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**DESCRIBING THE PHENOMENON OF "LIVING AS A REFUGEE"
AMONG SYRIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENT REFUGEES**

BY

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*In memory of my beloved father, whom I lost due to cancer;
and my dearly beloved sister, whom I lost due to COVID-19.*

*&
Dedicated to those around the world who have faced persecution and been forced to leave
their homeland.*



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With love and respect,

ÖZET

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Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencisi mültecilerin mülteci geçmişleri ve "bir mülteci olma" olgusuyla ilgili deneyimlerine odaklanmıştır. Amacı, mültecilerin göç deneyimleri, kültürel uyum süreçleri ve yerel toplum üyeleri ile etkileşimleri sırasında karşılaştıkları zorlukları kapsamlı bir şekilde anlamak ve bu deneyimlere nasıl tepki verdiklerini, hangi stratejileri kullandıklarını ve bu deneyimlerden nasıl faydalandıklarını belirlemektir. Mülteci deneyimlerini öznel açıklamaları üzerinden anlamak için bir fenomenolojik yaklaşım tercih edilmiştir. Bu amaçla, 18 yaş ve üzeri 10 üniversite öğrencisiyle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmeler 25-45 dakika arasında sürmüştür ($Ort.=32.52, \pm 8.08$). Katılımcılar üniversite mülteci öğrenci topluluklarından kar topu örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenmiştir. Çalışmanın analizinde tematik analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. İlk olarak, ses kayıtları yazıya geçirilmiş ve ortaya çıkan metinler tekrar tekrar okunmuştur. Daha sonra kodlama işlemi gerçekleştirilmiş ve alt temalar ile ana temalar ortaya çıkmıştır. Temaların oluşturulmasının ardından, revizyon gerektiren bölümleri tartışmak için iki uzmana danışılmıştır. Daha fazla okuma sonrasında temalar son halini almıştır. Yapılan analizlerin sonucunda, dokuz temel tema belirlenmiştir. Bu temalar şunlardır: (1) "İyi bir yaşam süremedik"- Göçün zorlukları, (2) "Sadece hayatta kalmak için mücadele," (3) Türkçeyi anlamamak günlük yaşamı zorlaştırıyor, (4) Suriyelilere karşı yabancı düşmanlığı, (5) Suriyeli kimliğini gizleme: Ayrımcılığa karşı kendini koruma, (6) "Hapishanedeymişim gibi"- Hükümet politikalarının ve hukuk sistemlerinin etkileri, (7) Mültecilerin gelecek hedefleri, (8) Zorlayıcı deneyimlerle başa çıkma yollarını bulma ve (9) zorlayıcı deneyimlere karşı güçlenme ve eylemlilik. Oluşturulan temalar var olan literatür, strength-based (güç temelli) ve the cycle of mutual constitution (karşılıklı oluşum) yaklaşımları çerçevesinde tartışılmıştır. Bu çalışma, literatürdeki var olan temaları netleştirmiş ve daha önce üzerine gidilmemiş bazı temaları gün yüzüne çıkarmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mülteci, deneyim, fenomenoloji, güç temelli yaklaşım, karşılıklı oluşum döngüsü.

ABSTRACT

TEKELİ, Muhammed Refik. Describing the Phenomenon of "Living as a Refugee" among Syrian University Student Refugees. Başkent University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master with Thesis in Social Psychology, 2023.

This study focused on university student refugees' experiences related to their refugee background and the phenomenon of "being a refugee." Its objective was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by refugees during their migration experiences, acculturation processes, and interactions with local society members. Additionally, it aimed to determine their reactions to these experiences, the strategies they employed, and the benefits they derived from them. A phenomenological approach was chosen to understand refugee experiences through their subjective accounts. To achieve this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 university students aged 18 and above. The interviews lasted between 25-45 minutes ($M=32.52, \pm 8.08$). Participants were identified through snowball sampling from university refugee student communities. Thematic analysis was employed in the study's analysis process. Initially, audio recordings were transcribed, and resulting texts were repeatedly read. Subsequently, coding was performed, and sub-themes and overarching themes emerged. After the generation of themes, two experts were consulted to discuss sections requiring revision. Following further readings, the themes reached their final form. As a result of the analyses, nine fundamental themes were identified. These themes are as follows: (1) "We couldn't live a good life" - The challenges of migration, (2) "Struggling just to survive," (3) Not understanding Turkish makes daily life a struggle, (4) Xenophobia towards Syrians, (5) Hiding Syrian identity: Protecting oneself against discrimination, (6) It's like I'm in prison" - Effects of government policies and legal systems, (7) The future aspirations of refugees, (8) Finding ways to cope with challenging experiences, and (9) strength or agency in the face of challenging experiences. The generated themes were discussed within the framework of strength-based approaches and the cycle of mutual constitution, drawing upon existing literature.

Keywords: Refugee, experience, phenomenology, strength-based approach, cycle of mutual constitution.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
ÖZET	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Definitions.....	2
1.2. Theoretical Baseline: Strength-based Approaches and The Cycle Of Mutual Constitution	2
1.3. Refugee Situation in Türkiye	6
1.4. Impact of Migration on Refugees	7
1.5. Migration and Resettlement.....	8
1.5.1. Xenophobia	9
1.5.2. Discrimination	10
1.5.3. Language barrier.....	10
1.5.4. Reinterpretation of the self	11
1.5.5. Financial and occupational problems.....	12
1.5.6. Refugee label.....	12
1.5.7. Being separated from family	13
1.5.8. Mental health	13
1.6. Positive Aspects of Migration	14
1.6.1. Coping mechanisms and resilience	14
1.6.2. Post traumatic growth	15
1.7. Related Studies in Türkiye.....	15

1.8. Purpose and Research Questions	17
2. METHOD	19
2.1. Design and Working Group.....	19
2.2. Material.....	21
2.2.1. Semi-structured interviews.....	21
2.2.2. Sociodemographic questionnaire	21
2.2.3. Informed consent form	21
2.3. Procedure.....	21
2.4. Analysis	22
2.5. Validity and Reliability.....	23
2.6. Reflexivity	23
3. RESULTS.....	26
3.1. Theme 1: " <i>We couldn't live a good life</i> "- The challenges of migration	29
3.1.1. Adjusting to a different country/culture	30
3.1.2. Leaving your own country.....	30
3.1.3. Being forced to work	31
3.2. Theme 2: " <i>Struggling just to survive.</i> "	32
3.2.1. " <i>First and foremost, we are humans</i> "- Right to flee from war.....	33
3.2.2. Living alone and separated.....	34
3.2.3. Inaction (not defending oneself / not retaliating)	35
3.2.4. Fear of being sent back	35
3.2.5. Living with insecurity due to refugee identity	36
3.2.5.1. Exposure to physical violence and insults	37
3.2.5.2. Increase in anti-refugee rhetoric	38
3.2.5.3. Fear of harm / concerns for personal safety.....	39
3.2.5.4. Fear of mistreatment	40
3.2.6. Living with prejudices	41

3.2.6.1. Misconception of easy and free access to university	42
3.2.6.2. Misconception of receiving a lot of aid from the government	42
3.2.6.3. Misconception that "Esad will give money and start businesses for returnees"	42
3.2.8. Being seen as responsible for the war / accusatory attitudes	43
3.2.9. Negative impact of social media	43
3.3. Theme 3: Not Understanding Turkish Makes Daily Life Difficult	44
3.3.1. Desire to drop out of school.....	45
3.3.2. Decline in academic performance	46
3.3.3. Struggles in government institutions	47
3.3.4. Delay in learning Turkish.....	48
3.3.4.1. Receiving education in Arabic schools.....	48
3.3.4.2. Preference for Arabic-speaking regions	48
3.4. Theme 4: Xenophobia Towards Syrians.....	49
3.4.1. "Are you Syrian?" - Their only guilt is being Syrian!	49
3.4.2. Xenophobia in the neighborhood.....	51
3.4.3. Xenophobia in the educational environment	52
3.4.3.1. Attitudes of teachers/academics	52
3.4.3.2. Attitudes of classmates	54
3.4.6. Xenophobia among government officials.....	55
3.5. Theme 5: Hiding Syrian Identity -Protecting Oneself Against Discrimination	56
3.5.1. "No Arabic!" - Not speaking Arabic within the community	56
3.5.2. "I'm from Mardin"- Not revealing that you're Syrian	58
3.5.3. Trying to dress/look like a Turk	58
3.5.4. "Sharp as a knife glances" - Being subjected to accusatory and hostile looks	59
3.5.5. Desire not to be a refugee and to have citizenship	59

3.6. Theme 6: " <i>I feel like I'm in prison</i> " - Effects of Government Policies and Legal Systems.....	60
3.6.1. Restrictions on the right to travel	60
3.6.2. Inability to work in public institutions.....	62
3.6.3. Difficulty in acquiring Turkish citizenship	62
3.6.4. High fees in higher education	63
3.7. Theme 7: The Future Aspirations of Refugees.....	63
3.7.1. " <i>Always dark</i> " – Hopelessness about the future.....	64
3.7.2. " <i>There is light somewhere</i> " – Being hopeful about the future	65
3.8. Theme 8: Finding Ways to Cope with Challenging Experiences	66
3.8.1. Family support.....	67
3.8.2. Support from Turkish teachers/academics.....	68
3.8.3. Support from Turkish friends/neighbors.....	69
3.8.4. Support from faith	70
3.9. Theme 9: Strength or Agency in the Face of Challenging Experiences	71
3.9.1. Empowerment through language learning	71
3.9.2. Getting to know people - Being able to distinguish who might cause harm.....	72
3.9.3. " <i>Swimming against the current</i> " - Resisting difficulties, putting in more effort	73
3.9.4. Learning to advocate for one's rights.....	74
3.9.5. Taking on responsibilities at a young age	75
4. DISCUSSION.....	77
4.1. Discussion by themes	78
4.2. Discussion by The Mutual Cycle of Culture.....	85
4.3. Research's Contribution, Implications, and Limitations	88
4.4. Suggestions.....	90
5. CONCLUSION	92
REFERENCES	93

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX 2: DEMOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FORM

APPENDIX 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FORM

APPENDIX 4: ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

APPENDIX 5: MIND MAP OF THE THEMES AND SUBTHEMES



LIST OF TABLES

	Pages
Table 2.1 Participant Information Table	20
Table 3.1 Master table of themes and sub-themes.....	26



LIST OF FIGURES

	Pages
Figure 1.1 The Mutual Constitution of Cultures and Selves.....	5



1. INTRODUCTION

Migration terminology in Türkiye contains interchangeable use of the terms such as "migrant", "refugee", "asylum-seeker" for the migrants and, "international protection" and "temporary protection status" for migrants' statuses. This study prefers to use the term "forcibly displaced persons" and the term "refugee" interchangeably.

In this study, I focused university student refugees' experiences regarding their refugee background. It includes i) their experiences regarding "being a refugee" (inc. interaction with the locals), ii) their perceptions of themselves (if they see themselves as strong, capable, victim, weak etc.), iii) their coping mechanisms and iv) their future orientation (how do they describe their future).

The primary research question of this qualitative study was formulated as follows: "How refugees define themselves and their experiences? in general. Some complementary research questions were created as "What are the strengths/ coping mechanisms of refugees?", "Do refugees use weak victim or strong agent narratives?", "What are their experiences regarding the interaction with locals?". These questions seek to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges refugees face during their migration experiences, acculturation processes, and interaction with the local society, as well as to determine how they react to these experiences, what strategies they employ, and what benefits they derive from their experiences.

To do so, I implemented ten semi-structured interviews with university students' refugees in Türkiye. I reached the participants with my personal contacts using snowball sampling method. While implementing interviews, analyzing and interpreting the qualitative data so called the strength-based approach, and the cycle of mutual constitution were taken as the theoretical base.

In the following parts of the thesis, I will mention the definitions regarding the thesis topic and then theoretical background of the thesis which is so called the strength-based approach and the cycle of mutual constitution. Afterwards refugee situation in Türkiye and related studies realized on refugees will be introduced.

1.1. Definitions

Migration is defined as the temporary or permanent movement of the population from one region to another, either individually or collectively (Kofman, 2000; Toros, 2008). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), forced migration is "A migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion" (Glossary on Migration, 2019). Additionally, it is regarded useful to define the term 'refugee'. In addition to the general refugee definition in Article 1(2) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1969 Convention of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) defines a refugee in Glossary on Migration (2019) as

"A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (...)".

It can be said that these two concepts have similar connotations, but compelled displacement is used in a broader context. In the most general sense, the causes of migrations (compulsory, voluntary), the type according to the characteristics of the migrant (individual, mass), the naming due to the movement of the migration (internal migration, international migration), and the statuses brought by political and legal distinctions (immigrant, refugee, temporary protection, transit migrant) vary. The reasons for migrations are compulsory due to natural events (earthquake, drought), social events (war, internal conflicts) and political pressures; and voluntary due to concerns like economic reasons, educational opportunities, and marriages (Tümertekin and Özgüç, 2004; William, 1958). It is also possible to classify these reasons internally as push (avoided) and pull (desired) factors.

According to The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the end of 2022, 108.4 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide. 62.5 million of this amount is internally displaced and 35.3 millions are refugees (UNHCR, 2023). According to IOM (2020) more than 6 million people were displaced both internally and externally after the crisis in Syria; also, UNCHR (2023) describe it as refugee people who are need for international protection.

1.2. Theoretical Baseline: Strength-based Approaches and The Cycle of Mutual Constitution

Individuals' systemically marginalized identities have historically been seen in different studies in psychology as obstacles to achievement and wellbeing (Martin et al.,

2018). Systemically marginalized identities can be refugees, people who diagnosed with mental diseases, people in color and people with fewer opportunities (e.g., low socio-economic status). The strength-based approach is a theoretical framework employed to comprehend and analyze individuals who possess identities that are systematically excluded within society (Silverman et al., 2023). This acknowledges the various manners in which individuals systemically marginalized identities and corresponding experiences can provide advantages for both them and their society (Silverman et al., 2023).

Before continuing with the strength-based approach, it is necessary to understand what deficit-based approach is. The deficit-based approach dates back to phrenology or intelligence quotient (IQ) tests which aim to differentiate people, especially between privileged and systemically marginalized groups, based upon some characteristics (i.e., André, 2018; Center for the History of Psychology, 2021). Inevitably, this led to the blaming of the excluded people for their so-called "biological predisposition". As noted by Silverman and colleagues (2023), the results of these efforts caused several discriminative actions and genocides all over the world. Therefore, the deficit-based approach supports documenting structural inequality-related vulnerabilities while ignoring the variety of experiences and ways of being among systemically excluded individuals (Silverman et al., 2023). As stated by Silverman and colleagues (2023), there are three main strength-based approach's:

Universal strength approach: This is a perspective that concentrates on the positive qualities that are inherent in all individuals. It emphasizes "signature strengths" all people have such as kindness, honesty and bravery which aid individuals during difficult times in their lives.

The difference-as-strength approach: Different than universal strength approach, this approach is specifically focus on systemically marginalized identities and sees their differences as strength as comparison with privileged people. It attributes these experiences importance both for individuals and institutions. Also, it emphasizes societal structures which are built to reward the privileged people and sustain the situation both sides are in.

The identity-specific strengths approach: This approach characterizes the strength of systemically marginalized identities as a direct factor of their identity/ background, without a need of comparison with privileged people. This approach acknowledges that individuals with systemically marginalized identities and cultures possess inherent assets that may be utilized to foster their overall well-being and thriving. It is also called as "background-specific strength" (see Hernandez et al., 2021). This approach can be identified as "most direct counter-narrative to deficit-based ideologies".

Especially speaking of the identity-specific strengths approach, its contribution to psychology should be mentioned. The first thing is its opposition to deficit-based ideologies which occupies very large place in psychology and in general in the society. Secondly, it emphasizes that the identities or cultures of systemically marginalized peoples not deficient; on the contrary, they are the sources of strength which will aid them through difficult experiences. Thirdly, this approach provides psychologist and social scientists an alternative to understand the meaning and consequences of systematically marginalization apart from oppression and discrimination. Fourth, it can guide systematically marginalized people to understand their identities better. Lastly, the results of recent studies (see Bauer et al., 2021; Bauer, Job et al., 2023; Bauer, Walton et al., 2023) which applies the identity-specific strengths approach are promising.

In the following paragraphs, the cycle of mutual constitution (Markus and Kitayama, 2010) will be assessed as a complimentary idea to strength-based approaches. The cycle of mutual constitution is basically mutual completion of cultures and selves each other, which means they define and build upon each other. This indicates that the self is molded by the sociocultural environment in which it is immersed, and that the self, in turn, reflects and reinforces the patterns that are found in the sociocultural context. The cycle is dynamic since both culture and the individual are always evolving.

When Markus and Kitayama (2010) examine the research on self and culture, they convey that these studies have contributed to psychology through two fundamental points. The first of these is that these studies have renewed and expanded psychology's understanding of self, identity, or agency. Agency is the most general or global term and signifies acting in the world. Thus, they indicate that the experience is shaped socioculturally and reflects the individual's relationship with the world, which is the source of this shaping. Secondly, these studies emphasize the fact that one cannot separate the individual from their socio-cultural context. They even highlight that these contexts are built upon each other.

Studies on self and culture focus on how the world, context, or sociocultural systems in which people live shape psychological processes, rather than merely considering culture as human societies. At this point, it is essential to carefully examine Markus and Kitayama's (1994) approach, *"The Mutual Constitution of Cultures and Selves"*. Looking at the Figure 1, it can be seen that self and socio-cultural structure continuously shape each other. In this figure, four main clusters can be seen as:

Self: The "self" refers to an individual's identity, personality, beliefs, values, and sense of who they are. It encompasses an individual's psychological and emotional makeup.

In that context, the self is not viewed as a fixed or static entity. Instead, it is considered dynamic and continually evolving based on interactions with one's cultural context.

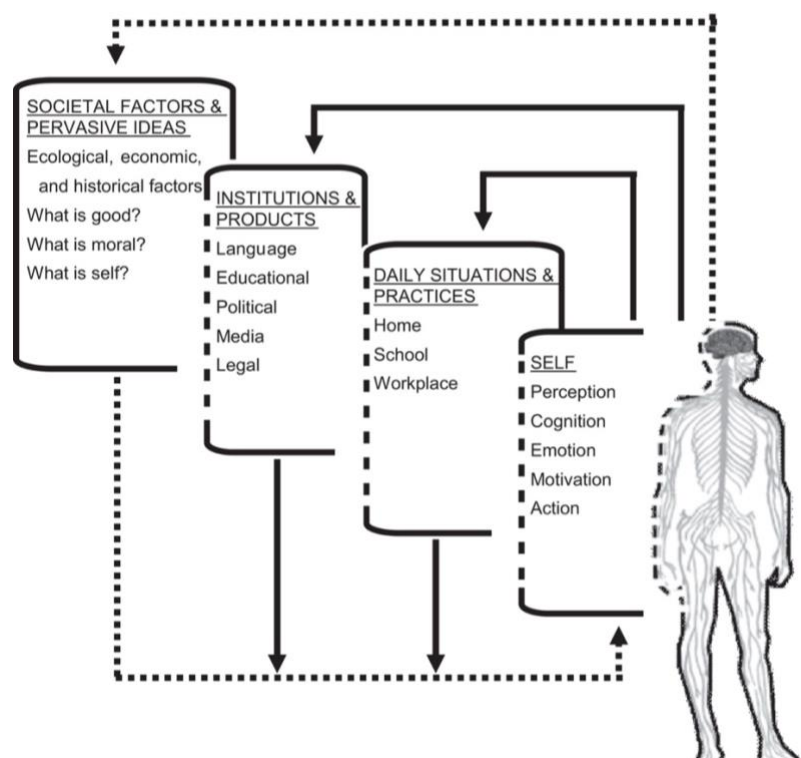
Daily Situations & Practices: Daily situations and practices refer to the routines, behaviors, and activities that individuals engage in as they go about their daily lives. These include things like how people dress, what they eat, how they communicate, and how they engage with others in their community or society.

Institutions & Products: Institutions are formal organizations or systems within a society that shape social norms, rules, and behaviors. Examples include schools, governments, religious institutions, and corporations. Products, in this context, refer to the tangible and intangible cultural artifacts and commodities produced by these institutions, such as laws, media content, education curricula, and consumer goods.

Societal Factors & Pervasive Ideas: Societal factors encompass the broader social, economic, political, and historical forces that influence the culture of a society. These factors include economic systems, power structures, and historical events. Pervasive ideas represent the dominant ideologies, beliefs, and narratives that shape a culture's collective consciousness. These ideas may include notions of gender, race, class, and morality.

Figure 1.1

The Mutual Constitution of Cultures and Selves (from Markus & Kitayama, 2010)



In the past, like the deficit-focused approaches, studies on culture and the self have mostly focused on middle-class North Americans. This has led scholars to collect information about one type of person, middle-class North American and Western European contexts, no matter how vast the body of knowledge (Markus et al., 1997). It can be clearly stated that the set of psychological dispositions that have been uncovered does not describe a universal human being (Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

Although the cycle of mutual constitution between culture and self are not yet well-understood with the theoretical and empirical studies conducted, these studies play a role in changing psychology's approach to understanding the individual. At this point, psychologists and scientists are beginning to think that they cannot develop a comprehensive understanding of human psychology by focusing solely on the individual. This change is increasingly leaning towards the relationship between culture and self, examining the point where humans create cultures and are then shaped by them.

In conclusion, psychological research has moved from deficit-focused to strength-based methods. Contemporary frameworks, especially strength-based ones, highlight systemically excluded identities' strengths and advantages, giving a new perspective on deficiency narratives. The key insight is that cultural and societal interactions affect individual experiences and identities, which cannot be universally defined or comprehended. Culture and self are influenced and impacted by each other in a complex interaction. Therefore, in this study, my focus changed from an individual-centric approach to one that considers cultural and societal circumstances for a more comprehensive understanding of refugee experiences. I saw the philosophy under strength-based approaches and cycle of mutual constitution complementary and could be combined in a study. As much as I wanted to reveal the strengths of refugees in this study, I am aware that this is not a process without social interaction. For this reason, in addition to the refugees' own experiences, I tried to reveal how the society they live in shapes these experiences positively or negatively.

1.3. Refugee Situation in Türkiye

In this part, I will explain the refugee situation in Türkiye including historical background, and interaction between refugees and local society. This part aims to develop a better understanding regarding the theme of the thesis.

Türkiye has been intensively dealing with forced mass migration and refugee issues since 2011, the beginning of the civil war in Syria. Türkiye continues to host the world's

largest refugee population, including over 3.6 million Syrians (UNHCR, 2023). Looking at the number of migrants in Türkiye through the data of the Directorate General of Migration Management (GIGM), it is seen that there are 3,298,817 registered Syrian migrants under temporary protection status as of 2023 August. Considering the high number of refugees in Türkiye, studies on interaction of refugees with local society members become more important to resolve the problems which is occurred, or which can be occurred.

At this point, Murat Erdoğan's studies called *Syrians barometer* over several years have important results which must be taken into consideration (Erdoğan, 2022). Syrian perceptions of cultural similarities between Turks and Syrians have changed significantly over time. In 2017, 56.8 percent of Syrians believed the two cultures were similar. This increased to 57.1% in 2019. In 2021, however, only 41.4% of respondents held this opinion, a significant decline. By the end of 2021, this belief has fallen to an astounding 24.7% (Erdoğan, 2022).

From a different perspective, in 2017, 23.9% of Syrians believed that they were distinct from Turks. This percentage decreased marginally to 21.9% in 2019, before increasing to 24.3% in 2020 and 29.1% in 2021. Notably, 2021 was the first year in which more Syrians perceived their culture to be dissimilar from Turkish culture (Erdoğan, 2022). This change over five years can be identified as radical; understanding these changes nature is becoming crucially important.

1.4. Impact of Migration on Refugees

In a recent content analysis study conducted by Yoon and others (2023), encompassing research conducted over the past 31 years pertaining to refugees, a total of 323 empirical studies were examined. Their primary findings revealed that individuals who are university-educated, young, and English-speaking predominantly featured in these studies. Additionally, it was observed that the most prevalent themes of investigation were acculturation and enculturation. However, it was noted that after the year 2000, issues related to racism and discrimination started to gain prominence.

In previous studies, it has been emphasized that the use of quantitative methods in refugee studies has brought with it several limitations (see Miller & Rasco, 2004; Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). To gain a better understanding of refugee experiences, there is a need for a detailed understanding of the cultural, economic, and political contexts (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). Therefore, qualitative studies provide a suitable foundation for the comprehensive exploration of this field.

The presence literature reveals that the majority of studies have been conducted using quantitative approaches. In the realm of refugee studies, most research consists of deficit-focused studies, which involve the measurement of predetermined variables on refugee samples (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017).

1.5. Migration and Resettlement

Migration is a bilateral phenomenon that impacts both the host country and the migrating individuals economically, culturally, and socially (Karakaya, 2020). Karasu (2018) has asserted that migration affects societal identity formation, lifestyle, and urban development. Migration, as noted by Castles and Miller (2008), influences the entire community in both the sending and receiving countries.

During the migration process, individuals often struggle to access food and clothing, face the risk of infection with various diseases and exploitation by human traffickers (Işık, 2019). The perilous routes of migration expose individuals to the risks of drowning, exposure to gunfire, physical violence inflicted by human traffickers, and adverse life events, all of which can subsequently impact their psychological well-being (Çırakoğlu & Kahil, 2019).

Refugee resettlement is described as a stressful and challenging experience (Goodman et al., 2017). It is known that refugees encounter a wide range of issues during their settlement process. These problems include unemployment, economic difficulties, social integration issues, exclusion, and xenophobia (see Alam & Asef, 2021; Buz & Dikmen, 2020; Sousa et al., 2023). Masarik and colleagues (2022) emphasize that language acquisition is the primary source of stress during the resettlement process. This is supported by Kömürcü and colleagues (2011) study, which underscores that refugees often live in a post-migration "survival mode," where immediate concerns such as providing for their children take precedence (Sousa et al., 2023).

