***7.2. Appendix B***

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE- Mentees**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Explaining the aim of the research to the participants.
2. Informing participants about the timeframe of the interviews: 45 – 60 minutes.
3. Informing participants about their rights, anticipated risks and benefits.
4. Requesting to record the interview.
5. Participants sign the informed consent form or give oral consent.

#### **1. Introductory questions**

1. Do you have a preferred name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. Where do you live in the Netherlands?
5. How long have you been living in the Netherlands?
6. What did you do before you came to the Netherlands?
7. What is your educational background?
- 8- Do you speak Dutch? Which level?
- 9- Do you speak other languages?

#### **2. Education and UAF mentoring program**

1. How did you join the UAF?

2. Now that you are doing a preparatory program of UAF to get access to higher education, can you tell me about this program?
3. How did you learn about the preparatory program of UAF?
4. Do you have a Dutch mentor?
  1. How do you communicate with her/him?
  2. How often do you meet?
  3. Are you connected on Facebook or LinkedIn?
  4. How important or not is your mentor in your social life?
  5. How important or not is the mentor in your education process?
  6. What is the impact of the programme on your social and educational life and life in the Netherlands in general?
  7. Do you recommend it and talk about it before your mates?
5. Does social media help you to communicate with colleagues or friends in general?

### **3. Integration and social networks**

1. Do you have friends from different nationalities?
2. Where do you meet your friends?
3. What does integration mean to you?
4. How do you communicate with your family and friends in your home country?
5. Do you prefer to have Dutch friends or friends from your own nationality? Why?
6. How does social networking contribute to your adaptation in the Netherlands?
7. What is the difference between social networking in your country of origin and here?
8. What do you do to expand your social and professional network in the Netherlands?

### **4. Importance of social media technologies for social connection and access to education**

1. Are you active on social media? (If the answer is no ask why not)
  1. How many hours per day do you spend on social media?
  2. Which social media platform is the most important for you? And why?
  3. Why do you use social media?
2. Are you a member of social networking groups? Which one?
3. To what extent does social media help you get information about education?



1. Does social media help you to connect with others in the university?
2. How does social media contribute to your Dutch learning?
3. In your opinion how credible is the information that you get from social media networks?

Which ones? Can you elaborate?

## **5. Aspirations**

1. What are your aspirations and plans for the next few years?
2. What level of education you would like to reach? For example bachelor, Master, PhD..?

## **7.3. Appendix C**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE - Mentors**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Explaining the aim of the research to the participants.
2. Informing participants about the timeframe of the interviews: 45 – 60 minutes.
3. Informing participants about their rights, anticipated risks and benefits.
4. Requesting to record the interview.
5. Participants sign the informed consent form or give oral consent.

#### **1. Introductory questions**

1. Do you have a preferred name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. Where do you live in the Netherlands?
5. Are you a student? If so, at which university? What do you study?
6. What do you like about your study?
- 7- How many languages do you speak?
- 8- Do you have a job?
- 9- Do you have hobbies?

#### **2. UAF mentoring program**

1. What do you know about the UAF?
2. Are you member of the UAF mentoring program?

3. How did you learn about the mentoring program?
4. Why did you become a mentor?
5. What is the aim of the UAF mentoring program?
6. From which country is your mentee?
7. How often do you meet your mentee?
8. What kind of study is your mentee doing?
9. What do you suggest on UAF to make this program more beneficial?
10. Have you received training to become a mentor

### **3. The role of social support and networks in the context of integration**

1. Do you have friends from different nationalities?
2. Where do you meet your mentee?
3. What do you do when your mentee is stuck or face problems with his/her study?
4. How do you describe your relation with your mentee? Formal/informal?
5. Can you tell me about something you have done with your mentee outside university?
6. How do you describe your knowledge about refugees before you became a mentor?
7. Did your knowledge about refugees changed after you became a mentor?
8. What does integration mean to you?
9. In your opinion to what extent is your mentee integrated into the Dutch society?
10. What do you do to support your mentee?
11. What did you learn from your interaction with your mentee?
12. How do you communicate with your mentee?
13. Have you introduced your mentee to members of your family or friends of yours?

### **4. Importance of social media technologies for social connection and access to education**

1. Are you active on social media? (If the answer is no ask why not)
2. Are you member of social networking groups? Which one?
3. Are you connected with your mentee on Facebook or LinkedIn or other platforms?
4. How many hours per day do you spend on social media?
5. Which social media platform is the most important for you? And why?
6. Why do you use social media?
7. To what extent does social media help you in your education?
8. Does social media help you connecting with your mentee and others in the university?

9. How does social media contribute to your knowledge about other cultures?
10. In your opinion how credible is the information that you get from social media networks?  
Which ones? Can you elaborate?

### **5. Aspirations**

1. What are your aspirations and plans for the next few years?
2. What level of education you would like to reach? For example bachelor, Master, PhD?  
Why?