Recent studies indicate that refugees experience loneliness and despair, struggle to obtain assistance from the government, feel anxiety and fear for those left behind, endure poverty, fear of deportation, and face difficulties in communication (Işık, 2019). Moreover, refugees living in urban areas, in particular, are often compelled to work in poor conditions (Işık, 2019).

Furthermore, studies suggest that men, women, and children are affected differently by migration and its subsequent consequences. Women migrants are reported to have inadequate coping mechanisms for dealing with stress (Topçu, 2006), experience nutrition problems, and reduce their physical activities (Baş et al., 2017). Türkleş and colleagues'

(2013) study conducted in Mersin highlights that women migrants suffer more negative psychological effects compared to men and encounter difficulties in emotional responses.

Among migrant children, a higher likelihood of psychopathology compared to their parents and non-migrant peers has been identified (Kesebir, 2011). Adolescents who migrate may exhibit school dropout, engagement in criminal activities, substance use, and suicidal tendencies (Kaya & Hiçdurmaz, 2017). Additionally, it has been noted that parents bear additional responsibilities and stress in protecting their children and preventing the possible harm during the migration and resettlement period (Akesson & Sousa, 2020).

The entire migration processes of refugees are influenced by various variables. These variables include socio-demographic factors (such as age, gender, marital status), the trauma of pre-migration experiences and its intensity, challenges encountered during migration and re-settlement, the presence of social integration and support mechanisms, among others (see Bhugra & Gupta, 2011; Yılmaz Zambak, 2021).

The following section of the text will delve into the challenges faced by refugees in their host countries after migration, which include xenophobia, language barriers, reinterpretation of self, unemployment and economic issues, labeling, separation from family, and mental health problems.

1.5.1. Xenophobia

Xenophobia originates from two Greek words: "Xenos" (foreigner) and "Phobos" (fear) (etymonline.com, Online Etymology Dictionary). It is used to express the fear or hatred directed towards a foreign or unfamiliar person. Hate speech, hostile attitudes and behaviors, violence, and various forms of abuse can all be the result of this process (Ojedokun, 2015).

The belief that things would improve with the advancement of ages has not progressed in parallel. While legal slavery no longer exists in the world, we can still say that xenophobia and racism persist and are even on the rise (Alam & Asef, 2021). A recent example of this is the tendency in the United States to exclude many groups, including Black people, Muslims, and Mexicans, from the concept of "real America" (Head 2018). In the past weeks (starting on October 7, 2023), the approach of the United States towards Israel's genocide against Gaza confirms its history.

Alam and Asef (2021) have studied the impact of xenophobia and anti-refugee attitudes towards refugees during the Trump era. It is observed that Trump's preference for a strict anti-refugee discourse and concrete actions (such as building a wall on the Mexican border) increased hate crimes in America by 21% (Alam & Asef, 2021). This is a clear

example of how political discourse, and the attitudes of a country's leaders can affect the people living in that country or region.

1.5.2. Discrimination

Discrimination is classically defined by Goffman (1990) as subjecting an individual or a group to unfavorable treatment based on their religion, gender, religious group, gender identity, nationality, socioeconomic status, age, and race. Discrimination, which can also be described as an "us" versus "them" division, may stem from biases, the presence of multiple identities leading to the emergence of dominant and subordinate groups (with one group perceiving itself as superior to the other), and political views such as nationalism (see Sumner 2013; Vignoles 2011).

In countries like Türkiye, which is popular destinations for immigrants, the dominant culture and its group members may perceive refugees as a threat to their country, identity, economy, and comfort zones, leading to discrimination, exclusion, and stigmatization (Hernandez et al., 2010). Considering that most of the participants in this study spent their childhood in Türkiye, it can be assumed that they experienced exclusion and discrimination both in childhood and early adulthood. Numerous studies indicate that refugee children and youth frequently experience discrimination and exclusion (see Brabant et al., 2016; Demir & Özgül, 2019; Hajisoteriou et al., 2017).

There are numerous studies demonstrating that refugees face discrimination and exclusion for various reasons, including their clothing and appearance (Demir & Özgül, 2019; Kumar, 2019), their accents, skills, and proficiency in the host country's language (Baiser & Hou, 2016; Haffeejee, 2015; Uptin et al., 2013), their races, nationalities, and cultures (Guo et al., 2019; Ziaian et al., 2018).

Furthermore, these forms of exclusion and prejudice can also manifest in the environment of university education, resulting in negative outcomes for refugee students, such as their inability to seek help when needed, a decline in academic achievements, and disruption of their social integration processes (Şahin & Çelik, 2020).

1.5.3. Language barrier

Language barrier is a recurring and significant issue that many studies have identified as the primary challenge faced by refugees (see Earnest et al., 2015; Torun et al., 2018; Yılmaz Zambak, 2021). It is characterized by refugees not understanding the language of the host country, lacking the communication skills necessary to handle their daily routines and perform tasks in that country (Earnest et al., 2015).

Başar and colleagues (2018) emphasized in their study that refugees face difficulties in class due to their inability to understand what is spoken in the classroom, leading these students to isolate themselves from the class. The language barrier is noted as the first and most significant problem students experience in schools. Additionally, students transitioning into the regular education process without receiving any language course struggle to benefit from lessons and experience a decline in their academic achievements due to their language limitations (Solak & Çelik, 2018). Furthermore, Er and Bayındır (2015) found that teachers also perceive themselves as inadequate in educating refugee students.

In many studies conducted in Türkiye, the language barrier has been identified as a factor affecting students' academic success, social integration, and school attendance (see Aydın & Kaya 2017; Çelik et al., 2023; Taştan & Çelik 2017). Additionally, a positive and supportive relationship between teachers and students has a positive impact on students' academic success and adaptation (Clark, 2017; Çelik et al., 2023). Moreover, it has been reported that due to the language barrier, refugees in Türkiye do not have sufficient access to healthcare services (Demir, 2019).

1.5.4. Reinterpretation of the self

Bartholomew and colleagues (2015) conducted a qualitative study with Karen refugees, and one of the key themes they generated is "redefined selfhood." In their research, refugees made self-assessments that they were inadequate, incapable, and worthless. The authors attributed this situation to both the experiences of war and adversity that refugees went through before becoming refugees and the treatment they encountered during the settlement period and in the camps (Bartholomew et al., 2015).

Maringe and colleagues (2017) noticed in their study that refugees were reluctant to participate in interviews. They attribute this reluctance to refugees' concerns about the possibility of their identities being identified by the countries they came from, their desire not to be known as refugees by their surroundings, and their wish to stay away from any potential threats. Another reason for this reluctance is that refugees are aware that disclosing their refugee status might subject them to various biases (e.g., being perceived as individuals who receive government support) (Mangan & Winter, 2016). In another study, participants expressed this situation as follows: "they never say this refugee did something good. Everything they say about refugees is bad..." (Morrice, 2013b, p. 663). Additionally, Mangan and Winter (2017) mentioned that refugees feel ashamed to admit that they are

refugees and therefore refrain from discussing their past. They also highlight that disclosing their refugee status becomes an additional source of stress for them.

1.5.5. Financial and occupational problems

Baranik and colleagues (2017) focused on the professional challenges experienced by refugee participants in their study. Their key findings revealed that refugee participants faced fundamental problems such as difficulty finding jobs, being employed at low wages, and their skills and abilities acquired in their home countries not being recognized in the countries where they lived as refugees. In a study conducted by Goodman and colleagues (2017), refugee women were reported to be constantly concerned about whether they would have enough income to support their families. Additionally, the study highlighted that women without legal documents often had to work as sex workers.

Bullinger and colleagues (2022) examined the impact of visualization on refugees' employment opportunities, which were limited due to employers' negative and prejudiced attitudes. They found that organizations working to place refugees in jobs could mitigate stigmatization through the methods they used. It is emphasized that not only employers' perceptions but also how the issue is framed is crucial in this regard.

Furthermore, these financial difficulties often compel refugee children to start working at a young age, drop out of school, or work while continuing their education (see Cinkir, 2015; Saritas et al. 2016). For boys, this often results in child labor, while for girls, it can lead to early marriages (Demir & Ozgul, 2019).

1.5.6. Refugee label

Ludwig (2013) has described refugee status as a "double-edged sword." Initially, the refugee label provides individuals with financial support and assistance, but over time, it can become a factor that hinders them from achieving sustainable economic conditions. Discriminatory attitudes from employers based on a person's refugee background can reduce their chances of finding employment. This situation is supported by the findings of Baranik and colleagues (2017).

In a study conducted by Groutsis and colleagues (2023), they focused on Bella, a banker who went from Syria to Australia as a refugee. As the title of the study, "I'm Not a Refugee Girl, Call Me Bella," suggests, it is evident that being a refugee is a label that can overshadow a person's professional competence, personality traits, and even their sense of self. In combating this, the agency of refugees plays a significant role.

1.5.7. Being separated from family

Goodman and colleagues (2017) emphasized in their study that refugees experience intense stress due to being separated from their families and not being able to see them in cases of irregular migration. Various reasons for this separation are mentioned, such as being undocumented migrants, financial inadequacies, or the fear of punishment in the country they came from. It is also noted that this concern is not limited to families left behind but also affects family members who are with them (such as children), leading to worries about their futures.

In a study conducted by Griswold and colleagues (2021), it was revealed that refugees often experience emotions such as fear, anxiety, regret, and worry due to being separated from their families, leading to a decrease in their coping skills when dealing with challenging situations.

1.5.8. Mental health

Witnessing war and being forced to migrate due to violence and political reasons is a common experience that often leads to trauma in both family members and children. Additionally, losing one's homeland and possessions can result in individuals losing their sense of identity and roots. Furthermore, individuals who are physically and psychologically threatened may experience significant anxiety. As a result of all these factors, refugees constitute a community that is susceptible to mental health problems (Kızmaz, 2018).

It is noted that the region where refugees settle also affects their mental health. Studies have found that refugees living in urban areas experience higher rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression compared to those living in camps. This situation has been associated with difficulties in accessing healthcare services in cities, challenging living conditions, communication barriers, and the associated feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Işık, 2019).

In a study conducted by Ünver and colleagues (2021), various mental health problems were identified in refugee children, including PTSD, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), bedwetting, psychosis, speech and language disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). Furthermore, in a study comparing refugee and settled students, depressive symptoms were found to be significantly higher in refugee students compared to settled students (Ataç et al., 2018). Also, Griswold and colleagues (2021) reported in their study that refugees experience various memory problems, difficulty in concentrating, and a constant state of preoccupation and distraction.

Recent meta-analyses, such as the one conducted by Bogic and colleagues (2015), which included 29 studies involving 16,010 war-affected refugees, found that the psychopathological findings from these studies were not uniformly distributed. However, the average prevalence of anxiety disorders, depression, and PTSD was found to be 20%. In conclusion, it is widely accepted that the refugee sample experiences higher clinical problems compared to the non-refugee sample, but this varies depending on factors such as the refugees' countries of origin, migration processes, adaptation to the host society, and the challenges they face (see Bhugra & Gupta, 2011; Yilmaz Zambak, 2021).

1.6. Positive Aspects of Migration

As Yaylacı (2018) has pointed out, refugee studies often tend to focus more on deficits. However, it is well-known that individuals do not all react to their experiences in the same way, and this is where the concepts of resilience and coping come into play. Rutter (2012) defines the concept of resilience as the ability to cope with challenging situations and transform them into positive outcomes. Despite exposure to adverse circumstances, it is possible to effectively manage and result in growth through resilience. Given that resilience is believed to be shaped by a wide range of contexts and variables, it is emphasized that a multi-stage and multi-dimensional approach is necessary for its assessment (Pieloch et al., 2016). Understanding this requires the evaluation of various factors, including the community, its institutions (such as education and healthcare), an individual's family, the environment in which they were raised, and their living conditions, all together (Pieloch et al., 2016).

1.6.1. Coping mechanisms and resilience

Research studies (see, Ai et al., 2003) have revealed that hope, religiosity, and education play significant roles in the coping mechanisms of refugees. Additionally, gender has been identified as an important factor in coping, with women being more likely to cope through family and home-related strategies compared to men (Renner & Salem, 2009). The importance of religiosity and faith-based social support groups in facilitating the social integration of refugees and their acquisition of the host country's language has also been emphasized (Griswold et al., 2021).

Numerous studies conducted over the years have consistently highlighted the significance of social support in the coping processes of refugees and migrants (see Alfadhli & Drury, 2018; Shisana & Celentano, 1987; Simich et al., 2005). Another coping strategy

worth mentioning is making an effort to learn the language of the host country (Baranik et al., 2017).

1.6.2. Post traumatic growth

Post-traumatic growth refers to the profound development experienced by individuals following challenging life events. Those who undergo post-traumatic growth may become more open to recognizing new opportunities and may regain functionality in their lives to a greater extent than before (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Post-traumatic growth manifests particularly in five areas: a greater appreciation for life and changes in priorities, the establishment of warmer relationships with others, a heightened sense of personal strength, spiritual development, and new possibilities (Ramos & Leal, 2013).

Experiencing post-traumatic growth can be associated with certain personality traits, such as extraversion and openness to experience. Managing challenging emotions and having supportive elements in one's life are also other factors that influence post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In a study conducted by Altınışik (2020) with Syrian refugee adolescents, a significant positive relationship was found between post-traumatic growth and social support, thus supporting the existing literature. Additionally, the use of positive religious coping strategies and the frequency of trauma are other significant factors that impact post-traumatic growth (Altınışik, 2020).

1.7. Related Studies in Türkiye

In the Turkish thesis database (YÖKTEZ), it is evident that there are 865 master's and doctoral thesis studies related to refugees in October 2023 (see YÖKTEZ database). Out of these, 811 were conducted from 2011 onwards, and from January 2023 to October 2023, 60 theses have been written. Furthermore, when examining the data, it can be seen that there has been a significant increase in the number of theses related to refugees in the past five years (see YÖKTEZ database). In the field of psychology, since the first thesis on refugees was written in 2014, a total of 87 theses have been completed. In the following, the most relevant quantitative and qualitative research related to this study will be discussed.

The aim of the study conducted by Yıldız (2021) was to examine the predictive effects of assumptions about the world and posttraumatic growth on anxiety in Syrian refugees. In the study, it was determined that there was a significant relationship between assumptions about the world, posttraumatic growth and anxiety. It was discovered that

assumptions about the world and posttraumatic growth have a significant predictive capacity for anxiety in Syrian refugees.

The thesis conducted by Bekdaş (2021) investigated the relationship between post-traumatic growth, post-traumatic stress symptoms and spiritual coping in Syrian refugee university students who migrated to Türkiye. A statistically significant positive relationship was found between posttraumatic growth, spiritual coping, and posttraumatic stress symptoms in this cross-sectional study.

Akbay Safi (2021) examined posttraumatic growth and related concepts in a descriptive thesis study. As a result of the study, growth was found most intensely in the field of individual strength and new opportunities. Economic status, education level, number of children, self-efficacy, level of Turkish language proficiency, and an active, religious coping style were identified as protective factors that significantly explained growth at the p 0.05 level, whereas post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and self-blame behavior were identified as risk factors.

In her doctoral study, Yılmaz Zambak (2021) conducted an examination of the interpretative phenomenological analysis of the experiences of young adult Syrian refugees through the lens of forced migration. She conducted a total of 18 interviews, with 15 of them being conducted with the assistance of an interpreter. Her research revealed eight main themes: Living with war in Syria, leaving the homeland behind, building a new life, ongoing challenges and losses, coping mechanisms, changing family dynamics, evolving self-perception, and future expectations. The researcher evaluated the findings from a clinical psychology perspective and in the context of refugee mental health.

Çavuşoğlu (2020), in her thesis, aimed to investigate the phenomenon of meaning in life among refugees who had experienced the war in Syria. He conducted interviews with six individuals, three women, and three men, who had experienced the war for at least two years. The analysis resulted in the identification of four core themes: experiences of war and being a refugee, coping mechanisms, the meaning and purpose of life, and future plans.

In her cross-sectional study, Acar (2020) sought to investigate the factors influencing post-traumatic growth in Syrian refugees and develop a model incorporating these variables. In this context, she examined the following variables: previous multiple traumatic experiences, difficulties experienced after asylum, symptoms of post-traumatic stress, and coping attitudes. Based on their measurements, they determined that 33 percent of posttraumatic growth could be attributed to these independent variables.

The research conducted by Yeken (2019) investigated the impact of factors such as social support, coping skills, and resilience as well as post-migrational living difficulties on mental health outcomes such as posttraumatic growth and posttraumatic stress symptomology. The researcher used vulnerability and resources perspectives which means strengths and weaknesses of the refugees which will affect their lives.

Cantekin (2019), in a qualitative study, focused on the experiences of refugees during both the pre-migration and post-migration phases. They found that pre-migration experiences were characterized by war and traumatic events, while post-migration experiences included themes such as separation from loved ones, economic challenges, and adaptation difficulties.

In conclusion, while there is a considerable body of research on refugees, particularly concerning issues such as mental health, education, and family dynamics, a recurring theme generated: refugees are portrayed as passive victims or merely affected individuals. This viewpoint appears to dominate the majority of studies, overshadowing the resilience and tenacity that refugees may exhibit. However, a deeper examination of particular theses reveals a more nuanced comprehension. These studies highlight the significance of social support, coping strategies, resilience, and even post-traumatic growth. The works of researchers (see Acar, 2020; Akbay Safi, 2021; Bekdaş, 2021; Yeken, 2019; Yıldız, 2021) illustrates the multifaceted nature of the refugee experience, whether they are examining the roles of prior traumatic experiences, post-migration difficulties, or the impact of worldview assumptions. Their findings highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach that recognizes the inherent strengths and growth opportunities within the refugee community, in addition to identifying problems. However, due to the quantitative nature of some of these studies and the limitations imposed by predetermined variables, it is hard to examine the experiences of refugees from a strength-based perspective.

1.8. Purpose and Research Questions

In this study, I focused university student refugees' experiences regarding their refugee background. It includes i) their experiences as a refugee (inc. interaction with the locals), ii) their perceptions of themselves (if they see themselves as strong, capable, victim, weak etc.), iii) their coping mechanisms and iv) their future orientation (how do they describe their future).

The primary research question of this qualitative study was formulated as follows: “How refugees define themselves and their experiences? in general. Some complementary research questions were created as “What are the strengths/ coping mechanisms of refugees?”, “Do refugees use weak victim or strong agent narratives?”, “What are their experiences regarding the interaction with locals?”.

These questions seek to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges refugees face during their migration experiences, acculturation processes, and interaction with the local society members, as well as to determine how they react to these experiences, what strategies they employ, and what benefits they derive from their experiences. As stated before, strength-based approaches and cycle of mutual constitution will be employed to discuss the results of the study.



2. METHOD

The primary goal of this study is to explore and understand university student refugees' experiences as refugees, self-perceptions, coping mechanisms, and future orientations, with a particular focus on identifying the narratives they use to define themselves, the challenges they encounter during migration and acculturation, and the strategies they adopt to overcome these challenges, all framed within the context of strength-based approaches and the cycle of mutual constitution.

This study was chosen as a qualitative study to ensure that participants were not restricted in their responses when asked about the theme of "being a refugee" and to obtain answers from a broader spectrum. Qualitative studies are very suitable for an in-depth examination of experiences.

In this study, a phenomenological approach, one of the qualitative research techniques, is preferred. Phenomenology, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), "aims to describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon." As a result, the phenomenological technique utilized to comprehend refugees' experiences regarding processes they overcame and strengths which helped them in those processes.

The primary objective of adopting this approach is to give refugees the opportunity to express their experiences directly in their own words and to delve deeper into these experiences. This is one of the main reasons behind the research adopting a qualitative approach. Qualitative research focuses on allowing participants to share their own experiences, emotions, thoughts, and perspectives.

Semi-structured interviews were performed to do this, allowing direct access to the refugees' experiences. Semi-structured interviews are defined as a flexible question style that allows particular data from participants to be collected without the use of a pre-determined questionnaire (Merriam, 2018).

2.1. Design and Working Group

When selecting participants, I made sure to meet the following criteria: being 18 years and older, being undergraduate students, identifying themselves as refugees, having a legal refugee status (temporary protection in Türkiye), and being able to communicate in Turkish. University students aged 18 and over who have been forcibly displaced from Syria

were included in this study. Equal numbers of men and women were included in the study to ensure balanced gender representation.

As can be seen in the table below, the average age of the participants is 21.2 ($M=21.2$, ± 2.1). The average duration of their stay in Türkiye is 8.9 years ($M=8.9$, ± 2.23). The average duration of the interviews conducted with the participants is 32.52 ($M=32.52$, ± 8.08) minutes.

Table 2.1

Participant Information Table (n=10)

	Sex	Age	Grade	Year of arrival in Türkiye	Province lived in Türkiye	Duration of the Interview
Participant 1	Woman	23	2	2013	Gaziantep	46.29
Participant 2	Man	20	1	2015	Hatay	29.43
Participant 3	Man	23	4	2012	Antakya	38.00
Participant 4	Woman	19	1	2013	Nizip	36.08
Participant 5	Woman	19	1	2013	Şanlıurfa	22.11
Participant 6	Woman	18	2	2012	Reyhanlı	27.38
Participant 7	Man	21	3	2018	Hayat	28.36
Participant 8	Man	24	3	2014	Gaziantep	43.55
Participant 9	Woman	23	4	2013	İstanbul	24.50
Participant 10	Man	22	3	2018	İstanbul	29.54
Mean	-	21,2	-	8,9	-	32.52

The Snowball Sampling Method utilized for selecting the participants. When determining the sample size and identifying possible participants is difficult, the snowball sampling method was used to contact other participants through the initial participant (Baştürk & Taştepe, 2013). This approach is described as the detective method by Baştürk and Taştepe (2013), in which the sample steadily increases like a snowball, akin to how a detective solves a case step by step.

However, as stated by Bal (2001), this strategy may induce bias by predominantly contacting persons with similar ideas. Multiple beginning places (participants) were chosen to alleviate this. For this reason, contact was made with the leader of the Atatürk University refugee students' community. Information about the study was provided to him, and his support was requested. Through this individual, refugee students studying at Atatürk University and meeting the criteria were reached.

2.2. Material

2.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

This questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended questions designed to acquire a better understanding of refugees' experiences with processes they surrounded and the strengths that assisted them in those processes. The questions aimed to understand the experiences of the refugees regarding difficulties they faced, strengths and accomplishments they had, coping mechanism which are important in their life, hosting society member's reflections and reaction to them. These questions were developed in response to the findings of the literature review and the researcher's personal experience (see Reflexivity section below). The questions were designed to deeply understand participants' experiences regarding "being a refugee" within the framework of a phenomenological approach.

2.2.2. Sociodemographic questionnaire

This form included questions regarding sociodemographic information of the participants such as sex, the duration of participants' stays in Türkiye, their grade, and field of study.

2.2.3. Informed consent form

Before the research begins, participants were given an informed consent form. This form specified that the research's goal is to gather academic data. All data collected will be specific to this study and will not be shared with anybody except the researcher. The study will not include names or personal information. Using anonymous codes, data will be assembled and evaluated. The study is completely voluntary, and individuals can leave at any time. Participants can contact the researcher if they have any questions about their participation. To ensure accuracy, participants will be asked to consent to audio recordings that will only be used by the researcher. The information on the permission form communicated both verbally and written. The informed consent forms were signed digitally.

2.3. Procedure

Initially, I identified a channel to connect with forcibly displaced individuals through a university student community founded by Syrian refugee students. Subsequently, I held introductory meetings with the community's representatives. They expressed their support for the study and agreed to promote it on their social media and other communication platforms. Before proceeding, I shared the set of questions with the representative of the student community to ensure clarity and received feedback. Additionally, three colleagues

reviewed the questions prior to a pilot study. The feedback from colleagues were gathered and questions were revised accordingly. The pilot study was conducted with one participant to verify if the questions were clear and if any modifications were necessary. For the pilot study, a participant who met the selection criteria used in the main study was included. All the questions were posed to the participant as planned, and it was determined whether the participant understood the questions and where they encountered difficulties. This helped us identify the type of changes we could make in the sentence structure and sequence of these questions. Based on feedback from the pilot study, minor adjustments were made to the language and wording of the questions.

I reached ten people to realize the semi-structured interviews. I created appointment for each of the participants as an hour time slot. The interviews were online and carried out individually, with a duration of around 25 to 45 minutes per session (see Participant Information Table). One day before the interview, the hyperlink for the online meeting was sent to participants by researcher. During the interviews, there were no notable internet connection instability or technical problem encountered. The researcher assumed the responsibility of conducting the interviews. Participants were adequately briefed about the research and were given an "Informed Consent Form" before to the interview. The provided document contained a request for consent about the recording of audio for the purpose of conducting thematic analysis. The participants were provided with the guarantee of their entitlement to withdraw from the study at any given point, and they will be duly notified that their data will be assessed in an anonymous manner.

The interview began with an introductory prompt, stating, "We will now start the interview," in order to spark the discourse. In instances where participants experience challenges in comprehending the questions, the same inquiry restated or reformulated in an alternative manner to assure understanding. None of the participants requested a translator, as their proficiency in Turkish was adequate for communication. After the interview, the socio-demographic questionnaire was performed. Upon the completion of the study, participants were reminded of their entitlements and expressively acknowledged for their active involvement in the research endeavor. Lastly, participants were thanked and their participation fee which is 150 Turkish Liras were sent their preferred bank accounts.

2.4. Analysis

This study utilized a thematic analysis approach, which is a qualitative analytical method. Thematic analysis may be defined as the systematic process of identifying and

interpreting patterns or themes within a dataset. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a systematic approach used to find, analyze, and present patterns or themes within collected data. The process involves the comprehensive organization and detailed description of the dataset, as well as the interpretation of numerous facets pertaining to the study issue. Braun and Clarke (2006) mentioned all analyses are essentially thematic analyze, therefore in this study, thematic analyze was used.

The model of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed. The model had six sequential processes, namely: (1) data familiarization, (2) code generation, (3) theme generation, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition and naming, and (6) reporting. These measurements, which support the researcher in anything from familiarizing themselves with the data to effectively presenting their conclusions, are extensively relied upon. This process outlines a methodical approach for analyzing and summarizing research findings, directing researchers through the steps required to do so successfully. Before the analysis, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. After transcription, the resulting text was read and checked several times. Subsequently, the steps mentioned above were applied to generate themes, subthemes, and codes.

2.5. Validity and Reliability

To assure the integrity of the data coding process, the method of peer review, also known as member checking, is utilized. The approach outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1986) entails sharing of data and research methodologies to an external researcher who is not actively engaged in the study, with the aim of soliciting their opinion. We conducted a 60-minute online discussion with two external researchers in that we had reviewed the themes, subthemes and codes. Based on their feedback, some parts of the analysis double checked, renamed, and changed.

2.6. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important component in qualitative research studies. This concept involves the researcher being aware of how their subjectivity influences the qualitative research process (Willig, 2013). It seems unlikely that researchers can completely exclude their subjective contributions during the process of interpreting qualitative research data. Therefore, it is important for researchers to be aware of their biases, preconceptions, and related effects. In this study, I am also aware of my reflexivity. It is important for the reader

to have information about the researcher's experience, motivation for the study, and processes that may influence the research before delving into the research findings.

I am a 26-year-old man who has spent half of my life in rural areas and the other half in urban centers. I am a psychologist and currently pursuing my master's degree in social psychology. Due to my education in social sciences during high school, I developed an early interest in research, reading, and writing. Following the projects I conducted during my high school years, I became actively involved in various non-governmental organizations. These organizations primarily focused on working with disadvantaged groups. In these organizations, I had the opportunity to work with refugee women from countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. I conducted various projects aimed at empowering refugee women socially and economically and facilitating their integration into society.

Subsequently, I deepened my research on risk assessment in disadvantaged groups. Currently, I am researching issues such as employment problems among people who have an addiction, addiction risk in refugees, and language barriers among refugees. During this process, I had the opportunity to work with refugees for an extended period. In this process, I had the opportunity to have firsthand experiences of refugees before, during, and after migration and their interactions with the host society. Additionally, I observed how refugee women can strengthen themselves economically, socially, and psychologically when given sufficient opportunities and how they can become role models for their children. I should also mention that due to my background as a descendant of Balkan and Crimean migrants, I am particularly sensitive to the problems of migrants and refugees.

During this process, I realized how complex and multifaceted the refugee experience is. The refugee experience significantly affects individuals psychologically, economically, and socially. Pre-migration exposure to war and traumatic experiences, the challenges during migration, and the negative consequences that arise during the acculturation process have a shaping effect on a person's life. In this thesis, I aimed to gain a more detailed understanding on the experiences of refugees and how they see themselves and their experiences. I believe that, based on the results of this study, it will be possible to develop prevention and intervention programs as further research.

When conducting interviews, not having major language issues with the participants has been a significant advantage for me. Knowing their cultural backgrounds based on my previous experiences has also been another advantage. Participants sometimes shared experiences that were challenging for me during the interviews, and the intensity of these experiences has been also challenging for me in this process. Participants tended to share

their traumatic experiences, even if not explicitly asked, so I tried to listen what they wanted to share and gently and carefully bring the interview back to its focus. This is because these experiences should be discussed in a therapeutic session, and participants need to share them in a planned and safe environment. Apart from these challenges, I did not encounter any major issues during the interviews. Considering all these past experiences and cultural background, I made an effort to distinguish what the participants were saying and my own thoughts and feelings.



3. RESULTS

In this thesis study, refugee experiences have been comprehensively addressed, and an attempt has been made to unveil a structure where this complex issue is examined in depth. The responses provided by the interviewed refugees to questions designed under the phenomenon "being a refugee" have presented with the table seen below. After briefly touching upon the themes and subthemes in this table, these themes and subthemes will be examined in detail through the codes they built on. As a result of the conducted analyses, 9 fundamental themes have been generated.

While this study aimed to focus on the strengths of refugees, the participants primarily and predominantly recounted negative experiences when discussing the phenomenon of "being a refugee." Responses related to positive experiences were also obtained from the participants in various questions. These responses are provided under the relevant themes. However, predominantly negative themes have been generated regarding the phenomenon of "being a refugee."

Table 3.1

Master table of themes and sub-themes

No	Themes	Subthemes
1	<i>"We couldn't live a good life" - The challenges of migration</i>	Adapting to a different country/culture Leaving your own country Being compelled to work
2	<i>"Struggling just to survive."</i>	<i>"First and foremost, we are human"</i> - Right to flee from war Living alone and separated Inaction (Not defending oneself / not retaliating) Fear of being sent back Living with insecurity due to refugee identity Exposure to physical violence and insults Increase in anti-refugee rhetoric Fear of harm / concerns for personal safety Fear of mistreatment Living with prejudices Misconception of easy and free access to university Misconception of receiving a lot of aid from the government Misconception that <i>"ESAD will give money and start businesses for returnees."</i>

		Being seen as responsible for the war / accusatory attitudes Negative impact of social media
3	Not understanding Turkish makes daily life struggle	Desire to drop out of school Decline in academic performance Struggling with government institutions Delay in learning Turkish Preference for Arabic-speaking regions Receiving education in Arabic schools
4	Xenophobia towards Syrians	"Are you Syrian?"- Their only crime is being a Syrian Xenophobia in the neighborhood Xenophobia in the educational environment Attitudes of teachers/academics Attitudes of classmates Xenophobia among government officials
5	Hiding Syrian identity- Protecting oneself against discrimination	"No Arabic!"- Not speaking Arabic within the community "I'm from Mardin"- Not revealing that you're Syrian Trying to dress/look like a Turk "Sharp as a knife glances"- Being subjected to accusatory and hostile looks Desire not to be a refugee/have citizenship
6	"It's like I'm in prison"- Effects of the government policies and legal systems	Restrictions on the right to travel Inability to work in public institutions Difficulty in acquiring Turkish citizenship High fees in higher education
7	The future aspirations of refugees	"Always dark"-Hopelessness about the future "There is light somewhere"- Being hopeful about the future
8	Finding ways to cope with challenging experiences	Family support Support from Turkish teachers/academics Support from Turkish friends/neighbors Support from faith
9	Strength or agency in the face of challenging experiences	Empowerment through language learning Getting to know people- Being able to distinguish who might cause harm "Swimming against the current"- Resisting difficulties, putting in more effort Learning to advocate for one's rights Taking on responsibilities at a young age

The first theme presented on the Table 2 is "*We couldn't live a good life,*" reflecting the difficulties refugees experienced in adapting to a different country and culture, the

decisions to leave their own countries, and sometimes the hardships such as forced labor. This theme consists of key thoughts that participants mentioned regarding being a refugee.

The second theme presented is "*Struggling just to survive*," highlighting the refugees' struggle for survival and the threats to their human rights. Under this theme, challenges such as the right to flee from war, living away from relatives and acquaintances, experiencing physical violence, and discrimination have been examined in detail.

Another theme discussed is "Not understanding Turkish makes daily life difficult," which examines how not understanding Turkish affects daily life. The advantages of understanding Turkish and the explanations of participants have been considered in the light of this theme.

The fourth theme that generated is "Xenophobia towards Syrians," shedding light on different aspects of xenophobia towards Syrians. Participants mentioned experiences of xenophobia and discriminatory behavior when discussing the theme of "being a refugee". This section has separately addressed contexts associated with xenophobia, such as education, neighborhoods, and public institutions.

Another theme is "Hiding Syrian identity: Protecting oneself against discrimination," which explores refugees' efforts to conceal their identities and protect themselves from discrimination. Refugees have developed various methods to protect themselves from discriminatory and xenophobic experiences, which are examined in this theme.

The sixth theme, while bearing the title "‘I feel like I'm in prison’- Effects of government policies and legal systems" explains the impact of government policies and legal systems on refugees, emphasizing how these factors limit refugees' freedom of movement and job opportunities.

The seventh theme, titled "The future aspirations of refugees," reflects the hopes and despair of refugees regarding the future. Participants' views on how being a refugee shapes their expectations for the future are included in this theme.

The following theme, "Finding ways to cope with challenging experiences," addressed the support and dealing mechanisms. This theme details the methods and strategies used by participants to cope with negative situations, including those extensively examined in previous categories, and highlights who provided support during challenging times.

Finally, under the title "Empowerment or agent in the face of challenging experiences," the theme delves into the strengths that refugees have developed due to their

challenging experiences. It explores which skills have improved and whether "being a refugee" contributes to becoming a stronger individual.

Each of these themes lays important foundations for a more in-depth understanding of refugees' experiences. In the following sections, these categories will be explored in greater detail, and a deeper analysis of these experiences will be provided.

3.1. Theme 1: *"We couldn't live a good life"- The challenges of migration*

"There is both bullying and kindness from the teachers towards us. That's how it is for a refugee. There's always goodness, and there's always badness." (Interview 5)¹

In this theme, it is reflected that migrants experience difficulties in adapting to a different country and culture, making the decision to leave their own countries, and sometimes facing hardships such as forced labor. Participants generally begin by discussing their experiences in general when talking about the phenomenon of "being a refugee," focusing on the challenges of the migration process and resettlement. The difficulty of "being a refugee" has been mentioned by all the participants. This sentiment is expressed in Interview 2 as *"Being a refugee, experiencing that feeling, enduring the weight of their evil is difficult,"*² and in Interview 9 as *"It means leading a difficult life, it means putting in a lot of effort."*³

Participants mentioned that when they are forced to leave their own countries, they grapple with homesickness, and adapting to a new country or culture emerges as a significant challenge. Overcoming language and cultural differences further complicates the process of social integration. Additionally, refugees express the difficulty of feeling unwanted or undesired in the host country, as expressed in the following way: *"You are forced to encounter someone who doesn't want you or doesn't like you. You don't want to stay in the same place, but you have to. You have no other choice."* (Interview 9)⁴

Furthermore, the necessity of working is emphasized. Migrants find themselves working for lower wages, and they mention taking on responsibilities at a young age and

¹ Turkish original: "Yani hem zorbalık oluyor hem de hocalardan bir bize karşı iyilik oluyor yani. Mülteci böyle işte. Hep iyilik var hep kötülük var." (Görüşme 5)

² Turkish original: "Mülteci olmak, o duygu yaşamak, onların kötülüğüne ağırlığına katlanmak kötü." (Görüşme 2)

³ Turkish original: "Zor bir hayat yaşamak demek, çok çabalamak demek." (Görüşme 9)

⁴ Turkish original: "İstenmeyen ya da sizi istemeyen biriyle karşılaşmaya mecbur kalırsınız. Yani aynı yerde durmak istemiyorsunuz ama mecbursunuz. Başka bir çareniz de yok". (Görüşme 9)

providing support to their families. This makes it difficult for them to continue their education and develop their own abilities.

3.1.1. Adjusting to a different country/culture

This subtheme fundamentally emphasizes the challenging experience refugees face when adapting to a different country or culture. In Interview 6, one participant succinctly summarized this situation, saying, *"We are starting to build a new life. It's not as easy as you might think. Starting from scratch. Meeting new people. Speaking a new language."*⁵ These are encountered in the process of adapting to the host country.

Participants expressed that they are foreigners in a new country and struggle to fully integrate, stating in Interview 1, *"We are in a foreign country. That country is not our country. So, no matter what we do. We just arrived; you know."*⁶ The integration process involves both refugees and the host country. It is also expected that both sides will adapt to this process over time. However, refugees' frequent need to relocate can complicate this process. This was articulated in Interview 5 as follows: *"I was always moving from one place to another. But it changed when I left there and came here. (...) It was always like this. I never stayed in the same place. It's tough for people."*⁷

Adapting to a new country also involves acculturation into the culture of that country. The difficulty brought about by the displacement of norms refugees have been accustomed to with the norms of the host country is explained in Interview 2 as follows: *"I think getting used to the new life is hard. I used to live in a different country or in a different culture. I crossed over to Türkiye, a different culture and language. You know, it's heavy."*⁸ These experiences highlight how challenging it can be to achieve acculturation and learn a new language.

3.1.2. Leaving your own country

Refugees experience multiple challenges simultaneously and must strive to cope with them concurrently. While trying to adapt to the language, culture, and norms of the host country, they also have to contend with the pain of leaving their own country behind. In

⁵ Turkish original: "Yeni bir hayat kurmaya başlıyoruz. O da düşündüğünüz gibi hiç kolay değil. Bir insanın sıfırdan başlaması. Yeni insanlarla karşılaşmak. Yeni bir dil konuşmak." (Görüşme 6)

⁶ Turkish original: "Biz yabancı bir ülkedeyiz. O ülke bizim ülke değil. Yani ne yaparsak yapalım. Daha yeni geldik yani." (Görüşme 1)

⁷ Turkish original: "Hep değişiyordum bir yerden bir yere. Ama çok yani orada bıraktıktan sonra buraya gelmek, o arada bir değişiklik oldu. (...) Hep böyle oldu. Yani aynı yerde kalmadım. Zordur yani insanlar için." (Görüşme 5)

⁸ Turkish original: "Yeni hayata alışmak zor bence. Ben farklı bir ülkede yaşıyordum veya farklı bir kültürde yaşıyordum. Türkiye geçtim, farklı bir kültür veya dil. Biliyorsunuz, ağır bir şey." (Görüşme 2)

Interview 6, a participant described this situation as follows: *"Being a refugee is a tough thing. It's really tough. Because, firstly, you are away from your homeland. I'm someone who loves his homeland very much. ...I'm far from my home."*⁹

Participants emphasized their love for their own countries and the fact that they had good lives in their home countries before the war. However, they explain that they were forced to leave their homeland due to the denial of basic rights such as dignity, security, peace, and education. These statements align closely with the internationally recognized definition of a refugee.

3.1.3. Being forced to work

This subtheme focuses on the challenges refugees faced in the workplace and the perception that they must always work as refugees. The necessity of work is a significant part of refugees' lives, and various experiences and emotions related to this topic have been expressed in this study.

Firstly, some individuals mention that they are compelled to work for low wages in the host country. This stems from being a refugee and often results in economic hardships. This is articulated in Interview 1 as follows: *"I work constantly. I've been working since I came here; you know. They pay us less because we are refugee."*¹⁰ A similar sentiment is echoed in Interview 9: *"We receive lower salaries for the same reasons because we are refugee."*¹¹

Furthermore, some refugees expressed that they had to work at a young age and, as a result, could not experience a "normal childhood". In Interview 2, a participant state:

*"I was 14 years old. So, I was forced to work because my father was 52 years old. I'm the only male at home. We are three girls and one boy in our family. I always had to work, even though I was small. I was forced to work."*¹²

In Interview 1, a participant also described the situation, saying, *"Taking responsibility at a young age is very difficult. We felt like we were grown-ups already, and*

⁹ Turkish original: "Mülteci olmak zor bir şey. Bayağı zor bir şey. Çünkü birincisi vatanından uzak duruyorsun. Ben çok vatanımı seven bir insanım. ...evimden uzak oluyorum." (Görüşme 2)

¹⁰ Turkish original: "Ben sürekli çalışıyorum. Buraya geldiğimden beri çalışıyorum yani. İşte yabancı olduğumuzu için bize az ücret veriliyor." (Görüşme 1)

¹¹ Turkish original: "Daha az maaş alıyoruz aynı sebeplerden yabancı olduğumuz için." (Görüşme 1)

¹² Turkish original: "14 yaşındaydım. Yani çalışmaya mecbur kaldım. Çünkü babam 52 yaşındaydı. Ben de evde tek erkeğim. Yani üç kız ve bir erkek bizim aile. Hep mecbur kaldım. Çalıştım, küçük olduğuma rağmen. Mecbur kaldım çalışmaya." (Görüşme 2)

we never really felt like children. We immediately felt like adults."¹³ This situation leads to refugees not being able to experience a normal childhood and being exposed to high levels of stress at an early age.

However, some participants mentioned that they work to support their families and take on economic responsibilities. This is a common situation for migrants who bear the responsibility of providing support to their families. Additionally, the reasons why some participants had to work as child laborers at a young age include being the only man in the family, the death of their father, and leaving behind all their belongings and property when coming to Türkiye.

3.2. Theme 2: "Struggling just to survive."

"We work extremely hard just to survive. We make tremendous efforts, just to live. We put in so much effort, solely to survive. We are trying to establish some order." (Interview 8)

This theme highlights the difficulties and emotional burdens associated with being a refugee and living in another country. It consists of eight main subthemes that describe the fundamental problems encountered while living as a refugee. Being a refugee has become a part of the participants' lives, and this situation has labeled them as "refugees," a label that shapes their identities and is often imposed on them by societies. This is expressed in Interview 4 as follows: *"No matter how much time passes, you remain Syrian. If something happens, they'll say, 'Oh, she's Syrian.'"*¹⁴

Participants express that they work and strive just to survive. This indicates that refugees struggle with economic hardships and expend significant effort to meet their basic needs. The uncertainty and insecurity associated with being a refugee are significant factors that shape their lives.

Furthermore, this perspective sheds light on how being a refugee affects people's identities and perceptions. Being recognized as a refugee means that one's experiences have become a part of their identity, and this label is often emphasized by others. This illustrates that being a refugee entails not only physical challenges but also emotional and identity-

¹³ Turkish original: "Küçük yaştan sorumluluk almak da çok kötü. Yani büyüğümüzü hissettik yani, çocuk olduğumuzu hiç zaten hiçbir zaman hissetmedik. Direkt böyle büyük olarak kendimize hissettik." (Görüşme 1)

¹⁴ Turkish original: "Ne kadar zaman geçse de geçsin, sen Suriyeli kalırsın. Bir şey olursa aa Suriyeli derler." (Görüşme 4)

related difficulties. Refugees face various factors that have significant effects on both their survival and their identities and perceptions.

3.2.1. "First and foremost, we are humans"- Right to flee from war

This subtheme signifies that the participants fled from the war in Syria and used their right to seek asylum in another country. Therefore, the concept of "we are all human first" emphasizes the human rights and the right to protect their lives of those escaping the conflict. The participants described the difficulties and dangers brought about by the war in Syria. These challenges are particularly emphasized in relation to the impact of the conflicts on the lives of their close relatives. It is understood that they had to migrate in an environment where war threatened human life and security, even leading to the deaths of their relatives. This situation is conveyed in Interview 1 as follows:

*"There were some difficulties, you know, there was a war. There were even a lot of conflicts with our people. (...) What we saw was the belongings of our relatives. They cut off their heads and hung them. I saw that. It's the same with my friend and my uncle's son. I watched his death too."*¹⁵

At the same time, those who fled the war expressed that their freedoms in Syria were limited, and they had to live their daily lives under the shadow of the war. This not only points to the physical dangers of war but also highlights its negative effects on people's way of life. Our participant in Interview 3 described this situation as follows:

*"Now, when we were in Syria, you know, there was a war, you're not free there. You can't do everything as you wish. I mean, that was our country, but we felt like foreigners there. We no longer had a say. After that, we stayed in the war for quite a while. We stayed for a long time. We left Syria early, but we survived."*¹⁶

In addition, Interview 10 mentions this:

*"I came here by escaping the war. (...) There was a region on the outskirts of Damascus. We were trapped in the war for a while. From 2013 to 2018. We were stuck there, couldn't get out. Then, when the Esad regime entered our areas, we had to leave. After that, we had to come here."*¹⁷

¹⁵ Turkish original: "Biraz sıkıntılar olmuştu yani, savaş olmuştu. Hatta bizimkilerle çok çatışma falan yaşandı. (...) Onlar mesela gördüğümüz şey bizim akrabalarımızın şeyleri. Kafası da kesip onları asılılar. Onları gördüm. Benim arkadaşımın ve amcamın oğlu aynı şekilde oluyor. Onun ölümüne de izledim." (Görüşme 1)

¹⁶ Turkish original: "Şimdi Suriye'deyken biliyorsunuz yani savaş var, orada özgür değilsin. İstedğin gibi her şeyi yapamazsın. Yani orası ülkemizdi ama biz yabancı gibi duruyoruz orada. Yani artık bizim bir çözümümüz yoktu. Ondan sonra savaş içinde kaldık. Baya kaldık yani. Suriye'den erken çıktık ama yaşadık." (Görüşme 3)

¹⁷ Turkish original: "Savaştan kaçarak geldim. (...) Şam'ın kenarında bir bölge vardı. Bir süre mahsur kaldık savaşta. 2013'ten 2018'e kadar. Orada yani böyle bir süre mahsur kaldık, çıkamazdık. O zaman sonra

The decision to migrate became a necessity for the participants who wanted to cope with the effects of the war in Syria and ensure the safety of their families. It is emphasized by the participants that making this decision was not easy. Therefore, the use of the right to migrate by those fleeing the war should be seen as a step towards protecting their lives and seeking a better future. Another participant in Interview 8 tragically conveyed that nobody is aware of what they went through, how difficult the war was, and that children couldn't endure it:

*"None of them talks about the civil war we experienced. They say you escaped from the war and such. For example, we didn't have the capability to fight when we were children. They had no knowledge about these matters. Besides, it wasn't like a war for us. Brothers were fighting against each other. Some of them are very ignorant about these matters."*¹⁸

3.2.2. Living alone and separated

This subtheme highlights the experiences of refugees feeling a sense of loneliness and the challenges brought about by being separated from their families. Refugees have been unable to refugee with their families or relatives, thus having to live apart from them in a foreign country. In Interview 2, one participant described the situation as follows: *"Now, my family came to Türkiye, but our relatives stayed in Syria. I mean, uncles, aunts, cousins. Relatives are there."*¹⁹ The same participant in Interview 2 continued to define this situation as follows: *"Our relatives went far away, and no one was left with you. Now in Türkiye, there are only two families. We and our uncles live together. Other relatives are in Europe, Jordan, Syria. But we don't see them."*²⁰

The separation of families has created both emotional and practical difficulties for migrants. Emotionally, not being with their families has caused them to miss them and feel lonely. Additionally, relatives living in different countries can weaken family ties and limit social support networks. Furthermore, it is expressed that migrants who are separated from their families feel lonely and, therefore, are more vulnerable. Being without family support

bölgelerimize Esed rejimi girerken, çıkmaya mecbur kaldık. Ondan sonra buraya gelmeye mecbur kaldık." (Görüşme 10)

¹⁸ Turkish original: "Hiçbiri bizim iç savaş yaşadığımızdan bahsetmiyor. Siz savaştan kaçtınız falan diyorlar. Bizim çocukken savaşacak halimiz yoktu mesela. Öyle hiçbir bilgilileri yoktu bu konularda. Hem bizde savaş gibi değildi. Kardeş kardeşe savaş ediyordu. Sanki bu konularda çok cahiller bazıları." (Görüşme 8)

¹⁹ Turkish original: "Şimdi ailem Türkiye'ye geldiler ama akrabalarımız Suriye'de kaldı. Yani dayılarım, amcalarım, halalarım. Akrabalar orada." (Görüşme 2)

²⁰ Turkish original: "Akrabalarımız uzağa gitti sonra, kimse kalmadı yanınızda. Şimdi Türkiye'de sadece iki aileyiz. Biz ve amcamlar yaşıyoruz beraber. Diğer akrabalarımız. Avrupa'da var, Ürdün'de var, Suriye'de var. Fakat görmüyoruz onları." (Görüşme 2)

in a foreign country can pose challenges in terms of security and social integration. This situation is emphasized by the participant in Interview 8 with the sentence, *"Because we were weak, you come, you hit, we can't do anything. Everyone is already living separately. Relatives are far away. There's nothing to fall back on. That's why they used to beat us in the beginning."*²¹

3.2.3. Inaction (not defending oneself / not retaliating)

This subtheme reflects the experiences of refugees engaging in inaction that can be described as not defending themselves or not responding. Participant mentioned that they sometimes prefer to remain silent when faced with mistreatment or even harassment. This silence can arise for various reasons, but it is associated with the fear of not being safe, the belief that responding could create more problems, or the concern that harm may come to their families. This situation is conveyed by a participant in Interview 1 as follows: *"I would stay silent. I never did anything. Because... If I engage with someone who is very angry. They will get angrier. When someone treats me poorly, for example, I remain silent."*²²

This situation indicates that refugees are hesitant to use their ability to defend themselves or assert their rights against bullying or discrimination. Refugees tend to postpone taking action, believing that defending themselves or responding may lead to dangerous or harmful consequences. This is clearly seen in the response provided in Interview 3: *"I've gotten used to these things; I don't argue with anyone. I sometimes experience these difficulties, but I never argue with anyone."*²³

3.2.4. Fear of being sent back

Refugees live with the constant fear of deportation in many situations, and this fear adversely affects their daily lives. The fear of deportation is believed to lead refugees to live in uncertainty about their safety and future. This is clearly reflected in the response provided in Interview 6: *"Right now, I'm talking to you. I mean, they could send me back to Syria in*

²¹ Turkish original: "Böyle bizimkiler zayıf olduğu için, sen gelirsın, vurursun hiçbir şey yapamıyor. Herkes zaten ayrı yaşıyor. Akrabalar uzak. Öyle bir şey yani arkası yok. O yüzden zayıf gördükleri için dövüyorlardı yani ilk zamanlarda mesela." (Görüşme 8)

²² Turkish original: "Ben susuyordum. Ben hiçbir zaman bir şey yapmadım. Yani... Çünkü... Çok sinirli bir kişiyle eğer muhatap olursam. O daha çok sinirlenecek. Bana karşı mesela birisi kötü davrandığında ben susuyorum." (Görüşme 1)

²³ Turkish original: "Ben alıştım bu şeylere, hiç kimseyle tartışmıyorum yani. Yani bazen yaşıyorum bu sıkıntıları ama hiç tartışmıyorum kimselerle." (Görüşme 3)

an hour, we see certain incidents. You can't even think about your future."²⁴ Another supporting point is the statement shared in Interview 1:

*"I know a family. Their kids had a fight with a Turkish person. Then, they come home at 11 o'clock at night. They deported them on the same day, at 11 o'clock. They didn't even allow them to take anything. They just took them and deported them like that. It was over a very minor fight. The whole family's life was ruined."*²⁵

Moreover, this fear can limit the efforts of some immigrants to integrate into the host country because uncertainty about their future makes it difficult to make long-term plans. Refugees live in a state of constant uncertainty due to the fear of deportation, which affects their future planning. In Interview 7, this situation is described as follows:

*"I'm in my second year here. I was afraid of something. Are we not going to go back, or are we going to go back? Because there are no universities in Syria, I mean, there are, but it's not like here. If I go back, I will waste these years; it will be pointless for me. That's why I'm afraid."*²⁶

3.2.5. Living with insecurity due to refugee identity

Refugee identity can lead refugees to face discrimination and prejudice in society. This will be further discussed as a separate section in this study. Therefore, refugees carry concerns that they may be unfairly accused or harassed by the police or other authority figures. This can make immigrants feel less safe in society and lead to many negative experiences. This situation is explained by a participant in Interview 3 as follows:

*"When an incident occurs, the police don't look at who is right and who is wrong. If someone is a refugee, they are automatically considered guilty. I witnessed these incidents. They happened right in front of me. That's why I think there is no trust left for refugees. Otherwise, it's quite safe for Turks."*²⁷

²⁴ Turkish original: "Şimdi ben şimdi konuşuyorum ya sizinle. Yani bir saat sonra beni Suriye'ye atabilirler, yani bazı olayları görüyoruz. Düşünemezsin geleceğini falan." (Görüşme 6)

²⁵ Turkish original: "Benim tanıdığım bir aile var. Çocukları, Türk biriyle kavga ediyorlar. Sonra saat gece 11'de evlerine geliyorlar. Onları sınır dışı ediyorlar aynı gün, saat 11'de. Hiçbir şey almalarına bile izin vermediler. Direkt aldılar çıktılar böyle. Çok küçük bir kavgadan böyle bir şey. Tüm ailenin hayatı mahvoldu." (Görüşme 1)

²⁶ Turkish original: "Ben ikinci senedeyim burada. Ben şeyden korkuyordum. Dönmeyecek miyiz, dönecek miyiz? Çünkü Suriye'de üniversiteler yok yani. Var da burası gibi değil yani. Ben dönersem bu yılları kaybedeceğim, boş olacak benim için. O yüzden korkuyorum." (Görüşme 7)

²⁷ Turkish original: "Bir olay oldu, polis geldiği zaman kim haklı, kim haksız bakmıyor. Yabancı kimse o suçlu direkt. Ben bu olaylara şahit oldum. Yani önümde oldu. O yüzden güven hiç kalmadı bence mülteciler için. Yoksa Türkler için bayağı güvenli yani." (Görüşme 3)

The perception of being automatically considered guilty or less trustworthy due to their refugee status can have a significant impact on refugees' sense of security and well-being.

3.2.5.1. Exposure to physical violence and insults

This study has identified instances where some refugees have been subjected to physical violence and harassment. Particularly, young refugees may face physical violence and verbal abuse at school or in public spaces. Participants in this study have reported experiencing serious incidents of violence, especially during their middle school and high school years (when they first arrived in Türkiye). Participant in Interview 2 recounted an incident as follows:

*"We were playing football, as I said. Three or five young people who were drunk came. They even had knives. They came at us with knives. They started hitting us, they kept hitting us. Then, I don't know what happened. An old man came, started shouting, and we ran away. Thankfully, nothing happened. We ran away, and they ran away too."*²⁸

One participant in Interview 8 mentioned being randomly attacked by local people in their neighborhood or the areas they went to school:

*"We were coming out of school. Some troublemakers were waiting in the park or gathering there. They caught a Syrian kid and started beating him up. Such situations used to happen a lot, it used to happen a lot in the past. There's nothing like that now. They've gotten used to it."*²⁹

Additionally, it has been found that acts of violence occurring in school have had significant negative effects on students and their families, leading students to refuse to go to school. This situation is described in Interview 6:

*"In high school, they started bothering me a lot. They said, 'Go back to Syria; we don't want you. You're a troublesome person for us.' I couldn't stand hearing those words at all. I told my mom that I wanted to quit. She said you can't quit, but I said I would quit. I quit for a period. Then, when the pandemic hit, they let everyone passed. So, I returned to the same class."*³⁰

²⁸ Turkish original: "Biz dediğim gibi futbol oynuyorduk. Sarhoş 3-5 genç geldi. Bıçakla geldiler hatta. Bıçakla geldiler. Bize vurmaya başladılar, vurdu vurdu vurdu. Ondan sonra bilmiyorum nasıl oldu. Bir adam geldi, ihtiyar bir adam. Bağırmaya başladı da biz kaçtık, çok şükür bir şey olmadı. Kaçtık, onlar da kaçtı yani." (Görüşme 2)

²⁹ Turkish original: "Biz okuldan çıkıyorduk. Bazı serseriler parkta falan bekliyor, toplanıyorlar. Bir tane Suriyeli çocuk yakalayıp dövmeye başlıyorlar. Öyle durumlar oluyordu, eskiden çok oluyordu. Şu an öyle bir şey yok. Artık alıştılar." (Görüşme 8)

³⁰ Turkish original: "Lisede çok fazla üstüme gelmeye başladılar. Suriye'ye dön, biz sizi istemiyoruz. Siz bizim için çok sıkıntılı insanlarsınız. Hiç de tahammülüm yoktu o sözleri duymaya. Anneme dedim, bırakmak istiyorum. Dedi ki bırakamazsın, dedim bırakacağım. Bir dönem bıraktım. Sonra işte korona olunca herkesi geçirdiler. Sonra onunca sınıfta döndüm." (Görüşme 6)

Not only in the neighborhood but also within the school, violence incidents have been reported. Participants have stated that they experienced verbal attacks and physical violence from classmates or older students. This is mentioned in Interview 3 as follows: *"I had more problems with the students. Due to racism. Racism wasn't very common back then. But nevertheless, I experienced racism. Some of them would speak nicely, and some would hit me. There were quite a few incidents."*³¹

3.2.5.2. Increase in anti-refugee rhetoric

This subtheme highlights the increasing anti-refugee rhetoric and its impact on refugee experiences. The growing prevalence of such rhetoric negatively affects perceptions and relationships with Syrian refugees within society. As stated by a participant in Interview 4:

*"For example, if you were to ask me now, I would prefer to stay. I would like to graduate and get a job here. But as time goes by, problems between Turks and Syrians are growing even more. If you notice, there are more problems now. Initially, about 30% of the people didn't like Arabs, now I can say it's 70%."*³²

The participant noted that attitudes towards refugees have become increasingly negative. Especially, recent incidents of violence and negative perceptions can increase refugees' security concerns. This situation leads Syrian refugees to believe they must bid farewell to their families every time they leave home. This is described in Interview 3:

*"I don't know, it's been really difficult to stay here. Especially recently, incidents have increased. Just two days ago, they killed a Syrian in Adana. He was a phone repairman. These people are probably idiots. They entered the shop and demanded a free phone. When he didn't give it to them, they shot him with a gun. It was on the news. The day before that, it happened in Istanbul. They attacked a restaurant with guns. It's hard now, you have to say goodbye to your family every time you leave home. You don't know if you'll come back or not. Will someone kill you; will the government deport you? It's not clear anymore."*³³

³¹ Turkish original: "Öğrencilerden daha sıkıntı çekiyordum. Irkçılıktan dolayı. O zaman ırkçılık çok yoktu yani. Ama her şeye rağmen vallahi ırkçılık gördüm. Yani bazıları güzel konuşurlardı. Bazıları vururlardı bana. Bayağı olaylar oldu." (Görüşme 3)

³² "Yani mesela şimdi bana sorsan ben kalmak isterim. Diplomayı alıp işte atanmayı isterim. Ama zaman geçtikçe Türklerle Suriyeliler aralarında sorunlar daha da çok büyüyor. Fark ettiyseniz daha fazla sorun oluyor. Önce mesela Arapları sevmeyen %30'du şu an %70 diyebilirim." (Görüşme 4)

³³ Turkish original: "Bilmiyorum yani gerçekten burada kalmak bayağı zor oldu. Özellikle son zamanlarda yani olaylar arttı. Şimdi iki gün önce Adana'da bir Suriyeliyi öldürdüler. Adam telefoncu. Herhalde aptal yani bunlar. Girdiler dükkâna. Bedava bir telefon istediler. Vermediği için silahla sıktılar. Haberlere de çıktı. Ondan önceki gün İstanbul'da oldu. Bir lokantaya saldırmışlar silahla. Artık zor yani insan evinden çıktığı

Increase in anti-refugee rhetoric can also be triggered by different societal events. For example, participants cited election periods. In Interview 1, a participant described the increased incidents of violence during election periods: *"They damaged a lot of Syrians' cars. My dad hid his car in the garage, that's why we didn't experience anything like that. But many people's cars and businesses were damaged."*³⁴ This type of language used during election periods is criticized by participants for making Syrians a political tool. Moreover, it exacerbates tensions in society and makes hate incidents against refugees more likely. This frustration is expressed by a participant in Interview 8: *"Honestly, this has affected us a lot. For example, you're walking on the street or taking a shared taxi. You see a big sign, 'Syrians should leave.' What does our leaving have to do with your success?"*³⁵

3.2.5.3. Fear of harm / concerns for personal safety

In parallel with the increasing anti-refugee rhetoric, participants expressed concerns about their personal safety and fear of harm. Specifically, when walking alone at night or in certain areas, they stated that they are worrying about their safety, negatively impacting their quality of life. Some participants have shared their fear of random attacks or threats while walking on the streets, highlighting the seriousness of this concern. As mentioned in Interview 10, one participant shared a strategy he developed in response to this situation:

*"There are some incidents in Türkiye. Sometimes when you walk alone at night, a young guy comes up and asks, 'Brother, do you have a cigarette?' You say, 'No, I don't smoke.' Sometimes, they might be drunk or troublemakers, and they might pull a knife on you. So, what did I do, for instance? I don't smoke, but I always carry a pack of cigarettes in my pocket. When a young guy comes up to me alone at night, I immediately take them out and say, 'Here, brother, can I light it for you?' I'm afraid. Why should I die for no reason? Why should I die? I have a future ahead."*³⁶

zaman ailesiyle bir daha vedalaşması lazım yani. Bilemiyor, dönecek mi, dönmeyecek mi? Birisi mi öldürecek, devlet mi gönderecek artık belli değil." (Görüşme 3)

³⁴ Turkish original: "Bir sürü Suriyelinin arabalarına zarar verdiler. Babamın arabasını garaja sakladılar onun için öyle biz böyle bir şey yaşamadık yani. Ama çoğu kişinin arabası, iş yeri falan zarar gördü." (Görüşme 1)

³⁵ Turkish original: "Vallahi bizi çok etkiledi aslında bu... .. mesela sokakta gidiyorsun ya da dolmuşla gidiyorsun ya da arabayla gidiyorsun... ..büyük bir yazı görüyorsun, Suriyeliler gidecek. Peki, bizim gönderilmemizle senin bir yere gelmenin ne alakası var?" (Görüşme 8)

³⁶ Turkish original: "Bazı olaylar oluyor Türkiye'de. Gece tek başına yürürken bir genç gelir mesela 'Abi sigaran var mı?' diye sorar. 'Yok, kullanmıyorum.' dersin. Bazen sarhoş ya da serseri bıçaklar seni. O yüzden ben ne yaptım mesela? Ben sigara kullanmıyorum ancak cebimde hep bir paket sigara taşıyorum. Tek başıma yürürken gece bir genç geliyorsa hemen çıkartıyorum 'Buyur kardeşim ateş vereyim mi?' Korkuyorum. Niye öleyim yani sebepsiz, niye öleyim. Daha geleceğim var." (Görüşme 10)

Furthermore, similar to the previous subtheme, participants have mentioned that going out becomes riskier during election periods or times of social tension. They emphasize the impact of societal events on refugees. Such situations seem to lead refugees to prefer staying at home and being cautious when interacting with the outside world.

3.2.5.4. Fear of mistreatment

This subtheme reflects the concerns of Syrian refugees about experiencing mistreatment or discrimination. Refugees have difficulties for integrating into Turkish society or making Turkish friends because they fear feeling excluded or discriminated against. A participant mentioned this in Interview 1:

*"They don't make friends. Because they say, if we become friends with them, they will treat us very badly. You are a refugee. I have seen that they never approach Turkish friends. I have seen this in most of my friends. They never interact with Turkish friends."*³⁷

Especially due to the fear of being revealing refugee identity, some Syrian students avoid making Turkish friends. As explained by a participant in Interview 4:

*"For example, when I first arrived, we didn't do much with Turks. For example, in another class, there were 3-4 Arab students, and we were always with them. Neither the Turks were trying to mingle nor were we. Ninth grade passed like that."*³⁸

Additionally, in some quotes, Syrian students are mentioned to be hesitant about attending Turkish schools or learning Turkish, which indicates that language barriers and discrimination concerns make integration more challenging. As a participant in Interview 9 explained: *"At that time, there were Syrian schools. I didn't want to go to Turkish schools. I was a bit scared because I didn't know Turkish. So, I went to Arab schools and studied there. That's how I finished high school."*³⁹

³⁷ Turkish original: "Arkadaşlık edinmiyorlar. Çünkü şey diyorlar. Onlarla arkadaş olursak bizi çok dışlayacaklar. İşte mültecisiniz. Çok kötü bir şekilde davranacaklarını düşündükleri için hiçbir zaman yaklaşmıyorlar. Ben bunu çoğu arkadaşımda gördüm. Yani hiçbir zaman Türk arkadaşlarıyla muhatap olmadıklarını da gördüm." (Görüşme 1)

³⁸ Turkish original: "Mesela ben ilk geçtiğimde Türklerle çok şey yapmıyorduk. Mesela diğer bir sınıfta 3-4 tane Arap öğrenci vardı, hep onlarla birlikte oluyorduk. Hani ne Türkler kaynaşmaya çalışıyordu ne de biz. Dokuzuncu sınıf o şekilde geçti." (Görüşme 4)

³⁹ Turkish original: "O zaman Suriye okulları vardı. Direkt Türk okullara gitmek istemedim. Yani korktum biraz, Türkçe bilmiyorum diye. O zaman Arap okullara gittim, orada okudum. Öyle bitirdim liseyi." (Görüşme 9)

3.2.6. Living with prejudices

This subtheme focuses on the fact that Syrian refugees in Türkiye face prejudices and how these prejudices can negatively impact their lives. Prejudices commonly held against Syrian refugees further complicate their relationships within society, hindering the establishment of a healthy communication. In Interview 1, the participant described this situation as follows: *"Many people look at me or approach me with prejudice. After they learn that I am Syrian, they either approach with a lot of prejudice or distance themselves."*

⁴⁰ The same participant continued as:

*"When we first arrived, people used to ask me things like, 'Do you have water?' 'Do you have a house?' 'Or do you live in a tent?' I saw a lot of that. They think we are ignorant and poor. (...) Once, I was eating grapes on the street, and a woman asked me, 'Do you have grapes?' I said, 'No, we don't have grapes.'"*⁴¹

Syrian refugees expressed that the Turkish community does not approach their experiences empathetically, which leads prejudices based on misinformation. In Interview 10, a participant conveys this situation with the following words: *"Let's be fair. I mean, a Turkish youth can say such things because they don't know what's happening in Syria, what we're going through."*⁴²

Additionally, it is mentioned that some people approach Syrian refugees with prejudices and accuse them of various actions (lying, fraud, theft, etc.). Interview 6 described this situation as follows:

*"Some understand when you explain our situation to them. They understand that we are never happy, that we don't want such things. Some, on the other hand, don't understand at all. They get angry with us. Why? They think we are liars. They think we speak falsely."*⁴³

⁴⁰ Turkish original: "Ön yargılı bir şekilde bana bakan, bana yaklaşan insanlar çok. Suriyeli olduğumu öğrendikten sonra çok ön yargılı bir şekilde yaklaşıyorlar ya da uzaklaşıyorlar." (Görüşme 1)

⁴¹ Turkish original: "Bana şey soruyorlardı ilk geldiğimizde 'Sizde su var mı?', 'Sizde ev var mı?' 'Yoksa çadırda mı yaşıyorsunuz?'. Bunları da ben çok gördüm. Şey bizi cahil ve fakir sanıyorlar. (...) Bir kere yolda üzüm yiyordum. Bir kadın 'Sizde üzüm var mı?' dedi bana. Dur bak yok, bizde üzüm yok." (Görüşme 1)

⁴² Turkish original: "İnsaflı olalım. Yani Türk genci, Suriye'de ne olduğunu, bizim ne yaşadığımızı bilmediği için öyle şeyler söyleyebilir." (Görüşme 10)

⁴³ Turkish original: "Bazıları anlıyorlar, anlattığınız zaman anlıyorlar durumumuzu. Bizim hiç mutlu olmadığımızı, öyle şeyler istemediğimizi anlıyorlar. Bazıları da hiç anlamıyorlar. Bize sinir oluyorlar. Neden? Bizim yalancı olduğumuzu düşünüyorlar. Yalan konuştuğumuzu düşünüyorlar." (Görüşme 6)

3.2.6.1. Misconception of easy and free access to university

Particularly noteworthy are the explanations regarding misconceptions about university education and tuition fees for Syrian refugees. Many Syrian refugees indicate that they have to take the Foreign Students Exam (YÖS) and pay tuition fees to attend university. Consequently, there is misinformation based on the false belief that Syrian refugees can enter university for free or without exams. In Interview 1, a participant explained this situation with the following sentences: *"For example, we pay tuition fees. The amount I mention is quite substantial. When I tell people, they are shocked. There's no such thing. You are studying for free. Or there are beliefs like you are living for free."*⁴⁴ A participant in Interview 2, supporting this notion, conveyed: *"Some people say that you enter universities without exams. That's not true. There were YÖS exams for foreign students. We take that exam, and based on the score, we go to universities."*⁴⁵

3.2.6.2. Misconception of receiving a lot of aid from the government

Another misconception prevalent in society concerns the amount of support provided to refugees and the misconceptions about aid programs. Support given to Syrian refugees is generally in low amounts and aims to cover their basic needs. These supports help refugees meet their basic living expenses but are often insufficient and hinder them from building a better life. These misunderstandings serve to reinforce the prejudices of the host community towards refugees. In Interview 4, a participant explained this situation as follows: *"For example, the issue of assistance. They think we receive a lot of money every month. There's nothing like that. For instance, per person, it used to be 150, now it's 200."*⁴⁶

3.2.6.3. Misconception that "Esad will give money and start businesses for returnees"

Participants emphasized that the host community holds misconceptions that Syrian refugees will receive substantial financial incentives and support from the Esad Regime if they return, and these beliefs are prevalent. It is also noted that such misconceptions are spread through social media. Despite Syrian refugees are aware that this is not true, the host

⁴⁴ Turkish original: "Mesela ben, benim gibi çok kişi ücret ödüyoruz. Dediğim ücret de çok. Söylediğimde herkes böyle şok oluyor. Yok öyle bir şey. Siz bedava okuyorsunuz. Ya da siz bedava yaşıyorsunuz gibisinden öyle şeyler de var." (Görüşme 1)

⁴⁵ Turkish original: "Bazı insanlar diyorlar ki, siz sınavsız giriyorsunuz üniversitelere. Öyle bir şey yok. YÖS sınavları vardı, yabancı öğrenciler için. Ona giriyoruz, sonra puana göre ne kazanıyorsan gidiyorsun okullara." (Görüşme 2)

⁴⁶ Turkish original: "Mesela yardım konusu. Her ay para alıyoruz ya çok fazla para aldığımızı düşünüyorlar. Kişi başı bilmem kaç ama hiç öyle bir şey yok. Mesela kişi başı önceden yüz elliydi, şu an iki yüz oldu." (Görüşme 4)

community's lack of awareness about this fact deepens their prejudices against refugees. In Interview 2, a participant explained this issue with the following sentences:

*"They, some people, believe what they see on social media. They say, 'Assad will give you \$10,000, he will open shops, why aren't you going, what are you still waiting for?' Even though they know it's a lie, they still want to believe it."*⁴⁷

3.2.8. Being seen as responsible for the war / accusatory attitudes

Syrian refugees expressed that they have been subjected to accusatory attitudes, with others perceiving them as if they are the culprits of the war. A participant explained this situation in Interview 9 stated: *"It's like they treat us as if we are guilty, but we haven't done anything to anyone. It's very unsettling."*⁴⁸

Furthermore, the words of a participant in Interview 2 complemented the sentiments of the first participant: *"(...) Some people here, you know. They say, 'You should fight there, you can't escape.' But I don't argue with these people at all. I mean, they say, 'Why did you run away, why did you come?'"*⁴⁹

3.2.9. Negative impact of social media

This subtheme draws attention to the negative impacts of social media on the lives of refugees. A participant explained this situation as follows:

*"(They think that) we misbehave, we commit rape. They have prejudices from social media, from the pages on social media. They follow them and believe what they say. For instance, you ask them, 'What have you witnessed from Syrians?' I haven't witnessed anything, but a friend told me this, told me that, and so on."*⁵⁰ (Interview 1)

Syrian refugees are negatively affected due to misinformation encountered on social media and the prejudices that spread within society. Furthermore, malicious propaganda

⁴⁷ Turkish original: "Onlar yani bazı insanlar sosyal medyada gördükleri şeylere inanıyorlar. Esed size 10.000 dolar verecek, dükkân açacak neden gitmiyorsunuz, neyi bekliyorsunuz hala diyorlar. Yalan olduğunu bilmelerine rağmen hala inanmak istiyorlar." (Görüşme 4)

⁴⁸ Turkish original: "Yani sanki suçluyuz gibi davranıyorlar ama biz hiç kimseye hiçbir şey yapmadık. Çok rahatsız edici bir şey bu." (Görüşme 9)

⁴⁹ Turkish original: "(...) Bazı insanlar burada biliyorsunuz. Bize orada savaşacaksınız, kaçamazsınız diyorlar. Ama hiç tartışmıyorum bu insanlarla ben. Yani dediğim gibi niye kaçtınız, niye geldiniz? Biz olsaydık kaçamazdık, öyle diyorlar." (Görüşme 2)

⁵⁰ Turkish original: "Şey yaramazlık yaparlar. Tecavüz ederler. Sosyal medyadan ön yargıları var, sosyal medyadaki sayfalardan. Onları takip edip ne söylediğine inanırlar. Mesela sen sorarsın. Hocam peki Suriyelilerde ne gördün? Hiç görmedim ama bir arkadaşım böyle söyledi, böyle söyledi bilmem ne." (Görüşme 10)

against refugees deliberately organized by certain groups can spread to wide audiences through social media. In Interview 8, a participant characterized this situation as follows:

"They catch one, whose Turkish is not good enough to express himself. They grab him and say, 'Syrians are like this, or we hate Syrians.' Let's try to portray them in a bad light. They are not Syrians; some of these people are actually Turkish. (They proofed that some paid) them just tell them in front of the camera that we are Syrians." ⁵¹

Especially on social media platforms, the dissemination of content that promotes discrimination against Syrian refugees or is based on misleading or false information can have a negative impact on social cohesion and integration. This situation is explained by a participant in Interview 4 as follows:

"For instance, when I watch YouTube on my phone, I see them doing street interviews. They talk about Syrians. As I watch these, I feel bad. When I go out, I look at everyone, thinking, 'Do they also think like that (as others in the YouTube videos)?' After that, I tried not to mention that I am Syrian too much." ⁵²

3.3. Theme 3: Not Understanding Turkish Makes Daily Life Difficult

"The mistake they (other Syrians) made is not learning Turkish properly. That was a big problem. I used to tell them, 'All our problems here stem from not learning Turkish properly.'" (Interview 8) ⁵³

This theme addresses the difficulties caused by not understanding Turkish in daily life. It includes issues such as the desire to drop out of school, declining academic performance, challenges in dealing with government institutions, and delays in learning Turkish. Not knowing the Turkish language can create barriers to communication, finding employment, accessing healthcare services, education, and meeting other basic needs.

However, the process of learning a language requires time and effort. Some Syrian refugees make efforts to improve their language skills. Still, there are challenges in this

⁵¹ Turkish original: "Bir tanesini yakalıyorlar, Türkçesi kendini ifade etmeye yetmiyor. Onu çekip 'Suriyeliler bu şekilde' ya da 'zaten artık biz Suriyelilerden nefret ediyoruz' de diyorlar. Onları yakalayıp kötü göstermeye çalışalım diye para ödüyorlar. Suriyeliler bu şekilde zaten. Zaten şu an açıklandı. Bu kişilerin bazıları Suriyeli değil Türk'müş. Sadece bunlara kamera karşısında biz Suriyeliyiz deyin. Bunu söyleyin. Bu şekilde söyleyin demişler." (Görüşme 8)

⁵² Turkish original: "Mesela ben telefonda Youtube izlediğimde görüyorum sokaklarda röportaj yapıyorlar. Hani işte Suriyeliler hakkında konuşuyorlar falan. Ben bunları izledikçe kötü oluyorum. Gittiğimde herkese bakıyorum, böyle acaba bunlar da mı o şekilde düşünüyorlar diye. O şekilde o şeyden sonra ben Suriyeli olduğumu fazla söylememeye çalıştım yani." (Görüşme 4)

⁵³ Turkish original: "Onların (diğer Suriyelilerin) yaptıkları hata Türkçeyi doğru düzgün öğrenmemeleri. Bu da büyük bir sıkıntı oluyordu. Ben bunlara söylüyordum. Burada bütün sorunlarımız zaten Türkçe öğrenmemekten." (Görüşme 8)

process, and coping with the difficulties caused by not knowing the language can be tough. While participants mentioned struggling to learn Turkish, they also highlighted the advantages of knowing Turkish. In Interview 4, a participant described the difficulty they faced when learning Turkish as follows: *"When we first arrived, of course, we faced many difficulties. It took 3-4 years to learn Turkish."*⁵⁴ Additionally, in Interview 10, a participant mentioned how knowing Turkish helped them to handle many tasks: *"My Turkish is considered good, and that's why. If I didn't know Turkish, it wouldn't work. It wouldn't get done."*⁵⁵

3.3.1. Desire to drop out of school

This subtheme reflects the difficulties Syrian refugees face in adapting to the Turkish education system and how these challenges can lead to a desire to discontinue their education. Participants expressed that they are struggling due to language barriers. The difficulty of students who do not speak Turkish in understanding and following lessons negatively impacts the educational process. In this study, it is evident that many refugees do not continue their education due to these challenges, but some are able to continue with the support they receive. A participant in Interview 3 vividly illustrated this situation:

*"They closed this school (the one that is Arabic school) and said we had to go to the religious (imam hatib) school. We told the teachers that we don't know Turkish, that we just arrived. We said, 'Let us learn Turkish systematically through a course.' (They told us) It's not our fault. They said whoever wants can go to the religious school, whoever wants can quit school. Some students dropped out. I went to the religious school. I learned Turkish there on my own. I mean, I didn't attend any courses."*⁵⁶

Refugees drew attention to the difficulties they face during the process of adapting to school. Initially, some students have a feeling of not wanting to go to school but gradually start to adapt. This indicates that migrant children can develop the skills to adapt to a new educational environment over time. However, strong motivation is required for a student to return to school after deciding to drop out. In Interview 2, this motivation is highlighted as

⁵⁴ Turkish original: "Yani ilk geldiğimize tabii ki çok zorluklar yaşadık. Türkçeyi öğrenene kadar 3-4 yıl geçti." (Görüşme 4)

⁵⁵ Turkish original: "Türkçem iyi sayılır, ondandır. Türkçe bilmeseydim olmazdı. Hallolmazdı." (Görüşme 10)

⁵⁶ Turkish original: "Bu okul kapattık, imam hatibe gitmeniz lazım dediler. Hocalara biz Türkçe bilmiyoruz, yeni geldik dedik. Yani bir kurs olsun, planlı Türkçe öğrenelim. Bizim suçumuz değil dediler. İsteyen imam hatibe gitsin, isteyen okulu bıraksın. Bazı öğrenciler okulu bıraktılar. Ben imam hatibe gittim. Türkçeyi orada öğrendim tek başıma. Yani herhangi bir kursa falan gitmedim." (Görüşme 3)

a family decision: *"I came from Syria to Türkiye, and I didn't understand anything in classes. After that, I got very exhausted. I said, 'I will quit school.' My family didn't accept it. They said, 'No, you will go to school.'"*⁵⁷

Alternatively, in Interview 6, a participant mentioned that during the pandemic, they had the opportunity to return to school through remote education. Some external events also contributed to their return to school:

*"I thought about it and quit. I quit in the third grade. My mom was saying, 'Don't do it, my daughter.' But my mom knew why I wanted to quit. I quit for a whole year. Yes, like that. I even quit in high school. I quit in the 9th grade. There were some incidents. I quit for a semester. In the 3rd grade, COVID happened. When COVID happened, my situation got better because classes were online. I came back."*⁵⁸

3.3.2. Decline in academic performance

The impact of the Turkish language barrier on the academic achievements of refugees was clearly mentioned by the participants. Students' expressed difficulties in understanding lessons, solving questions, and comprehending course content due to the inadequacy of their Turkish language skills. A participant in Interview 5 explained how challenging the first year was for them due to not understanding the language: *"I started to get used to it in the ninth grade. But the first year was very tough for me. I couldn't do the lessons because I didn't understand. We couldn't do the lessons in the first year."*⁵⁹

Students mention that understanding terms and course content takes time, and as a result, exam times are not sufficient for them. Additionally, the language barrier slows down their learning process. This is stated in Interview 2 as follows: *"Of course, it affects a lot because of the language. Especially, some terms are very difficult. It happens through understanding or grasping them. (...) Time runs out before you understand and solve the questions."*⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Turkish original: "Suriye'den Türkiye'ye geldim, hiçbir şey anlamıyordum derslerde. Ondan sonra çok yoruldum. Artık okulu bırakacağım dedim. Ailem kabul etmedi. Yok okula gideceksin dediler." (Görüşme 2)

⁵⁸ Turkish original: "Düşündüm ve bıraktım. Üçüncü sınıfta bıraktım. Annem yapma kızım falan diyordu. Ama annem biliyor niye bırakmak istediğimi, tam bir yıl bıraktım. Evet. Öyle. Hatta lisede de bıraktım. 9. sınıfta olaylar oldu bıraktım. Bir dönem bıraktım. 3. sınıfta Korona oldu. Korona olunca işim halloldu. Çünkü dersler uzaktan oldu. Döndüm." (Görüşme 6)

⁵⁹ Turkish original: "Dokuzuncu sınıfta alıtmaya başladım. Ama birinci sene çok kötü geçti benim için. Yani anlamadığım için dersleri yapamadım. Dersleri yapamadık birinci seneden." (Görüşme 5)

⁶⁰ Turkish original: "Tabii ki dilden kaynaklı çok etkiliyor. Özellikle mesela bazı terimler çok zor geliyor. O da işte bunları anlayarak ya da kavrayarak oluyor. (...) Soruları anlayıp da çözeşiye kadar zaman biter." (Görüşme 2)

However, some students mentioned that they began to understand Turkish better over time, and their academic achievements improved. This demonstrates that migrant students can overcome the language barrier if they continue their education with determination and effort. A participant in Interview 5 explained this situation as follows: *"At first, the first year was very tough. In fact, I graduated with a 95 (from Arabic school), but here I stayed back; I even failed in the 8th grade with a 45. It was very bad."*⁶¹ To support this, a participant in Interview 3 continued:

*"Of course, I pushed myself a lot. But when I got home, I translated all my lessons. That's why my average (grade) was a bit low. When I went to high school, my average (grade) was 50 or 51. I didn't fail, thank God, but my grade was low. I started to improve slowly. When I finished the 12th grade, my grade was 80."*⁶²

3.3.3. Struggles in government institutions

This subtheme reflects the difficulties and discrimination faced by Syrian immigrants due to the language barrier when dealing with government institutions in Türkiye. Refugees mentioned that they have difficulties while expressing their problems in hospitals or other official institutions because they do not speak Turkish. This is explained in Interview 2 as follows: *"Now my father and people like my mother sometimes struggle because they don't know Turkish. They can't explain their problems to the doctor. Our only problem is language in that regard. In hospitals, health centers."*⁶³

Additionally, in some cases, officials do not understand the language barrier or show prejudice against immigrants. This discriminatory situation is described in Interview 6 as follows:

*"They are very harsh with them because they don't know Turkish, especially in Reyhanlı. They all speak Arabic but don't speak it deliberately. Okay, I'm a student, you can speak Turkish to me because I know Turkish, and you know Turkish too. You also know Arabic, and I know Arabic. Some of them don't understand this."*⁶⁴

⁶¹ Turkish original: "İlk başta, yani 1. sene çok zordu. Hatta ben orada 95 ile mezun olurken burada kaldım, hatta 8. Sınıfta 45'te kaldım. Çok kötü oldu yani." (Görüşme 5)

⁶² Turkish original: "Tabii zorladım bayağı. Ama yani eve döndüğüm zaman tüm derslerimi tercüme ediyordum. O yüzden ortalama biraz düşüktü. Yani lise bire gittiğim zaman ortalama 50 ya da 51'di. Yani kalmadım şükür ama notum düşüktü yani. Yavaş yavaş gelişmeye başladım. 12. sınıfı bitirdiğim zaman notum 80'di yani ortalama." (Görüşme 3)

⁶³ Turkish original: "Şimdi babam ve annem gibiler Türkçe bilmediği için bazen zorlanıyorlar. Orada doktora dertlerini anlatamıyorlar. O konuda sadece dil açısından sıkıntımız var. Hastanelerde, sağlık ocaklarında." (Görüşme 2)

⁶⁴ Turkish original: "Onlar Türkçe bilmediği için çok sert davranıyorlar onlara, Reyhanlı'da mesela hepsi Arapça biliyor ama konuşmuyorlar, bilerek yapıyorlar onlar. Tamam ben öğrenciyim benimle Türkçe

3.3.4. Delay in learning Turkish

Two fundamental factors can explain the delay in Syrian refugees' process of learning Turkish. One of these factors is the existence of Arabic education institutions in several education levels which opened under the assumption that the refugee status of Syrians would be temporary. The second reason is the geographical proximity to Syria, which results in refugees settling in or choosing regions where Arabic-speaking Turkish citizens are predominant (e.g., Antakya, Hatay, Kilis).

3.3.4.1. Receiving education in Arabic schools

Firstly, some refugees mentioned that they received education in Arabic schools instead of Turkish. They point out that it limited their opportunities to learn Turkish and subsequently turned the process of learning Turkish into a challenging one, impacting their academic and social lives. In Interview 4, this situation is conveyed as follows:

*"When we first started, we didn't go to Turkish schools. We didn't go to regular schools. They opened schools in the condolence's houses, and there, Arabic teachers started providing Arabic education. (...) In middle school, we never integrated with Turks. I started in 5th grade there. They were teaching both Arabic and Turkish."*⁶⁵

In the following years, Interviewee 8 mentions that these schools were closed, and they were replaced by mixed schools that only provided education in Turkish: *"No, they closed those schools after I graduated. There were only Turkish high schools. It became mixed after that. But during our time, it wasn't mixed. Arabs were in separate schools, Turks in separate ones."*⁶⁶

3.3.4.2. Preference for Arabic-speaking regions

Secondly, migrants living in Arabic-speaking regions continue to reside within Arabic-speaking communities, and as a result, they did not feel the immediate need to learn Turkish. This has been observed as a barrier to their acquisition of Turkish and has made the

konusabilirsin, çünkü ben Türkçe biliyorum, sen de Türkçe biliyorsun. Sen de Arapça biliyorsun, ben de Arapça biliyorum. Bazıları bunu anlamıyorlar." (Görüşme 6)

⁶⁵ Turkish original: "Biz ilk başladığımızda Türk okullarına gitmedik. Normal okullara gitmedik. Taziye evlerine okul açtılar ve orada Arap öğretmenler, Arapça öğretim vermeye başladılar. (...) Orta okulda Türklerle hiç kaynaşmadık. 5. Sınıfa orada başladım. Öyle hem Arapça öğretiyorlardı hem de Türkçe." (Görüşme 4)

⁶⁶ Turkish original: "Yok bizden sonra ben mezun olduktan sonra artık o okulları kapattılar. Sadece Türk liseleri vardı. Artık karmaydı o zamandan sonra. Ama bizim zamanlarımızda karma değildi. Araplar ayrı, Türkler ayrı okullardaydı." (Görüşme 8)

integration process more challenging. The participant explained this situation in Interview 7:

*"In Reyhanlı, people mostly speak Arabic. I couldn't speak Turkish very well there because people mainly spoke Arabic. In Hatay, they generally speak Arabic. We struggled a bit, but we learned Turkish after entering high school. Yes, it was challenging to learn Turkish."*⁶⁷

3.4. Theme 4: Xenophobia Towards Syrians

*"I really hate that question, 'Where are you from?'"*⁶⁸ (Interview 10)

This theme focuses on the existing xenophobia against Syrians in Türkiye, which manifests in various ways within the neighborhood, educational environments, the attitudes of teachers and academics, the behaviors of classmates, and government officials. Our participants have shared instances where refugees have encountered xenophobia in various areas where they interact with the host community. In Interview 8, one participant mentioned that even the criterion of being Muslim, which was previously sufficient motivation for staying in Türkiye, is now questioned in the face of the xenophobia they experience: *"But now, with racism, that's why everyone started thinking about going to Europe. Because people used to say, 'We want to live in a Muslim country,' before."*⁶⁹

3.4.1. "Are you Syrian?" - Their only guilt is being Syrian!

This subtheme elaborates on the discrimination and xenophobia that Syrian refugees face solely due to their Syrian identity. It is important to understand the severity of these situations through the incidents narrated by three different participants:

*"Sometimes we stay after class to study. There were laptops there, and I was using one by myself. There was a security guard. He came over and saw my notebook. I was translating my courses from Turkish to Arabic to understand better. He asked me 'Where are you from?' I told him that I'm Syrian. Then he replied 'Well, you guys are going to leave for sure. Tayyip Erdoğan will leave, and you will too. It came out of blue. Why are you telling me this? I'm a student, studying here. I haven't done anything wrong. I don't know. He'll come to his senses. He'll ask. There's nothing to be done.'" (Interview 10)*⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Turkish original: "Reyhanlı'da çoğullukla Arapça konuşuyorlar. Çok Türkçe konuşamadım orada. Çünkü çoğullukla Arapça konuştular. Hatay'da genelde Arapça konuşuyorlar. Zorlandık biraz ama liseye girdikten sonra Türkçe öğrendik. Evet zorlandık Türkçe öğrenmekte." (Görüşme 7)

⁶⁸ Turkish original: "Ben gerçekten yani şu nerelisin sorusu var ya. Nefret ediyorum bu sorudan." (Görüşme 10)

⁶⁹ Turkish original: Ama şimdi ırkçılık olunca, o yüzden herkes Avrupa'ya gitmeyi düşünmeye başladı. Çünkü insanlar eskiden Müslüman bir ülkede yaşamak istiyoruz diyordu." (Görüşme 8)

⁷⁰ Turkish original: "Ders bittikten sonra sınıfta bazen kalırız, çalışırız. Orada laptoplar falan var. Orada onu kullanıyordum tek başıma. Güvenlik görevlisi vardı. Geldi. Bir şey yok yani. Geldi öyle. Benim notlarımı gördü, Türkçeden çeviriyordum Arapçaya. Dedi ki, "Oğlum sen nerelisin?" Tamam, söyleyelim abi. Suriyeliyim. E, gideceksiniz. Kesin gideceksiniz. Bir gün gideceksiniz. Tayyip Erdoğan gider, siz de gidersiniz."

"One day, we went to a restaurant. There weren't many people there, just one family. We sat a bit far from them. Then, after 5-10 minutes, a woman from that family came to us and said, 'If you want, come sit over here; there's air conditioning here.' I talked to her without anyone else, my mom or anyone else, talking. 'Alright, we'll come,' I said. She thought we were Turks; we moved closer to them. When we moved, we started speaking in Arabic. We were already talking there, but our voices weren't reaching them. After a few sentences, the woman turned and looked at us, her eyes widened. She asked if we were Arabs, and I said yes. Then, her face changed, and she stopped talking. After that, they just got up and left." (Interview 4)⁷¹

"I think it was when I was in high school. I was in the 9th grade. My Turkish was good. My friends didn't know that I was Syrian at that time. They found out when I showed my ID, and they got pretty angry. They asked, 'How could you not tell us?' I said, 'Why should I tell you? First of all, you didn't ask. Second, what difference does it make? Whether I'm Syrian or Turkish or Christian, what difference does it make?'" (Interview 6)⁷²

These incidents highlight that the group facing refugee hostility did not do anything to provoke it; in fact, they were treated well before their Syrian identity was revealed. However, upon learning that they were Syrian, hostile attitudes and remarks were directed toward them without any apparent reason.

In some instances, there are statements suggesting that when Syrian refugees attempt to conduct transactions by revealing their identities, they are denied certain rights that are offered to others. This exclusion leads to some daily services being denied solely because they are Syrian. This situation is conveyed in Interview 1:

"I had just asked if they offered installment payment. They answered me 'No, we don't offer it to Syrians. Go somewhere else.' That day, we were going to buy a broom. I had only asked if there was an installment option. They said,

Tamam abi. Benim ne işim var seninle? Niye bana söylüyorsun bunu? Ben öğrenciyim, burada okuyorum. Sana bir şey yapmadım. Yani bir kötülük etmedim. Bilmiyorum. Kendi kendine gelir. Sorar. Yapacak şey yok." (Görüşme 10)

⁷¹ Turkish original: "Bir gün lokantaya gittik. Fazla insan yoktu orada sadece bir aile vardı. Biz de onlardan biraz uzak oturduk. Sonra aradan 5 -10 dakika geçti. Oradaki aileden bir kadın yanımıza geldi şey dedi "İsterseniz gelin bu tarafta oturun", orada klima var dedi. Ben de onunla konuştum annem falan hiç kimse konuşmadan, tamam geliriz dedim. Hani bizi Türk sanmıştı, biz onların yanına geçtik. Geçtiğimizde Arapça konuşmaya başladık. Zaten konuşuyorduk orada da ama sesimiz gelmiyordu. Birkaç cümle sonra kadın böyle bir döndü baktı, gözlerini böyle açtı. Siz Arap mısınız dedi, ben de evet dedim. Sonra kadının böyle suratı asıldı. Soru soruyordu bana, suratı asıldı ve hani böyle hiç konuşmamaya başladı. Zaten sonra kalkıp gittiler." (Görüşme 4)

⁷² Turkish original: "Sanırım bir ara liseyken ben. 9. sınıftaydım. Benim Türkçem iyiydi. Yani arkadaşlarım o ara Suriyeli olduğumu bilmiyordu. Kimliğimi çıkarttığım zaman gördüler, işte baya kızdılar. Sen nasıl söylemezsin falan. Dedim işte niye söylememe gerek mi var. Zaten birincisi siz sormadınız. İkincisi, yani ne fark eder ki? Suriyeli ya da Türk olduğum ya da Hristiyan olsam yani ne fark eder ki?" (Görüşme 6)

*'No, we don't offer it to Syrians. You're all thieves,' and similar statements were made.'*⁷³

3.4.2. Xenophobia in the neighborhood

Xenophobia against Syrian migrants are also encountered in the neighborhood. When refugees in the neighborhood disclose their Syrian identity, some neighbors react negatively, leading to unpleasant incidents. This situation is described in Interview 3: *"Now, when I go out, our neighbor, for example, used to come. 'Why are you looking at me?' he says. So, for no reason, arguments used to start that way."*⁷⁴

Some neighbors make efforts to evict Syrian immigrants from their homes or refuse to communicate with them. Such negative behaviors make immigrants feel excluded from their social surroundings. This situation is narrated in Interview 9:

*"We had only one neighbor in the building. He always tried to evict us from the house. But he couldn't. (...) Because we were Syrian, and once he asked my father for something. He wanted to marry a girl. He wanted a Syrian girl he didn't know. My father didn't help with this, so he got mad at us and tried to evict us."*⁷⁵

In another example, immigrants claim that they were criticized by their neighbors for placing umbrellas in front of their businesses, citing that it spoiled the neighborhood's appearance, and even the police became involved. If the person you are dealing with in any event is a refugee, the non-refugee party tends to develop a belief that they can do anything they want, as conveyed by the participants. In Interview 10, this situation is explained through an incident:

"My father has a shop, and our neighbor had just opened a new shop. We were putting up an umbrella outside so that the sun wouldn't come in. He told us to take it inside, saying it was spoiling the view. I said, 'Alright, we have customers right now.' Can I take it inside in half an hour? He said okay. I was 10 minutes late. He came and said, 'Are you kidding with me?' Why didn't you take it inside? He argued with us, and the police came. I mean, we can legally place an umbrella in front of our door. The police came because we're Syrian,

⁷³ Turkish original: "Bir tanesi şey yapabilir. Siz Suriyelere artık hesap açmıyoruz. Hadi gidin buradan. Mesela bir gün süpürge falan alacaktık. Ben sadece soru olarak taksit var mı diye sormuştum. Yok, Suriyelilere vermiyoruz biz. Siz hırsızınız gibi cümleler kuruldu." (Görüşme 1)

⁷⁴ Turkish original: "Şimdi oldu ben yola geçtiğim zaman komşumuz mesela geliyordu. Niye bakıyorsun lan diyor. Yani öyleyse sebezsiniz. Evet öyle tartışmalar başlıyordu." (Görüşme 3)

⁷⁵ Turkish original: "Yaşadığımız binada bir komşumuz vardı sadece. Hep bizi evden kovmaya çalıştı. Ama beceremedi. (...) Suriyeli olduğumuz için ve bir kere babamdan bir şey istedi. Bir kızla evlenmek istedi. Ya tanımadığı Suriyeli birini istedi. Babam bu konuda yardımcı olmadığı için böyle rahatsız oldu bizden ve kovmaya çalıştı." (Görüşme 9)

*saying it spoils the view. Okay, whatever you say, we don't have anything to say."*⁷⁶

3.4.3. Xenophobia in the educational environment

This subtheme examines the xenophobia experienced by Syrian refugees in the educational context through the attitudes of teachers and academics. In addition, classmates have also been included in the educational setting.

3.4.3.1. Attitudes of teachers/academics

Participants reported that some teachers hold biases towards Syrian refugees and express these biases within the classroom. Specifically, when teachers learn that students are Syrian, they exhibit unfavorable attitudes, as stated. Many students express that their teachers hinder their participation in classes or receiving special assistance, citing their exclusion due to being Syrian. This issue is articulated in Interview 3: *"Now when I go to school, I am the only Syrian. There is no one else. But despite this, I faced difficulties. For example, the teachers did not pay attention."*⁷⁷

Another example is presented in Interview 4: *"For example, I was good at mathematics, really good. When I raised my hand to participate in the class, they said no, you sit down. Not you, let the Turkish students solve it."*⁷⁸ Students mentioned that this situation particularly affects their grades and negatively impacts their academic performance. It is even noted that these issues escalate into administrative problems, harming students' further education, as described in Interview 6:

*"When I went to school, I had a teacher who did not like Syrians at all. I asked why, and at one point, he said to me, 'You are so different.' But in the end, we are all human. I told him, 'You have no right to do that.' As a result, I received a suspension."*⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Turkish original: "Babamın bir dükkânı var, komşumuz yeni açtı dükkânı. Biz dışarıya bir şemsiye koyuyorduk, yani güneş gelmesin diye. Bunu içeri alın dedi. Manzarayı bozuyormuş. Tamam hocam, şu an müşterimiz var dedim. Yarım saat sonra çıkarsam olur mu? Tamam dedi. 10 dakika geç kaldım. Geldi, Lan sen benimle mi oynuyorsun? Oyun mu oynuyorsun? Niye çıkartmadın? gibi laflar etti. Tamam hocam, sakın ol. Tamam. Çıkartıyorum, müşterilerim vardı. Olmadı yani tartıştık, polis de geldi. Yani bizim kapımızın önünde, kanuna göre koyabiliriz şemsiye. Polis Suriyeli olduğumuz için gelir, tamam alın bunu manzarayı bozar. Tamam ne dersen o deriz, diyecek bir şey yok." (Görüşme 10)

⁷⁷ Turkish original: "Şimdi okula gittiğim zaman, yani Suriyeli olan tek benim. Başka yok. Ama bunu rağmen zorluklar çektim. Mesela hocalar önem göstermiyorlardı." (Görüşme 3)

⁷⁸ Turkish original: "Mesela benim matematiğim iyiydi, güzeldi yani. Elimi kaldırıp derse katılmak istediğimde yok sen otur dediler. Sen değil, Türk öğrenciler çözsün." (Görüşme 4)

⁷⁹ Turkish original: "Ben okula gittiğim zaman bir öğretmenim vardı. Suriyelileri hiç sevmiyordu. Nedenini sordum, bir ara bana dedi ki "İşte siz çok farklısınız". Ama sonuçta hepimiz insanız. Sizin öyle yapmaya hakkınız yok dedim. Bunun için uzaklaştırma aldım." (Görüşme 6)

Some students claim that they face discrimination even at the university level solely because they are Syrian. In Interview 7, it is conveyed that the attitude of academic's changes when they learn that the student is refugee: *"Now, in university, there are some professors. When you mention foreign nationality, their attitude changes, frankly. We can't speak openly with them. We are afraid because they know we are of foreign nationality."*⁸⁰ The discriminatory behavior of academics is observed to translate into actions and negatively impact students' academic success. Interview 8 illustrated this with an example:

*"It affected me, as I mentioned, my GPA could have been 3.09 instead of 2.96. I had done a project, for instance. Because our teacher did not like us, I tried to do it better. Just to get an 'AA' grade. I was trying to raise my GPA to 3.00 because I wanted to get an honor certificate. The teacher asked us for a project and an assignment. One girl had only done the project. I saw her project and did it better than hers. She got a 'BA,' and I got a 'CB.' She had only done the project."*⁸¹

It is stated that in this case, grading was not based on the effort put in, and a student who had not fulfilled all responsibilities received a higher grade than a refugee student who had fulfilled all responsibilities. This situation may lead refugee students to develop a belief that, no matter how hard they try, they cannot achieve good grades, damaging their sense of justice, as explained in Interview 9:

*"Both in terms of studying, if I look at it from a studying perspective, I work harder than the Turks, put in more effort. I put in effort, but I can't achieve the same results. I don't get the same things from the teachers."*⁸²

Some academics are reported to exhibit biased behavior towards Syrian students and create difficulties rather than helping them. In Interview 9, it is noted that an academic helped non-Syrian students find internships but avoided assisting Syrian students:

"I tried to find an internship in the summer, but I couldn't find one. So, my internship was postponed to the next summer. When I asked the professor for

⁸⁰ Turkish original: "Şimdi üniversitede bazı hocalar var. Yabancı uyruklu dediğinde öyle bakışı değişiyor açıkçası. Yani tam konuşmıyoruz onlarla. Korkuyoruz açıkçası, yani bizi biliyorlar ya yabancı uyrukluyuz. Bazı hocaların öyle bakışı değişir bize karşı." (Görüşme 8)

⁸¹ Turkish original: "Yani etkiledi söylediğim gibi, benim ortalamam 2.96 iken 3.09 olabilirdi. Sadece çok şükür ki o kadar etkiliyor. Ben mesela bir proje yapmıştım. Hocamız bizi sevmediği için ben daha iyi yapmaya çalışmıştım. Sadece AA harfi almak için. Ortalamamı 3.00 yapmaya çalışıyordum. Çünkü onur belgesi istiyordum. Hoca bizden bir proje ve bir ödev istiyordu. Bu kız sadece proje yapmıştı. Yani ben de projesini gördüm. Ondan daha iyi yaptım. Ona BA vermişti, bana CB verdi. Kız sadece proje yapmıştı." (Görüşme 8)

⁸² Turkish original: "Hem ders çalışmak için, eğer ders çalışmak açısından bakarsam, Türklerden daha fazla çalışıyorum, daha fazla emek veriyorum. Emek veriyorum ama aynı neticeye ulaşamıyorum. Hocalardan aynı şeyi almıyorum." (Görüşme 9)

help, the professor was helping those who couldn't find a place. I told him, 'Professor, I couldn't find a place.' He answered me 'Look for yourself'."⁸³

3.4.3.2. Attitudes of classmates

To better understand the xenophobia experienced in the educational environment, it is important to comprehend the experiences of Syrian students regarding the attitudes of their classmates. Classmates are considered the individuals with whom the participants received their high school and university education together. Two different incidents recounted by participants shed light on these experiences:

"In a history class, the teacher was talking about something unrelated to the lesson. He was saying how people outside are always idle, and not to become like them. The teacher never mentioned Arabs or Syrians specifically; he was speaking in general terms. Then one student said, 'They are all Arabs, Syrians.' Of course, back then, I couldn't respond. I felt really bad that day, I got angry. But I couldn't say anything." (Interview 4)⁸⁴

"There was a guy who looked at me and said, 'When are you going back to Syria?' I said, 'Only God knows.' 'Even if I don't go back, what will happen? Why do you care? What harm do you see in us?'" I asked. He said to me, 'We don't like you; we don't want anything to do with you, but you don't understand.' (...) The teacher had asked him to apologize, but he didn't. He came up to me and said, 'I won't apologize, I hope you leave.'" (Interview 6)⁸⁵

These two incidents highlight the xenophobia experienced by participants in the educational environment. Participants mentioned that they were emotionally affected by these incidents. Classmates may exhibit discriminatory and racist attitudes toward Syrian students. Some students express feeling excluded and ostracized due to being Syrian. These students report being ridiculed for being Syrian within the classroom and state that some classmates avoid interacting with them. A participant in Interview 8 described this situation as follows: *"When I first came to the classroom, I would greet my classmates. None of them*

⁸³ Turkish original: "Ben yazın staj bulmaya çalıştım bulamadım. Yani stajım kaldı gelecek yaz. Hocadan yardım istediğimde, hoca bulamayan arkadaşlara yer buluyordu. Dedim hocam ben yer bulamadım. Bak kendin uğraş falan dedi." (Görüşme 9)

⁸⁴ Turkish original: "Tarih dersiydi. Hoca ders dışı bir şeyler anlatıyordu. Dışarıdaki insanlar hep boş, siz de onlar gibi olmayın diyordu. Hoca asla Araplar falan demiyordu. Hani genel olarak konuşuyordu. Sonra bir tane öğrenci "Hepsi Araplar, Suriyeliler" dedi. Tabii ben o zamanlarda cevap veremiyordum. Ben o gün gerçekten çok kötü oldum, sinirlendim yani. Ama bir şey diyemiyordum." (Görüşme 4)

⁸⁵ Turkish original: "İşte bir erkek vardı. Bana böyle bir baktı "Siz ne zaman Suriye'ye döneceksiniz" dedi. Allah bilir dedim. Dönmesek ne olacak, yani ne oluyor? Siz bizden ne zarar görüyorsunuz? diye sordum. Bana "biz sizi sevmiyoruz, sevmiyoruz öyle. Sizinle hiçbir şey yapmak istemiyoruz ama siz anlamıyorsunuz" dedi. (...) Hoca ondan rica etmiş özür dilesin diye. Özür dilemedi. Yanıma yaklaştı ve dedi ki 'özür dilemeyeceğim, inşallah gidersiniz'." (Görüşme 6)

would respond or greet me. I didn't do anything wrong. They had wrong ideas about Syrians. But they all changed, of course."⁸⁶

Additionally, Syrian students noted that their classmates cast doubt on their achievements, even when they receive high grades. This situation arises from discrimination directed towards Syrian students' accomplishments. In Interview 10, a participant conveyed this situation: "Some friends would ask us, 'How do you, as Syrian students, get such high grades?' They would say, 'How do you get 'AA,' 'AB,' and such grades?'"⁸⁷

These experiences shed light on the challenges faced by Syrian students not only from teachers and academics but also from their peers within the educational environment. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing and mitigating xenophobia in educational settings.

3.4.6. Xenophobia among government officials

This subtheme reflects the negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviors of civil servants in government institutions towards Syrian refugees. Some civil servants working in government institutions may display biased and discriminatory attitudes towards Syrian refugees. These attitudes can exacerbate the difficulties that Syrian refugees face in accessing various public services. Examples have been provided where civil servants in government institutions, such as immigration authorities, hospitals, or schools, make decisions based on negative stereotypes about Syrian refugees.

For instance, in Interview 1, a participant stated:

*"Before it was my turn, the doctor had an argument with a Syrian person. I entered and was talking to him in Turkish, explaining my issue. Then, he looked at my name in the system and asked, 'Are you also Syrian?' I replied, 'Yes.' He said, 'Okay, you're fine. You can go.'"*⁸⁸

Here, it is indicated that the doctor treated other refugees poorly based on a negative experience with other refugees. In another example, both the change in refugees' access to their rights based on the attitudes of civil servants and discriminatory behaviors in schools are discussed. In Interview 3, a participant explained the situation through an incident:

"Attitudes vary depending on the civil servant. Wherever you go: immigration authorities, hospitals, or schools. After the earthquake, we moved to Bingöl."

⁸⁶ Turkish original: "Ben sınıfa ilk geldiğim zaman arkadaşlarıma selam veriyordum. Hiçbiri selam veya cevap vermiyordu. Ben şimdi bir şey yapmadım. Onların da yanlış fikirleri vardı Suriyelilere karşı. Ama hepsi değişti tabi ki." (Görüşme 8)

⁸⁷ Turkish original: "Bazı arkadaşlar bize "Suriyeli öğrenci olarak nasıl bu kadar yüksek bir puan alırsınız?" diyorlardı. Diyorlar ki nasıl AA, AB falan diye notlar alıyorsunuz. Nasıl?" (Görüşme 10)

⁸⁸ Turkish original: "Benim sıram gelmeden önce doktor Suriyeli biriyle kavga etmiş. Ben de girdim. Onunla Türkçe olarak konuşuyordum. Derdimi anlatıyordum. Sonra benim adıma baktı sisteme. "Sen de Suriyeli misin?" dedi. "Evet" dedim. "Tamam bir şeyin yok. Hadi çık." dedi." (Görüşme 1)

*We went to enroll my siblings in school. They wouldn't admit them to the first school. The officer said, 'They don't know Turkish. I can't take them. Are they decent or indecent?' He was speaking like this initially, without knowing us or asking us. We said, 'They know Turkish, don't worry. If they're indecent, you can expel them from school later.' He didn't want to register them, despite everything. We went to another school. We got them enrolled immediately, within 5 minutes. Both my siblings were registered."*⁸⁹

3.5. Theme 5: Hiding Syrian Identity -Protecting Oneself Against Discrimination

"I never speak Arabic on the bus, for example. If my phone rings, I never speak Arabic. I speak Turkish. I mean, I don't know, I do it to avoid bad experiences." (Interview 1)⁹⁰

"Well, sometimes, I feel ashamed to say I'm Syrian. Some people don't mention that they're Syrian. Some have reached this point. (...) To prevent people's behavior from changing. For example, they say, 'I'm not Syrian, I'm Palestinian,' or something like that." (Interview 8)⁹¹

This theme addresses efforts to conceal one's Syrian identity as a means of self-preservation against discrimination. This encompasses behaviors such as refraining from speaking Arabic within the community, not disclosing one's Syrian origin, and attempting to dress like a Turk. It also includes the reluctance to endure refugee status any longer and the desire to become a citizen of any country in order to avoid accusations and hostile glances.

3.5.1. "No Arabic!" - Not speaking Arabic within the community

Syrian refugees may employ different strategies to avoid mistreatment or discrimination within society. One of these strategies involves exhibiting certain behaviors, such as refraining from speaking Arabic in the community or public transportation and speaking Arabic quietly while on the phone. Additionally, they try to conceal their Syrian identity by practicing speaking Turkish. A participant in Interview 7 explained this situation as follows:

"I do not speak Arabic. Actually, I don't like speaking Arabic. I prefer speaking Turkish. When I speak Turkish on the street or on the bus, they can't

⁸⁹ Turkish original: "Tutumlar memura göre değişiyor. Nereye gidersen git: göç idaresi, hastaneye ya da okul. Deprem olduktan sonra biz Bingöl'e taşındık. Kardeşlerimizi okula kaydettirmek için okula gittik. İlk okula almadılar. Adam diyor ki, "Türkçe bilmiyorlar. Ben bunları alamam. Ahlaklı mı, ahlaksız mı?" İlk başta böyle konuşuyor. Yani bizi tanımadan, bize sormadan. Dedik ki, "Türkçe biliyorlar, merak etme. Ahlaklılar, ahlaklı değilse okuldan atabilirsiniz." Her şeye rağmen kaydını yapmak istemiyordu yani. Başka bir okula gittik. Direkt kaydını yaptırdık, direkt. Yani 5 dakika içinde iki kardeşim kaydedildi." (Görüşme 3)

⁹⁰ Turkish original: "Hiçbir zaman Arapça konuşmam otobüste, mesela telefon gelirse Arapça hiç konuşmam. Türkçe konuşurum. Yani bilmiyorum kötü şeylere maruz kalmamak için böyle yapıyorum." (Görüşme 1)

⁹¹ Turkish original: "Yani bazen Suriyeliyim demekten utanma oluyor. Bazıları söylemiyor Suriyeli olduğunu. Bazıları bu duruma geldi. (...) İnsanların davranışları değişsin diye. Şey diyor mesela, ben Suriyeli değilim, ben Filistinliyim falan." (Görüşme 8)

*recognize me. They usually don't realize I'm Syrian when I speak Turkish. When you speak Arabic, you get those harsh looks. You can't get those when you speak Turkish."*⁹²

Refugees in this study expressed feelings of embarrassment and apprehension about speaking Arabic. Participant in Interview 10 addressed this issue: *"Honestly, when I first arrived, I suffered a lot. I felt embarrassed to speak Arabic with friends. You know how it is."*⁹³

These strategies aim to help Syrian refugees manage their daily lives while mitigating the challenges and discriminatory attitudes they encounter. Simultaneously, it is evident that this behavior has become a norm, with other refugees cautioning those unaware of it not to speak Arabic in public spaces. Interview 8 provided a concrete example:

*"I was in Istanbul recently. I was speaking Arabic. It was my first time in Istanbul. My friend told me not to speak Arabic on the metro, subway, or anywhere else. Speaking Arabic can cause problems right away. Sometimes, I accidentally speak Arabic, but my friends warn me. They have been living there for 10 years. They warn me. I never speak Arabic. It could lead to trouble. There is a possibility."*⁹⁴

This situation led refugees being afraid to use public transportation and behaving as if danger could strike at any moment in public spaces. Besides speaking Arabic, reading Arabic, thereby exposing Arabic to the local population, is also considered problematic. Participant in Interview 9 explicitly explained this:

*"We started to fear taking public transportation. I was going to work, and I started reading a book on the metro. The book was written in Arabic. Some people were looking at me very angrily just because I was reading a book in Arabic. We don't speak Arabic anyway. We can't speak Arabic on the streets or buses. There's a limit; there's no freedom."*⁹⁵

⁹² Turkish original: "Arapça konuşamıyorum. Arapça konuşmayı sevmiyorum aslında. Türkçe konuşmayı tercih ederim. Sokakta ya da otobüste Türkçe konuşunca seni tanıyamıyorlar. Genelde Suriyeli olduğumu anlamıyorlar Türkçe konuştuğumda. Arapça konuştuğunda sana öyle kötü bir bakış geliyor. Türkçe konuşunca sen öyle yapamıyorlar." (Görüşme 7)

⁹³ Turkish original: "Valla hocam ilk geldiğimde çok çektim. Arkadaşlarla Arapçayı konuşmaktan utanıyordum. Yani bilirsiniz böyle." (Görüşme 10)

⁹⁴ Turkish original: "Ben geçen İstanbul'daydım. Arapça konuşuyordum. Ben ilk defa İstanbul'a gitmişim. Arkadaşım dedi ki sen metrobüste, metroda falan hiç Arapça konuşma sakın. Arapça konuşma hemen sorun çıkartabilirler. Bazen yanlışlıkla şey yapıyorum Arapça konuşuyorum. Ama arkadaşlarım uyarıyorlar. Onlar zaten 10 yıldır orada yaşıyorlar. Beni uyarıyorlar. Yani hiç Arapça konuşmam. Bir sorun olabilir. Bir ihtimal olabilir." (Görüşme 8)

⁹⁵ Turkish original: "Ulaşım araçlara binmeye korkmaya başladık. İşe gidiyordum ben, metrodayken bir kitap okumaya başladım. Kitap Arapça yazılı bir kitaptı. Birkaç kişi bana çok sinirli bir şekilde bakıyordu. Yani sadece Arapça bir kitap okuduğum için. Arapça zaten konuşmuyoruz. Yani sokaklarda ya da otobüslerde Arapça konuşamıyoruz. Sınır var, özgürlük yok." (Görüşme 9)

3.5.2. "I'm from Mardin"- Not revealing that you're Syrian

This subtheme focuses on Syrian refugees' efforts to conceal or alter their Syrian identities. This behavior emerges as a strategy aimed at avoiding discrimination or negative reactions and seeking better acceptance and treatment within society. Particularly in countries with a high concentration of Syrian refugees, such as Türkiye, openly expressing one's Syrian identity can sometimes lead to adverse consequences.

This situation does not occur when a Syrian refugee presents themselves as coming from a different country (e.g., Lebanon, Palestine) or identifies themselves as Turkish (e.g., from Mardin, Urfa). In Interview 10, a participant recounted an incident to illustrate that even belonging to another Arab group can be safer than identifying as a Syrian:

*"When I came to Erzurum, I introduced myself as Lebanese. To avoid racism. I say I'm Lebanese. Lebanon? Where is that? They don't know where it is. Alright, what language do you speak there? We speak Arabic. I know Arabs, but Syrians are the worst. May God be pleased, I'm glad I didn't say I'm Syrian."*⁹⁶

In parallel, a participant in Interview 3 mentioned a tendency to identify as Turkish or from the Eastern Anatolia Region, especially due to not being fluent in Turkish:

*"I have to do that, or else I could get into trouble. Yes, to that extent. So, sometimes I say I'm Turkish, or I say I'm from Mardin or Urfa, or I say I'm from Hatay. That's because they don't notice that my Turkish isn't good."*⁹⁷

3.5.3. Trying to dress/look like a Turk

This subtheme focuses on Syrian refugees' efforts to dress and appear like Turks. These behaviors may reflect Syrian individuals' aspirations to gain more acceptance within society or to minimize exposure to discrimination. One's style of clothing and appearance is a significant factor that creates initial impressions about a person's identity in public, and as a result, some Syrian refugees may attempt to control these factors. For example, a participant in Interview 1 stated this situation as follows: *"I appear as if I'm not Syrian. I*

⁹⁶ Turkish original: "Erzurum'a gelince kendimi Lübnanlı olarak tanıttım. Irkçılık görmemek için. Lübnanlıyım derim. Lübnan mı? Neresi Lübnan? Bilmiyoruz neresi. Tamam ne konuşursunuz orada? Arapça konuşuyoruz. Arapları biliyorum, fakat Suriyeliler en kötüsü. Ya Allah razı olsun iyi ki Suriyeli olduğumu söylemedim." (Görüşme 10)

⁹⁷ Turkish original: "Öyle yapmazsam zarar görebilirim yani. Evet o derece. O yüzden bazenleri Türküm diyorum, Mardinliyim ya da Urfalıyım diyorum ya da Hatay diyorum. O yüzden Türkçemin iyi olmadığını fark etmiyorlar." (Görüşme 3)

haven't experienced many problems."⁹⁸ This sentiment is echoed in Interview 4, where the following remarks were made: *"When we first went there, like I said, my mother and I dressed just like Turks. Our Arab identity wasn't very apparent."*⁹⁹

3.5.4. "Sharp as a knife glances"- Being subjected to accusatory and hostile looks

This subtheme highlights the accusatory or negative glances that Syrian refugees may face when speaking Arabic or revealing their Syrian identity. In situations where they speak Arabic or exhibit any behavior that discloses their Syrian background, they can encounter disapproving looks and negative reactions within society. This can be a distressing experience that negatively affects the daily lives of Syrian refugees.

Regarding the accusatory looks faced when speaking Arabic in public spaces, a participant in Interview 7 explained it as follows: *"A person is speaking Arabic on the phone. This happens a lot in Türkiye. People look at them like, how can you speak Arabic? You should speak Turkish; you can't speak Arabic. You should only speak Turkish."*¹⁰⁰ Additionally, a participant in Interview 3 conveyed this situation with the following sentences: *"When I speak Arabic, people look at me, so I'm hesitant. I mean, people give me dirty looks. That's why."*¹⁰¹

3.5.5. Desire not to be a refugee and to have citizenship

Among refugees, it is observed that the common sentiment is the increasing inability to tolerate the difficulties associated with refugee status, leading to a desire not to be a refugee or to acquire the citizenship of a country. These desires reflect the aspiration to evade the restrictions associated with refugee status.

Some refugees readily accept that they possess a refugee identity, acknowledging it as a given aspect of their lives. In Interview 1, a participant explained this situation as follows:

⁹⁸ Turkish original: "Suriyeli değilmişim gibi gözüktüyorum ya. Çok bir sorun yaşamadım." (Görüşme 1)

⁹⁹ Turkish original: "Biz oraya ilk gittiğimizde dediğim gibi mesela annemle aynı şekilde Türkler gibi giyiniyoruz. Yani bizim Arap olduğumuz fazla belli olmuyor." (Görüşme 4)

¹⁰⁰ Turkish original: "Bir kişi telefonla Arapça konuşuyor. Bu çok oluyor Türkiye'de. Böyle insanlar ona bakıyor ki yani nasıl konuşuyorsun sen Arapça. Türkçe konuşmalısın, Arapça konuşamazsın. Sadece Türkçe konuşacaksın." (Görüşme 7)

¹⁰¹ Turkish original: "Arapça konuştuğum zaman millet bana bakıyor, o yüzden çekiniyorum. Yani millet ters ters bakıyor. O yüzden." (Görüşme 3)

*"We have at least an identity. Because I left at a young age, I don't even have a Syrian identity. I'm just a girl written down when leaving. But I don't have an identity; at least I have one now, even it's a refugee identity."*¹⁰²

However, at the same time, they expressed a desire to live like a 'regular person' rather than under the banner of a refugee identity. This is an expression of their avoidance of being labeled as refugees. Seeking to move beyond refugee status to gain more freedom and opportunities is a significant source of motivation for Syrian individuals. This sentiment was expressed in Interview 5 with the following words:

*"I am comfortable as a refugee, but no one wants to stay under the title of a refugee. We want to live like normal people. I don't want to be a refugee in the future. (...) Maybe I'll become a citizen of any country, or my own country, I don't know."*¹⁰³

3.6. Theme 6: "I feel like I'm in prison"- Effects of Government Policies and Legal Systems

"Because my registration is in Hatay, I can't leave the Hatay province, for example. It feels like I'm in prison, you know. I feel this way." (Interview 3)

This theme addresses the impact of government policies and legal systems on refugees. It encompasses challenges mentioned by participants, such as restrictions on the right to travel, the inability to work in public institutions, the difficulty of obtaining Turkish citizenship, and high tuition fees for higher education.

3.6.1. Restrictions on the right to travel

This subtheme highlights a series of restrictions and challenges affecting the lives of refugees in Türkiye. Specifically, factors such as travel restrictions and the requirement for travel permits appear as significant barriers that limit their freedoms.

The participants mentioned that they cannot even freely move within Türkiye and encounter bureaucratic obstacles when trying to travel to different provinces for any reasons. This situation is explained in Interview 1 as follows: *"Especially because we have refugee identity, it is only valid where our identity is registered. Since I lived in Gaziantep, it's there."*

¹⁰² Turkish original: "Yine bir kimliğimiz var. Çünkü ben küçük yaşta çıktığım için benim Suriyeli kimliğim bile yok. Sadece ayrılırken yazılmış bir kız. Ama kimliğim de yok, şu anda en azından bir kimliğim var." (Görüşme 1)

¹⁰³ Turkish original: "Yani ben rahatım mülteci olarak ama yine insan mülteci adı altında kalmak istemez. Normal insanlar gibi yaşamak ister. Mülteci olmak istemiyorum gelecekte o kadar. (...) Yani herhangi bir ülkenin ya da kendi ülkemın vatandaşı olurum belki, bilmiyorum." (Görüşme 5)

Let's say I want to go to a different city. I have to get a travel permit."¹⁰⁴ It can be inferred from the participants' statements that traveling from one city to another, even for tourist purposes, involves procedural processes. This is highlighted in Interview 3, where a participant states: *"In Türkiye, for going from one city to another, you need to get a travel permit. Sometimes they don't give it, for example, they never give it to Istanbul. Now, I can't go to Istanbul."*¹⁰⁵

Refugees do not seem to have the option to leave the province they are registered in if they lose their jobs or cannot find a new one. Even if they find a better job in a different province, participants mentioned that they cannot settle there. This is explained in Interview 8:

*"As a Syrian, you live in Gaziantep, for example. If you can't find a job in Gaziantep. You can't go anywhere. I mean, the rules are like that; you have to stay in the city you live in. You can't move anywhere."*¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, they expressed disappointment at being deprived of opportunities such as traveling abroad or pursuing higher education. In Interview 9, a participant expressed the desire to participate in the Erasmus program but is unable to do so due to not being a Turkish citizen: *"I wanted to go abroad with Erasmus before or do my master's abroad. But I can't do that because I'm not a citizen."*¹⁰⁷

Taking it a step further, even refugee students are required to obtain permission to travel from the cities where they study to where their families reside. It is uncertain whether this permission will always be granted, and it is common to encounter various problems and difficulties in this process. This situation is described in Interview 10:

"For example, I wanted to go from Erzurum to my family's city last week. To be able to go there, I need to get a travel permit. I have to apply to get it. I applied, and then I received a message from the immigration directorate. 'Come to our office.' I went. They said, 'You are asking for too many travel permits.' 'Why?' 'Okay, I added the documents for you.' 'I'm going to visit my family.' 'It's getting harder. They can postpone it easily.'" ¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Turkish original: "Özellikle bizim kimliğimiz mülteci olduğu için, kimliğimiz nerede kayıtlıysak orada geçerli. Ben Gaziantep'te yaşadım için, orada. Diyelim mesela farklı bir şehre gideceğim. O şehre gitmek için illa ben yol izin belgesi almam gerekiyor." (Görüşme 1)

¹⁰⁵ Turkish original: "Türkiye'de şey var. Bir ilden başka bir ile gitmek için yol izni belgesi almak lazım. Bazen vermiyorlar mesela, İstanbul'a hiç vermiyorlar. İstanbul şimdi ben gidemem." (Görüşme 3)

¹⁰⁶ Turkish original: "Yani bir Suriyeli olarak söyleyeyim, sen diyelim Gaziantep'te yaşıyorsun. Gaziantep'te iş bulamadın. Hiçbir yere gidemiyorsun. Yani kurallar öyle, sen yaşadığın şehirde kalacaksın. Hiçbir yere hareket edemiyorsun." (Görüşme 8)

¹⁰⁷ Turkish original: "Ben Erasmus'la yurt dışına gitmek istedim daha önce ya da yüksek lisansı yurt dışına yapmak istedim. Ama vatandaş olmadığım için bunu yapamıyorum." (Görüşme 9)

¹⁰⁸ Turkish original: "Mesela Erzurum'dan ailemin yanına gelmek istedim. Geçen hafta. Gelebilmek için yol izin belgesi çıkartmam gerekiyor. Çıkartmak için başvuru yapmam gerekiyor. Başvurdum, ondan sonra

3.6.2. Inability to work in public institutions

Another important issue for refugees is the limited opportunities for employment in the public sector. Refugees face career obstacles such as not being hired in public institutions or being unable to take important exams like KPSS (Public Personnel Selection Examination) due to not being Turkish citizens. This leads to the perception that refugees' education and skill development have limited value when it comes to finding employment in public institutions. This is articulated by a participant in Interview 1 who says, *"For example, as a refugee, if I don't become a citizen, I won't be assigned here. I can't even take the KPSS."*¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, a participant in Interview 3 questioned the value of the education they receive, stating, *"After finishing school, there's no appointment for us, non-Turkish citizens. I'm not a Turkish citizen. If I'm going to study for 5 or 6 years, and there's no appointment afterwards, then it seems like I've studied in vain."*¹¹⁰

3.6.3. Difficulty in acquiring Turkish citizenship

While obtaining Turkish citizenship is an important goal for refugees, it is considered a challenging experience due to the complexity and uncertainty of the process. As a participant in Interview 1 stated, *"Getting Turkish citizenship is important, of course. To advance in a career or to achieve better positions in work. I want to get it, of course, but it's not available now."*¹¹¹

The absence of a clear and specific path to become a citizen in Türkiye can create uncertainty and disappointment among refugees. This lack of clarity can limit refugees' aspirations to build a career or a better life in the country. This sentiment is expressed in Interview 3 as follows:

"There are no specific requirements for Turkish citizenship in Türkiye. So, the Turkish citizenships being granted now are exceptions. When I say exceptions, I mean there are no specific conditions. It's not like Europe. In Germany, for example, after staying for 5 years, you have the right to acquire German citizenship. I've been in Türkiye for 10 years now. I haven't

göç ilerisinden bir mesaj geldi. Müdürlüğümüze gelin. Gittim. Dedi ki, "Sen çok fazla yol izin belgesi istiyorsun. Niye?" "Tamam artık, ben sana belgeler ekledim." "Ailemin yanına gideceğim." Öyle. Yani daha zor. Ya da öbür gün gel, yarın gel. Sonra gel. Sürekli erteleme." (Görüşme 10)

¹⁰⁹ Turkish original: "Mülteci olarak mesela eğer ben vatandaş almazsam burada tayinim olmaz. KPSS'ye de giremem." (Görüşme 1)

¹¹⁰ Turkish original: "Okul bitirdikten sonra atanma yok bize, Türk vatandaşlığı olmayanlara. Ben Türk vatandaşı değilim. Ben mesela 5 yıl, 6 yıl okuyacağım, ondan sonra atanma olmayacaksa boşuna okudum demek ki." (Görüşme 3)

¹¹¹ Turkish original: "Türk vatandaşlığı almak tabii ki önemli. Yani kariyer yapmak ya da işte daha iyi bir yerlere gelmek için. Almak istiyorum tabi ki ama şu anda yok yani artık verilmiyor." (Görüşme 1)

*committed any crimes, for example. No problems. I always go through the official process, submit applications. But it still hasn't come."*¹¹²

From the participants' accounts, it is evident that the process of acquiring citizenship in Türkiye is more complex compared to other countries, and it may take several years for some refugees.

3.6.4. High fees in higher education

Many participants clearly expressed the difficulties that refugees face in accessing educational opportunities in Türkiye due to the high cost of higher education. Refugees encounter economic barriers stemming from their inability to afford high tuition fees, which, in turn, prevents them from pursuing the education they desire. This is explained by a participant in Interview 3 who couldn't study the desired field due to financial constraints:

*"There are semester fees now. If there were no semester fees, I would have studied dentistry. I really wanted to study dentistry. But I can't study it. Why? Because of money. I can't afford to pay 20,000 TL every year, excluding dormitory fees and other personal expenses. That's why I'm studying Arabic."*¹¹³

They mentioned the obligation to pay more due to their foreign nationality, and they express that this situation reflects a reality where they would have had a different experience in their own countries or if they weren't refugees. This sentiment is conveyed in Interview 5: *"For example, we pay for university differently. So, in this regard, I'm saying that if I were in my own country or if I weren't a refugee, I wouldn't be going through this."*¹¹⁴ In this context, it is evident that the financial barriers in higher education restrict refugees' access to education and career opportunities.

3.7. Theme 7: The Future Aspirations of Refugees

"There is no such thing as the future, we cannot know it because it is dark." (Interview 3)

¹¹² Turkish original: "Türkiye'de belirli bir şart yok Türk vatandaşlığı için. O yüzden şimdi alınan Türk vatandaşlıkları istisna. İstisna derken yani belli bir şart yok. Avrupa gibi değil. Şimdi Almanya'da 5 yıl kaldığın zaman Almanya vatandaşlığı hakkı kazanıyorsun. Şimdi ben burada 10 yıldır Türkiye'deyim. Hiçbir suç işlemedim mesela. Sıkıntı yok. Her zaman resmi bir şekilde gidiyorum, başvuruyorum. Ama hala gelmedi." (Görüşme 3)

¹¹³ Turkish original: "Şimdi dönem ücreti diye bir şey var. O dönem ücretleri olmasaydı, ben dış hekimliği okuyacaktım. Dış hekimliği okumayı çok isterdim. Ama ben bunu okuyamıyorum. Neden? Paradan dolayı. Yani ben her yıl 20 bin TL ödeyemem. Daha yurt parası hariç. Kendi masrafın hariç. Ödeyemem yani. O yüzden Arap dili okuyorum." (Görüşme 3)

¹¹⁴ Turkish original: "Mesela biz üniversiteye ödüyoruz, farklı olarak. Yani bu noktada diyorum ki kendi ülkemde olsaydım ya da mesela mülteci olmasaydım, ben bunu yaşamazdım." (Görüşme 5)

"Because I have a goal. (...) I will be a good person. I won't let others experience what I've been through. I'm building something good. And I believe it will happen." (Interview 6)

This theme explores the future aspirations of refugees, delving into the emotional experiences that oscillate between hopelessness and hopefulness. As discussed in previous categories, refugees can experience feelings of despair following challenging experiences they have endured. However, alongside these hardships, there are also refugees who maintain high expectations for the future and exhibit strong motivation.

3.7.1. "Always dark" – Hopelessness about the future

This subtheme delves deep into the uncertainty and hopelessness that refugees feel about their future. These individuals are grappling with significant uncertainty regarding how they will shape their future lives, primarily due to the tragic events in Syria, the challenging migration experiences they have endured, and the difficult times they have faced in the host country. As one participant expressed in Interview 10:

"Honestly, I won't lie, I'm telling the truth. Right now, I can't see the future. The future is always dark, I see it like night. I don't know where we will go, what will happen. I can't think about it. I can't even imagine it."¹¹⁵

Participants expressed a desire to pursue education or continue their careers, but they find it challenging to fulfill these aspirations and face difficulties along this path. In this regard, a participant in Interview 7 said: *"Now, I don't know what will happen in the future, but I'm waiting to graduate from university first. After that, I honestly don't know what will happen."*¹¹⁶

Additionally, due to the recent rise in anti-refugee discourse and violence in Türkiye, refugees mention feeling hopeless about the future. This hopelessness is related to the perceived insecurity and uncertainty in Türkiye. Furthermore, the uncertainty surrounding the situation in Syria complicates the prospect of return. Participants expressed that they have no idea what the future holds for Syria. They found it challenging to predict their future lives and, as a result, described a prevailing sense of despair and a bleak outlook on the future. This is closely tied to the fear of being forcibly returned to Syria, as seen in Interview 8: *"Of course, if Syria gets better and we have confidence in it, I'll return to Syria. But*

¹¹⁵ Turkish original: "Vallahi hocam, yalan söylemeyeyim, doğru söylüyorum. Şu an, geleceği göremiyorum. Gelecek hep karanlık yani, gece gibi görüyorum yani. Nereye gideceğimizi, ne olacağımızı bilmiyorum yani. Düşünemiyorum işte. Hayal bile edemiyorum." (Görüşme 10)

¹¹⁶ Turkish original: "Şimdi bilmiyorum yani gelecekte ne olacağını ama önce üniversiteden mezun olmayı bekliyorum. Sonra bilmiyorum açıkçası ne olacak." (Görüşme 5)

whether Syria will improve or not is uncertain."¹¹⁷ Additionally, in Interview 3, a participant articulated the situation further:

*"Even if I had money now, I can't work here, I can't establish anything. Even if I want to study, that desire slowly fades away. I think, if I study and they deport me to Syria before I get a diploma, then I would have studied in vain. People can't think. (...) People don't know what they want to do, what they don't want to do anymore."*¹¹⁸

3.7.2. "There is light somewhere" – Being hopeful about the future

This subtheme reflects the hopes and positive expectations of refugees for the future. Despite their challenging migration experiences, these individuals evaluated their futures positive and looking forward with hope.

Refugees discussed their future plans for education and careers, including those who aim to complete their undergraduate studies and then pursue master's and doctoral degrees. This reflects a focus on personal and professional development. This is clearly articulated in Interview 6:

*"Because I've gotten used to it here, because I have friends here, because I've learned some Turkish, I can't go to another country now, I mean I've gotten used to it here. I'm here now. Hopefully, good things are coming. Right now, I'm planning to finish my undergraduate degree. After that, I'll do a master. I'll take a little break, work. After that, if it's possible, I'll do a doctorate."*¹¹⁹

Furthermore, in this quote, the participant's ability to learn Turkish, make Turkish friends, and adapt to life in Türkiye contributes to their positive outlook and ability to make plans. Similar optimism can be observed in other refugees as well. Despite facing difficulties, some refugees believe in a bright future and expect to have a good profession. Moreover, there is a clear expression of the desire to start their own businesses and help others. A participant in Interview 8 explained this with the following words: *"Honestly, my expectations for the future are very high. To start my own company or my own business.*

¹¹⁷ Turkish original: Tabii ki, Suriye düzeltilirse oraya da güven gelirse, Suriye'ye dönerim yani. Ama Suriye artık düzelecek mi, düzelmeyecek mi belli değil." (Görüşme 7)

¹¹⁸ Turkish original: "Şimdi param olsa dahi. Ben burada iş yapamam, kuramam yani. Şimdi ben okumak istesem bile o istek kayboluyor yani yavaş yavaş. Diyorum ben okursam diploma almadan beni Suriye atarlarsa ben boşuna okumuş olurum yani. İnsan düşünemiyor. (...) İnsan neyi yapmak istiyor, neyi yapmak istemiyor artık bilemiyor." (Görüşme 3)

¹¹⁹ Turkish original: "Burada alıştığım için arkadaşlarım olduğu için, Türkçeyi biraz öğrendiğim için, başka ülkeye gidemem şimdi, yani buraya alıştım. Şu an buradayım yani. İnşallah güzel şeyler geliyor. Şu anda ben lisansı bitirmeyi planlıyorum. Ondan sonra yüksek lisans yağacağım. Biraz ara vereceğim, çalışacağım. Ondan sonra olursa doktora yapacağım." (Görüşme 6)

Sometimes I even think, going abroad to save money and then coming back to Türkiye, doing projects here, starting a company."¹²⁰

3.8. Theme 8: Finding Ways to Cope with Challenging Experiences

"I came back from school. I told my mother that I couldn't do it, that I was going to quit school. I said, 'I won't go anymore.' You know how families react. They say, 'You can't quit. You'll go for a while. You'll learn in a few years.' Yes, in the end, I did learn a few years later." (Interview 2)¹²¹

"At school, the teachers had changed. All of them. Good teachers had come. They used to chat with me. We even had meals together. I asked them, 'Why are you such good people?' They replied, 'Maybe because you're a good girl?' That's when I realized there are good and bad people." (Interview 6)¹²²

This theme explores ways of coping with challenging experiences, encompassing support mechanisms such as family support, support from Turkish teachers/academics, support from Turkish friends/neighbors, and support stemming from faith. Coping strategies for dealing with challenging experiences can vary widely. What is important for refugees is to know how to access support from their environment and resources while dealing with these difficulties. Social support, especially emotional support, can be provided through family, friends, and neighbors.

Furthermore, integration into the local community can be facilitated through Turkish teachers, academics, and neighbors who can guide newcomers. Similarly, faith and spiritual support can be an important coping mechanism for some refugees. These support mechanisms can assist refugees in better coping with challenging experiences.

While previous discussions have emphasized the negative aspects of refugees' interactions with the host population, as highlighted by many participants, the refugee experience can be characterized by both positive and negative interactions with the people they encounter. This theme particularly focuses on the positive aspects of refugees' interactions with individuals they come into contact with.

¹²⁰ Turkish original: "Vallahi gelecek hakkında benim beklentilerim çok yüksek. Kendi şirketimi kurmak ya da kendi işimi kurmak. Hatta bazen düşünüyorum mesela yurt dışına gidip orada para biriktirip sonra Türkiye'de dönmek, burada projeler falan yapmak, şirket kurmak." (Görüşme 8)

¹²¹ Turkish original: "Okuldan döndüm. Anneme yapamıyorum ben bırakacağım okulu dedim. Artık gitmeyeceğim. İşte biliyorsunuz aile nasıl tepki verir. Yok, bırakamazsın. Biraz gideceksin. Birkaç sene sonra öğrenirsin. Evet, sonunda birkaç sene sonra öğrendim." (Görüşme 2)

¹²² Turkish original: "Okulda öğretmenler değişmişler. Hepsisi. İyi öğretmenler gelmiş. Benimle sohbet ediyorlardı. Hatta yemek yiyorduk beraber. "Neden siz öyle çok iyi insanlarsınız? dedim". Onlar da "çünkü sen iyi bir kız olduğun için olabilir mi acaba?" O zaman iyi insan var kötü insan var anladım." (Görüşme 6)

3.8.1. Family support

Family support can be a crucial factor in how refugees cope with challenging experiences. This subtheme focuses on how families support refugees in the face of difficulties. When refugees decide to drop out of school due to the challenges mentioned earlier, the importance of family support in returning to school is emphasized by the participants. Families help refugees maintain their hopes for the future. This can be clearly seen in the words of a participant in Interview 3:

*"I was going to drop out of school in high school because of racism. I said to my father that I couldn't do it, I mean learning is one thing, but racism is something else, it's even worse. I didn't go to school for three days. My mother cried because I quit school. My father studied law in Syria. He said there's no other way, you have to study. He said you need to be patient. After that, I came back to school. I continued my education."*¹²³

In this account, the family directly prevented the refugee from dropping out of school. Another participant in Interview 6 talked about how their family convinced them to return to school and sorted out the legal processes after they had dropped out and not attended school for a while:

*"My mother started persuading me. She said, 'You're a strong girl. You have a big dream. You want to be a designer. If you quit school, nothing will happen. You won't have friends. You won't be able to go abroad.' I wanted to go abroad, like Dubai. When she started saying that I began to understand. I said they won't accept me again. 'No, they will accept you. I will talk to the principal,' my mother said. After it was resolved, I returned."*¹²⁴

When faced with challenges such as xenophobia, the family's supportive and morale-boosting influence has a significant impact on continuing education among refugees. Another participant in Interview 7 explained this situation as follows: *"I worked, I worked hard. And my family helped me. I somehow passed."*¹²⁵

¹²³ Turkish original: "İrkçılıktan dolayı okulu bırakacaktım lisedeyken. Yani dedim babama ben yapamıyorum, yani okul ayrı öğrenmek ayrı ama ırkçılık apayrı, yani o daha beter. Hatta üç gün okula gitmedim. Annem ağladı okulu bıraktığım için. Babam Suriye'de hukuk okudu. Ondan, yani okuldan başka çaren yok okuman lazım dedi. Sabretmen lazım dedi. Ondan sonra geri geldim okula. Okumaya devam ettim." (Görüşme 3)

¹²⁴ Turkish original: "Annem beni ikna etmeye başladı. Sen güçlü bir kızsın demeye başladı bana. İşte senin büyük bir hayalin var. Tasarımcı olmak istiyorsun. Okulu bırakınca hiçbir şey olamazsın. Arkadaşın olmaz. Yurtdışına çıkamazsın. Ben yurtdışına çıkmak istiyordum. İşte Dubai falan. Öyle demeye başlayınca, anlamaya başladım. Bir daha kabul etmezler ki beni dedim. Hayır, kabul ederler. Ben müdürle konuşacağım dedi annem. İşte hallolunca döndüm." (Görüşme 6)

¹²⁵ Turkish original: "Yani çalıştım, çok çalıştım. Hem de ailem bana yardım etti. Geçtim bir şekilde." (Görüşme 7)

3.8.2. Support from Turkish teachers/academics

This subtheme reflects the positive role played by Turkish teachers and academics in the education and adaptation processes of refugees. Previously, we discussed the xenophobia present in the educational environment towards refugees. This subtheme emphasizes how the support of teachers and academics has helped refugees develop coping skills. As participants have pointed out, some teachers have not only provided education to students but also offered emotional support. This has helped refugee students feel more welcomed and comfortable. In Interview 3, a participant described this by saying:

*"When I moved on to the third year of high school, we had a teacher from Aksaray, the Arabic teacher. He helped me a bit. None of the other teachers helped. He showed me some importance. He supported me and didn't allow racism. God bless him, we still talk."*¹²⁶

Additionally, there have been teachers who, even if their expertise was not in the field, helped students learn Turkish. In Interview 6, it is mentioned: *"I didn't know Turkish; I didn't understand it. There weren't many Syrians back then. Then my mother said there's a teacher who knows Arabic. He really liked Syrians. He taught me."*¹²⁷

This support has also helped refugee students integrate into the local community. Students have formed closer relationships with Turkish teachers and classmates, thereby strengthening their social bonds. A participant who remembers both friends and teachers with fond memories described it in Interview 5: *"There was only kindness towards me. I was the only one there. For example, diligent students used to make me study as a project. Diligent students gave me private lessons. Then, teachers would give them extra points."*¹²⁸

The support provided by Turkish teachers and academics has made significant contributions to refugees' ability to cope with challenging experiences and adapt to a new life. During the interviews, it was observed that as participants shared these memories, their posture straightened, their excitement increased, and their voice tone rose. This indicates that the impact of the support they received has had a lasting effect on them.

¹²⁶ Turkish original: "Lise 3'e geçtiğim zaman bir hocamız vardı Aksaraylı. Arapça öğretmeni. O bana biraz yardımcı oldu. Diğer hocaların hiçbiri yardımcı olmadı. O bana biraz önem gösterdi. Destek verdi, ırkçılık yapana izin vermiyordu. Allah'ım ondan razı olsun, şu an kadar konuşuyoruz." (Görüşme 3)

¹²⁷ Turkish original: "Türkçe bilmiyordum, anlamıyordum. Fazla Suriyeli yoktu. Sonra annem dedi ki, bir hoca var. Arapça biliyor. O da Suriyelileri çok seviyordu. O öğretti bana." (Görüşme 6)

¹²⁸ Turkish original: "Sadece iyilik vardı bana karşı. Tektim zaten ben orada. Mesela çalışkan öğrenciler, proje ödevi olarak beni çalıştırdılar. Çalışkan öğrenciler bana özel ders veriyorlardı. Sonra hocalar onlara ek puan veriyordu." (Görüşme 5)

3.8.3. Support from Turkish friends/neighbors

This subtheme focuses on helping Turkish friends and neighbors cope with the challenging experiences of refugees. The assistance from neighbors is primarily evident in their support for refugees in terms of household items and basic needs. In Interview 1, a participant described this situation as follows:

"For example, when we first arrived, we had nothing in our home. There were no curtains either. Our neighbor across the street saw us. Such a lady went, brought curtains, brought a rug. She was a great grandmother. We call her 'nene' (grandmother)." ¹²⁹

At the same time, it is observed that neighbors make efforts to intervene in situations that could create problems and prevent negative situations for refugees in the neighborhood. This is conveyed in Interview 3:

"There weren't many refugees in that area, but we still encountered racism from some neighbors. We had good and kind neighbors who intervened. They sorted it out, like, 'This shouldn't happen, we shouldn't harm them, this is shameful, it's not right, it's a sin.' They resolved it this way." ¹³⁰

This support has helped refugees feel safer while dealing with the difficulties they face. As seen above, refugees have encountered not only material support but also a warm approach from their neighbors and friends to the extent that they could be seen as family members.

With the support of Turkish friends and neighbors, refugees have had an easier time learning the language and integrating into the local community. Their language skills have improved, and they have had the opportunity to communicate better and adapt to society. This is expressed in Interview 5: *"It was good, you know. They tried to teach me Turkish a lot. So, I learned Turkish with their help."* ¹³¹ In addition, the statements of the participant in Interview 7 also highlighted the nature of this support: *"Well, I've been living here for a*

¹²⁹ Turkish original: "Mesela ilk geldiğimizde evimizde hiçbir şey yoktu. Perde falan da yoktu. Bizim karşı komşu bizi görmüştü. Böyle kadın gitti, perde getirmişti, halı getirmişti. O büyük bir nenedi. Biz ona nene diyoruz." (Görüşme 1)

¹³⁰ Turkish original: "Fazla mülteci yoktu o bölgede ama bazı komşulardan ırkçılık görüyorduk yine. Güzel iyi komşularımız vardı, onlar müdahale ediyorlardı. Hallettiler yani işte bu olmaz onlardan zarar görmedik, bu ayıptır, olmazdır, günahıdır. Yani bu şekilde hallettiler yani." (Görüşme 3)

¹³¹ Turkish original: "İyiydi yani. Bana da Türkçe öğretmeyi çalıştılar çokça. Yani onlardan yardım alarak zaten Türkçe öğrendim." (Görüşme 5)

while, and I have Turkish friends. I started talking to them. Just one word, a single word. Then I started talking about other things. Then I learned, you know."¹³²

3.8.4. Support from faith

This subtheme examines how faith serves as a support element in the process of refugees coping with challenging experiences. There are expressions among refugees indicating the significant role faith plays. Despite the difficulties their families face, they believe in "what God wills," which is stated to contribute to their strength and motivation to help others. This is articulated in Interview 6 as follows: *"For example, for us, for our family, we believed in what God willed. We believed in it to be strong. We started from scratch with such a life. It applies to everyone, you know."*¹³³

Furthermore, in Interview 6, it is noted that faith emphasizes the brotherhood and human values among people. This has reinforced refugees' love and respect for people of different backgrounds and contributed to social harmony. It is conveyed with these words: *"Turkish, English, Syrian, whatever it may be, I love them all. Because, in the end, we are all brothers and humans. God also said this. People are brothers, He said."*¹³⁴

Faith helps refugees perceive the challenges they face as a test. This perspective has been observed to help refugees place their negative experiences in a more meaningful context and cope better. This is stated in Interview 9:

*"I try to remember this to myself: no one chose where they were born, their family, and so on. What happened in the world, what people went through, no one had control over it. After all, we didn't come here willingly. We didn't choose to live this way. I consider it as a test."*¹³⁵

These accounts demonstrate that faith provides emotional and spiritual support for refugees in coping with challenging experiences. For many refugees, faith has been a source of strength and resilience.

¹³² Turkish original: "Yani biraz yaşadım da Türk arkadaşlarım var. Onlarla konuşmaya başladım. Anca bir kelime, tek kelime. Sonra neler konuşmaya başladım. Sonra öğrendim yani." (Görüşme 7)

¹³³ Turkish original: "Mesela bizim için, bizim ailemiz için Allah istedi diye inandık. Buna güçlü olmak için inandık. Böyle bir hayatla, sıfırdan başladık. Herkes için öyle geçerli yani." (Görüşme 6)

¹³⁴ Turkish original: "Türk mü, İngiliz mi, Suriyeli mi, her neyse seviyorum ben. Çünkü hepimiz sonuçta kardeşiz ve insanız. Allah da böyle dedi bunu. Yani insanlar kardeşler dedi." (Görüşme 6)

¹³⁵ Turkish original: "Kendime bunu hatırlamaya çalışıyorum: hiç kimsenin nerede doğduğunu, ailesini falan seçmedi. Dünyada neler olduğu neler geçtiği hiç kimsenin elinde değil, biz sonuçta isteyerek buraya gelmedik. Bunu isteyerek yaşamadık. Bunu bir imtihan olarak düşünüyorum." (Görüşme 9)

3.9. Theme 9: Strength or Agency in the Face of Challenging Experiences

"I became a different person, strengthened by those hardships." (Interview 8)¹³⁶
"I think being a refugee gives strength to a person. Because not everyone can accept such things." (Interview 5)¹³⁷

"I wrote down the difficulties I experienced. Then I realized how many hardships I had faced. When I saw all these difficulties together, I started to look at myself as if I were a very different person, as if I were very strong." (Interview 1)¹³⁸

This theme explores the role of personal empowerment or agency due to challenging experiences. Empowerment or agency in the face of adversity involves important aspects for refugees, such as resilience against the difficulties encountered and taking steps towards creating change. This theme encompasses topics such as empowerment through language learning, acquiring the ability to discern potentially harmful individuals, resilience in the face of challenges, and advocating for one's own rights.

3.9.1. Empowerment through language learning

Empowerment through language learning seems to have played a significant role in refugees' ability to be stronger facing after challenging experiences. The ability to communicate by overcoming language barriers has enhanced refugees' capacity to find employment, access education, and engage more effectively with the community. Language acquisition contributes to refugees' better understanding of their own potential and allows them to seize new opportunities.

Among refugees, it is emphasized that learning a new language empowers them. Learning a new language provides individuals with the opportunity to improve themselves and engage in positive endeavors. The process of language learning can contribute to individuals better understanding their abilities and potential. In Interview 5, a participant addressed this with the following statements: *"So, being a refugee has contributed me something beautiful. Now, when I go to countries, I can learn their languages directly and*

¹³⁶ Turkish original: "O zorluklar beni farklı insan yaptı, güçlendirdi." (Görüşme 8)

¹³⁷ Turkish original: "Bir mülteci olmak insana kuvvet katar diye düşünüyorum. Yani çünkü herkes kabullenemez böyle şeyleri." (Görüşme 5)

¹³⁸ Turkish original: "Ben yaşadığım zorlukları bir kâğıda yazdım. Sonra ne kadar çok zorlukla karşılaştığımı fark ettim. Bu zorlukları bir arada görünce kendime sanki çok farklı bir insanmışım gibi çok güçlüymüşüm gibi bakmaya başladım." (Görüşme 1)

*integrate into their societies. Because I've experienced different things before, I can easily learn different things and adapt."*¹³⁹

Refugees who believe that they have been empowered through learning Turkish mention that it makes them feel more comfortable in places like hospitals or immigration offices. The ability to speak the language helps individuals feel stronger and more independent. This is emphasized in Interview 2:

*"Of course, I learned a new language. They say to know another language is to have a second soul. So, when I go to hospitals or immigration offices with my mother or father, I feel comfortable because I know Turkish, I feel strong. Because I understand what they want from me, I know. Yes, I feel strong."*¹⁴⁰

Lastly, it is noted that learning Turkish can increase individuals' job opportunities and enable them to build more relationships. In Interview 10, this is explained as follows: *"When I learned Turkish, I had a better chance of finding a job. In fact, I achieved a high score in school here. That's how it is. There were connections with people. More relationships were formed."*¹⁴¹

3.9.2. Getting to know people - Being able to distinguish who might cause harm

Understanding people involves the ability to distinguish who can offer assistance and who may pose a threat. Refugees can seek support by connecting with trustworthy individuals and, at the same time, protect themselves by recognizing potential dangers. This can help them feel safer in the face of challenging experiences.

Refugees expressed that they are now able to distinguish between good and bad people because they have interacted with many people. Being able to predict people's behavior is seen as an empowering experience. These experiences have helped refugees improve their social skills and relationships. In Interview 1, a participant explained this as follows: *"Because I've met so many people, I can now distinguish. Good people, bad people,*

¹³⁹ Turkish original: "Yani mültecilik bunu bana böyle güzel bir şey kattı. Artık ülkelere gittiğimde direkt dillerini öğrenirim, toplumlarına da girerim. Çünkü farklı şey yaşamışım önceden, farklı şeyleri kolay öğrenip uyum sağlayabilirim." (Görüşme 5)

¹⁴⁰ Turkish original: "Tabii ben yeni bir dil öğrendim. Yani diyorlar ki bir dil bir insan. Yani annemle veya babamla gittiğimde hastanelere veya göç idaresine ben Türkçe bildiğim için böyle rahat hissediyorum, güçlü hissediyorum. Çünkü Türkçem var yani anlıyorum benden ne istediğini, biliyorum. Evet güçlü hissediyorum." (Görüşme 2)

¹⁴¹ Turkish original: "Türkçe öğrendiğimde daha iyi bir iş bulma fırsatım oldu. Hatta burada okulda yüksek bir puan alabildim. Öyle yani. İnsanlarla ilişkiler oldu. Daha fazla ilişkiler oldu." (Görüşme 10)

they will treat me like this. It really empowers a person."¹⁴² This sentiment is echoed in Interview 10, where a participant summarized the situation with the following words: *"After that, I look at people to see if they are good or bad. Whether they are troubled or not. I differentiate them now."*¹⁴³

Refugees also expressed that they now have a better understanding of who they can communicate with and how. Being able to assess people's behavior can help refugees feel safer and better manage negative situations. The ability to recognize negative behaviors such as xenophobia can also help refugees protect themselves. This is conveyed in Interview 9:

*"We can now perceive who we can talk to and how. When I sit in front of someone, I can easily answer whether I can work with this person or not. I can tell if someone seems to be exhibiting racism or not. (...) Now, when we encounter such situations, we know what to do or how to behave."*¹⁴⁴

3.9.3. "Swimming against the current" - Resisting difficulties, putting in more effort

"Swimming against the current" signifies resisting difficulties and putting in extra effort. Refugees can struggle to achieve their goals by resisting the challenges they face and putting in more effort. It can be a process that requires determination and resilience, but it can ultimately empower them and lead to greater success. Refugees expressed that when they encounter difficulties, they try to change prejudices. It is noted that changing people's prejudices is a challenging process, but refugees continue to make efforts in this regard. In Interview 2, this is conveyed as follows: *"Then gradually I try to change these prejudices. I do my best. Still, what's inside them doesn't change."*¹⁴⁵ Whether or not something changes seems not to affect these efforts. A participant in Interview 3 also made the following statement about facing challenges: *"Now, as people experience difficulties, that's when they become real people."*¹⁴⁶

Challenges seem to have helped refugees develop and grow. This can be exemplified by a person's determination to achieve their goal of going to university, despite some people

¹⁴² Turkish original: "Çok kişiyle tanıştığım için artık ayırt edebiliyorum. İyi insanlar, kötü insanlar, bunlar bana bu şekilde davranacaklar. Bunlar artık böyle davranacaklar gibisinden, bu şeyler gerçekten insanı çok güçlendiriyor." (Görüşme 1)

¹⁴³ Turkish original: "Ondan sonra insanlara bakarım iyi bir insan mı, kötü bir insan mı? Sıkıntılı biri mi değil mi." (Görüşme 10)

¹⁴⁴ Turkish original: "Kimlerle nasıl konuşabiliriz artık onları algılayabiliyoruz. Baktığım zaman insan karşısında oturduğum zaman bu kişiyle çalışabilir miyim diye kendime sorduğumda buna kolaylıkla cevap verebilirim artık. Yani ırkçılık falan yapan birine benziyor mu anlarım. (...) Artık böyle durumlarla karşılaşınca ne yapacağımızı ya da nasıl davranacağımızı biliyoruz." (Görüşme 9)

¹⁴⁵ Turkish original: "Sonra git gide ben değiştirmeye çalışıyorum bu ön yargıları. Elimden geleni yapıyorum. Yine illa onların içindeki şeyler değişmiyor." (Görüşme 2)

¹⁴⁶ Turkish original: "Şimdi insan zorlukları yaşadıkça o zaman adam oluyor yani." (Görüşme 3)

belittling and making fun of it. This example illustrates that determination and persistence in the face of challenges can have an empowering effect. In Interview 3, this situation is described as follows:

*"In the 12th grade, my friends said, 'Do you want to go to university? You can't, we can't even go.' They teased me. That strengthened me. I insisted and said I would definitely get in. I was the first one from our class to enter university, the first one to win. That's why all the teachers came to our house to visit. They congratulated me."*¹⁴⁷

Dealing with challenges is said to make refugees more disciplined and hardworking. Refugees express that they had to put in effort to develop themselves and prepare for the future in the face of difficulties. A participant in Interview 8 described this situation as follows:

*"Of course, this, like studying in the morning, working in the evening, and so on. If these difficult situations didn't exist, maybe I could have been an empty (useless) person. I mean, I'm saying this for myself, these difficulties were good for me. It didn't feel bad."*¹⁴⁸

3.9.4. Learning to advocate for one's rights

Learning to advocate for their rights involves refugees developing the ability to stand up for their own rights and actively engage in seeking justice. This may include resisting injustice and protecting human rights. Refugees can initiate a process of empowerment by advocating for change within their communities.

Refugees express that they have learned to advocate for their rights by not remaining silent in the face of misconceptions. The ability to confront misconceptions and unfair behaviors develops over time and with education. In Interview 4, this is conveyed as follows:

*"Before going to university, I couldn't respond to the racism and hurtful words directed at me. For example, my mom used to come to me and say, 'Don't cause trouble; we are refugees, let there be no problems,' and I used to get very affected and upset. But after going to university, it became somewhat different. When something happens, I can speak up now."*¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Turkish original: "12. sınıftayken arkadaşlarım 'Üniversiteye mi gitmek istiyorsun, gidemezsin biz zaten gidemiyoruz' dediler. Dalga geçiyorlardı. O beni güçlendirdi. İnat ettim, dedim illaki gireceğim. Üniversiteye sınıfımızdan ilk giren benim, ilk kazanan kişi benim. O yüzden tüm hocalar evimize geldiler, ziyarete. Tebrik ettiler." (Görüşme 3)

¹⁴⁸ Turkish original: "Tabii bu, yani sen sabah okumak akşam çalışmak falan. Bu zor durumlar olmasaydı belki ben boş bir insan olabilirdim. Yani ben kendim için söylüyorum bu zorluklar bana iyi geldi. Yani kötü gelmedi." (Görüşme 8)

¹⁴⁹ Turkish original: "Ben önceden üniversiteye gitmeden önce bana karşı yapılan ırkçılığa ve kötü sözlerle hiç karşılık veremiyordum. Mesela annem yanıma geliyordu. Kızım sorun çıkarma mülteciyiz, sorun olmasın falan diyordu. Yani çok etkileniliyordum ve kötü oluyordum. Ama üniversite gittikten sonra biraz daha farklı oldu. Hani bir şey olduğu zaman konuşabiliyorum artık." (Görüşme 10)

Additionally, a participant in Interview 1 expressed that they have learned to defend themselves with the following words: *"In a way, I don't stay silent. I listen and try to defend. I try to turn those misconceptions into correct ones."*¹⁵⁰

Refugees expressed their determination to defend themselves and assert that problems cannot be solved by remaining silent. Determination to advocate for one's own rights can help refugees in their struggle against adverse situations. This can be seen in Interview 6 with the following statements: *"I am a strong girl, and I have to be. I silence those who talk; I don't let them speak. Yes, I have started defending myself a lot because nothing gets resolved by remaining silent."*¹⁵¹

Finally, participants indicated that after learning about their rights, they can use this knowledge to carry out the necessary procedures. Refugees who are aware of their rights can protect themselves better by advocating for these rights. This is evident in Interview 10, where a participant actively advocated for a friend and said:

*"I learned exactly what my rights were. After that, my friend from Jordan and I went to Ziraat Bank the last time. We wanted to open a new bank account. They told us it wouldn't work. I said, 'Legally, you can do it. It's his right. Otherwise, we can go to the prosecutor and file a complaint.' He said, 'Okay, let me handle it. Come, I'll take care of it.'"*¹⁵²

3.9.5. Taking on responsibilities at a young age

Lastly, taking on responsibilities at a young age can empower refugees to shape their own futures. Young refugees can progress towards empowerment by assuming responsibility for their education and contributing to their communities. This allows young people to develop leadership skills and make positive contributions to their societies.

Refugees noted that when they had to take on significant responsibilities at a young age, they see these experiences as opportunities for personal growth and maturity. They express that taking on big responsibilities at a young age forced them to learn and communicate more, which has encouraged them to change and mature. This is expressed by a participant in Interview 1:

¹⁵⁰ Turkish original: "Bir şekilde ben susmuyorum. Hem dinliyorum hem de savunmaya çalışıyorum. O yanlış düşünceleri doğru düşüncelere çevirmeye çalışıyorum yani." (Görüşme 1)

¹⁵¹ Turkish original: "Ben güçlü bir kızım ve olmaya da mecburum. Konuşanları sustururum yani. Hiç konuşmasına izin vermiyorum. Evet, bayağı savunmaya başladım kendimi. Çünkü susarak hiçbir şey hallolmaz." (Görüşme 6)

¹⁵² Turkish original: "Benim haklarımı tam olarak ne olduğunu öğrendim. Ondan sonra geçen sefer Ürdünlü bir arkadaşımın Ziraat Bankası'na gittik. Yeni bir banka hesabı açtırmak istiyorduk. Bize olmaz dediler. "Kanunen yapabilir. Onun bir hakkı var. Yoksa şey, Savcı'ya gideriz ya da şikâyet ederiz" dedim. Tamam dedi tamam, halledeyim. Gelin, halledeyim." (Görüşme 10)

*"Of course, it strengthened me a lot. The sense of responsibility, the idea that I live here, and I have to take responsibility for it, strengthened me. (...) It's like we went directly from being small to becoming adults. And we have to take responsibility for something big. We need to learn. We need to communicate with new people. It's a very different life, but we gradually tried to improve it."*¹⁵³

It is emphasized that taking responsibility can help refugees become more successful and mature individuals. The sense of responsibility contributes to their success in both education and their careers. In Interview 8, a participant expressed it as follows:

*"I mean, the difficulties changed me. I was a different person, and now I'm a better one. Responsibility changed me a lot. It made me a better person. Even in university, as a successful student, most of my professors like me. I was very good at my job, thanks to God."*¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Turkish original: "Hocam tabii ki çok güçlendirdi. Yani sorumluluk hissi, ben burada yaşıyorum, bunun sorumluluğunu almam gerekiyor düşüncesi güçlendirdi. (...) Sanki küçükten direkt büyük bir yaşa geldik. Ve büyük bir şeyin sorumluluğunu alacağız. İşte öğrenmemiz lazım. Yeni insanlarla iletişim kurmamız lazım. Böyle çok farklı bir hayat ama gittikçe onu düzeltmeye çalıştık." (Görüşme 1)

¹⁵⁴ Turkish original: "Yani zorlukları nasıl diyeyim beni değiştirdi. Ben farklı biriydim şimdi. Sorumluluk beni çok değiştirdi. Daha iyi biri yaptı. Hatta mesela üniversitede başarılı bir öğrenci olarak, hocalarımın çoğu beni seviyor. İşimde de çok iyiydim, çok şükür." (Görüşme 8)

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to comprehend and analyze the strong and capable aspects of the identities of systematically marginalized groups in society, rather than focusing on their weaknesses and vulnerabilities due to the deficit-based approach. The refugee experience is widely acknowledged as a difficult and demanding one, as indicated by previous research (see Cantekin and Gençöz, 2017; Yılmaz Zambak, 2021) and the findings of this study. During this study, participants were asked a series of questions with the explicit aim of uncovering both the advantages and disadvantages, as well as the positive and negative facets of their refugee experiences. In response to these inquiries, participants predominantly focused on the negative aspects and disadvantages. Consequently, the themes and subthemes that generated in the study predominantly lean toward the negative side. Nonetheless, it's important to note that participants highlighted alongside their challenging experiences, they also encountered numerous positive aspects. These positive experiences, shared by the refugees, revolved around areas where they felt resilient and displayed effective coping mechanisms.

In addition, when participants were asked about future-related questions, it was observed that they primarily provided responses related to economic processes. For example, responses included finding jobs, building careers, or moving to different countries for better economic conditions. This can be explained through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. At this point, Maslow's first level of physiological needs stands out. Maslow (1943) in his original study emphasized that a person at this stage, who lacks basic physiological needs, would primarily focus on fulfilling those needs and might not be able to think beyond them. He explained that someone in this stage would dream and fantasize about food. He stressed that it's crucial not to skip this stage in a healthy progression towards higher levels of needs. Considering this explanation, it is understandable that refugees who struggle to sustain themselves economically would prioritize their basic needs. In a scenario where refugees have no concerns about their basic needs, it is believed that the responses to future-related questions would cover a broader range of possibilities.

In the following section, the results of this study will be evaluated separately based on the themes generated. Finally, the results of this study will be assessed within the context of "The Mutual Cycle of Culture."

4.1. Discussion by themes

"We couldn't live a good life". The difficulties experienced by the refugees examined in this theme highlight the complexity of the migration process. Similar to previous studies (Cantekin and Gençöz, 2017; Yılmaz Zambak, 2021), mental health of Syrian refugees affected by the pre-migration period where they witnessed war, loss of loved ones and aggression. When individuals are forced to leave their own countries, they encounter both emotional and practical challenges. As complementary to previous research (see Akesson & Coupland, 2018), refugees hoped that the situation in Syria get better and they can remain in their homeland. As the situation got worsen, they had to flee from their countries with leaving everything behind without preparing. This was followed by the process of adapting to a new country and culture and it becomes complex as they strive to overcome language and cultural differences. Furthermore, refugees find themselves in an environment where they feel unwanted and compelled to work continuously.

Moreover, a greater risk should be considered in this manner that refugee children start working at a young age, drop out of school, or work while continuing their education (see Cinkir, 2015; Saritas et al. 2016). For boys, this often results in child labor, while for girls, it can lead to early marriages (Demir & Ozgul, 2019). For boys, we had such results in this study, but for girls, as we focused on university students, it was not observed. However, it is a critical topic which should be focused more in the future studies.

However, the determination and effort to cope with these challenges demonstrate how resilient refugees are. Despite having to leave their home countries, these individuals show great resilience in adapting to a new life. They navigate challenges such as supporting their families, taking on economic responsibilities, and balancing education with work, all with unwavering determination.

"Struggling just to survive". This theme, by examining refugee experiences, clearly underlines the challenges and emotional burdens that refugees face. It demonstrates that being a refugee entails not only physical hardships but also emotional and identity-related challenges. Our findings are parallel with the existing literature (see Griswold, 2021). Also, in the literature (Türkleş, 2013) stated that refugee women struggle more emotional problems than men. In this study, we did not realize any differences between men and women based on their explanations. Additional to that, one of the findings of this study refugees are being separated from their families. This is a stress, fear and anxiety source for the refugees,

and it is supported by the several studies in the literature (Griswold et al., 2021; Goodman et al., 2017).

Refugees are not just struggling to survive; they are also contending with numerous factors that have significant effects on their identities and perceptions. As Sousa and colleagues (2023) stated refugees have a survival mode" in which they just try to focus on meeting their basic needs and protecting themselves and their families. This situation has become a part of their lived experiences, constantly labeling them as "refugees." This label appears as a description that shapes their identities and is frequently affixed to them by societies. As stated in the literature refugee status is a "double-edged sword." which refugees need to carry lifelong (Ludwig, 2013).

The uncertainty, feelings of insecurity, and the constant fear of deportation that come with being a refugee are significant factors that shape the lives of these individuals. At the same time, being recognized as a refugee reflects a situation in which one's experiences have become a part of their identity, and this identification is often emphasized by others. This study highlights the impact of these labels on refugees' identities, perceptions, and daily lives. This is supported by several studies in the literature (Baranik et al., 2017; Groutsis et al., 2023). These studies also showed that refugee label overrides personal characteristics, individuals' professional competence, personality traits, and even their sense of self.

Despite these challenges, it is important to emphasize that refugees have the right to respect for their human rights and the right to protect their lives. Despite the difficulties of being a refugee, these individuals are striving to survive, secure their families' safety, and seek a better future. Communities should make efforts to support refugees and advocate for their rights. Understanding the challenges faced by refugees and providing assistance is a shared responsibility of humanity.

"Not understanding Turkish makes daily life difficult". The process of learning the Turkish language by Syrian refugees in Türkiye emerges as a crucial factor deeply affecting their daily lives. This language barrier has a significant impact on various important areas. This is one of the common themes found in several recent studies (see Earnest et al., 2015; Torun et al., 2018; Yılmaz Zambak, 2021). Firstly, not knowing Turkish can create serious obstacles when it comes to finding employment, accessing healthcare services, education, and meeting other basic needs.

Furthermore, the language barrier, especially in education and academic achievement, poses a major challenge. Syrian students may struggle to understand lessons, solve problems, and grasp the course content due to not having a sufficient command of

Turkish. This can lead to a desire to drop out of school. This is also supported by several studies (see Şahin & Çelik, 2020; Solak & Çelik, 2018) which underlines the effects of prejudices and exclusion based on language to students desire to drop out of school and decreased academic achievement. However, efforts, motivation, and time have shown that these students have the potential to learn Turkish.

Lastly, the language barrier in government institutions makes it difficult for refugees to convey their concerns and can, in some cases, lead to discrimination. These findings are supported by the literature (see Baiser & Hou, 2016; Haffeejee, 2015; Uptin et al., 2013) which emphasizes refugees are discriminated and excluded in the society they live in just because their language competences or accents. This can limit refugees' access to official services and further complicate their integration processes (Yılmaz Zambak, 2021).

In conclusion, the process of learning the Turkish language stands out as a crucial factor deeply affecting the lives of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. Making efforts to overcome this language barrier, along with motivation and support, can enhance refugees' integration processes and provide them with a better future.

"Xenophobia towards Syrians". In this theme, the focus has been on the xenophobia against Syrian refugees in Türkiye and how this hostility manifests itself in different aspects of life. Participants' experiences indicate that discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards Syrian refugees deeply impact their daily lives. It is understood that this hostility takes shape in various negative experiences encountered in education, neighborhood life, government institutions, and other social spheres. Also as mentioned by the previous studies (see Thommessen et al., 2015; Yılmaz Zambak, 2021), the most challenging period for the refugees the years they arrived at Türkiye. In this study, it is also observed that the first peak for the violence and xenophobia against Syrian refugees was the first years of the migration flow. Additionally, the election atmosphere in Türkiye and increased anti-refugee discourse and attitudes has a significant effect on violence and xenophobia against Syrian refugees in Türkiye. Also, this situation stated by the Alam and Asef (2021) during the era of Trump, because of his anti-refugee attitudes and policy hate crimes increased in America by 21% which is very huge.

Additionally, as indicated by the participants in this study and in the research conducted by Erdoğan (2022), conflicts between the Turkish and Syrian communities have been on the rise. Another reason for this is believed to be the increase in the refugee population and the economic downturn in Türkiye. Turks perceive that refugees have taken

away their resources, leading to an increase in hostility between the two groups. Conflicts over the sharing of limited resources are on the rise (see, Haase et al., 2019).

In the educational environment, the negative attitudes of teachers and classmates towards Syrian students adversely affect their academic achievements and motivation. This situation leads to questioning fairness in education and an increase in discrimination among students.

In neighborhood life, the display of xenophobia towards Syrian refugees by neighbors makes migrants feel excluded in their social circles. This negatively affects the process of social integration.

Discriminatory attitudes of government officials in public institutions make it difficult for refugees to access public services. This can hinder refugees from exercising their rights and deepen their sense of exclusion within society.

In conclusion, the xenophobia against Syrian refugees in Türkiye leads to many negative experiences in different life domains. In the most recent study on this subject, Yılmaz Zambak (2021) reported that one-third of participants, in the same age group with the present study, experienced discrimination. In contrast, in this study, 90% of the participants stated that they had experienced discrimination in their daily lives. It has also been pointed out with numerous examples that these discriminatory behaviors occur in various contexts such as education, neighborhoods, or government institutions. Despite a short period of time, the changes in the participants' declarations of experiencing discrimination are noteworthy. It is thought that the reason for this may be the recent rise in anti-refugee rhetoric and actions, especially during the elections.

To reduce this hostility and contribute to a more tolerant environment, education, awareness campaigns, and efforts to combat racism can be crucial steps. Additionally, supporting policies based on principles of justice, human rights, and equality can play a significant role in addressing this issue.

"Hiding Syrian identity: Protecting oneself against discrimination". The strategies adopted by Syrian refugees to conceal their Syrian identities and protect themselves against discrimination reflect a series of measures taken under challenging living conditions and societal pressures. Behaviors such as not speaking Arabic and practicing Turkish are a result of these individuals' efforts to manage their daily lives. This issue is not frequently mentioned in the related literature, however some studies (Mangan & Winter, 2016; Maringe et al, 2017; Morrice, 2013) support these findings with some nuances. Also, these studies

found out refugees concerns for disclosing their refugee status might subject them to various biases, extra stress and trouble.

However, these strategies may lead individuals to deny their natural identities or experience identity confusion. This is stated by Bartholomew and colleagues (2015) in which refugees redefine their selves and see themselves less favorable. Additionally, Syrian refugees' desire to move away from refugee status and obtain citizenship reflects their aspiration to avoid the limitations imposed by refugee status. This reflects the difficulties they face and their need for self-protection as a result of societal norms and acceptance.

In conclusion, Syrian refugees' strategies to protect themselves against discrimination should be seen as a complex balancing act. These strategies reflect the measures they take to increase their social integration and avoid negative reactions. However, these measures may also lead to the concealment and denial of personal identities. Therefore, greater social tolerance and understanding towards Syrian refugees can help them gain acceptance without the need for these strategies, ultimately promoting healthier identity development in the long run.

"I feel like I'm in prison"- Effects of government policies and legal systems". The effects of government policies and legal systems in Türkiye on the lives and futures of refugees are quite pronounced. Factors such as restricted freedom of travel, limited employment opportunities in public institutions, the complexity of acquiring Turkish citizenship, and the high cost of higher education impact the daily lives of refugees and limit their future opportunities. Refugees face challenges such as being unable to leave the provinces where they are registered, inability to find jobs in public institutions, facing an uncertain process to obtain citizenship, and being unable to afford higher education tuition fees.

As Baranik and colleagues (2017) stated refugees face difficulties finding jobs, being employed at low wages, and their skills and abilities acquired in their home countries not being recognized in the countries where they lived as refugees. This is one of the findings of this study that refugees unable to work in governmental institutions even though because of they are refugees they have to work for low wages or uninsured. Even Goodman and colleagues (2017) mention that refugee women tend work as a sex worker, because they could not find any other jobs. This is an important topic in Türkiye to work on in the future.

These challenges may restrict refugees' desires to build better lives and careers in Türkiye. Moreover, these factors can adversely affect refugees' educational and professional development. Therefore, providing more support to refugees and developing fair and

accessible policies on issues such as freedom of travel, job opportunities, citizenship processes, and higher education tuition fees is crucial. This can help refugees have a better future and encourage them to contribute more to society.

"The future aspirations of refugees". Refugees' emotional experiences regarding the future are indeed quite diverse. Some individuals, due to the challenging experiences they have gone through and the uncertainty they face, are feeling hopeless and see the future as bleak. These people struggle to predict what the future holds, given the tragic events in Syria, the difficult migration experience, and the challenges they face in the host country. They believe that achieving their educational and career goals is difficult, and the option of returning to Syria has become complicated due to the uncertainty of the situation.

However, on the other hand, despite the difficulties, some refugees are looking forward to the future with hope and have positive expectations. They aim to complete their education, develop their careers, and even establish their own businesses. These individuals view the process of adapting to Türkiye, learning the language, and making new friends in a positive light. They have confidence in their own potential and future. Also, like previous studies (see, van Heelsom, 2017) these future orientation seems to regain of their life in Syria (i.e., trying to remedy losses and build a better life).

Refugees' emotional experiences regarding the future can be complex and varied. Understanding these differences between hopelessness and optimism is important to provide better support to refugees and help shape their futures. By offering education and career opportunities, we can support these individuals in self-improvement and help them build a better life in the future.

"Finding ways to cope with challenging experiences". This theme has examined various ways of coping with challenging experiences and has helped us understand how refugees deal with these experiences. It has highlighted the importance of support mechanisms such as family support, support from Turkish teachers/academics, support from Turkish friends/neighbors, and support from faith. It's important to note that Syrian refugee participants did not mention their in-groups as being supportive. Additionally, similar findings were reported in other studies (Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., 2021; Yılmaz Zambak, 2021)

Yılmaz Zambak (2021) stressed that these strategies employed by the refugees to support their resilience; also mentioned that peer and family support are most imported factors in developing resilience. Family support has helped refugees cope with difficult decisions such as dropping out of school and has contributed to keeping their hopes alive.

The emotional support provided by Turkish teachers and academics has facilitated the education and adaptation processes of refugees. The material and emotional support from Turkish friends and neighbors has facilitated refugees' better integration into society and language learning. These findings are supported by several studies in the literature (see Alfadhli & Drury, 2018; Shisana & Celentano, 1987; Simich et al., 2005). Faith has helped refugees view their difficulties as a test and has provided spiritual support. As Griswold and colleagues (2021) stated faith and religiosity are important coping strategies for refugees.

These findings provide valuable insights into how we can help refugees build resilience and improve their integration into society. These various support mechanisms for coping with challenging experiences can assist refugees in adapting to a new life and experiencing positive outcomes. Therefore, it is important to increase refugee communities' access to these support resources and promote their strengthening. This can contribute to refugees moving towards a more stable and hopeful future.

"Empowerment or agent in the face of challenging experiences". Within this theme of examinations, it becomes evident how refugees empower themselves and take action to navigate challenging experiences. A crucial aspect of this empowerment is their engagement in language learning, which not only enhances their communication skills but also opens doors to new opportunities while facilitating their integration into society.

Moreover, refugees' ability to recognize individuals and discern potential harm plays a significant role in helping them feel secure and effectively manage adverse situations. Several previous studies (Shakya et al., 2014; Suerbaum, 2017) have highlighted that the challenges faced by participants in this context, along with the responsibilities they assume at a young age, can profoundly impact their self-perceptions.

On one hand, participants noted that these processes accelerate their transition to adulthood. On the other hand, they also suggest that a somewhat slower transition might provide them with the necessary time to make independent decisions regarding their agency. Nonetheless, it is evident that taking on responsibilities empowers participants and boosts their self-confidence.

Resilience and unwavering effort in the face of adversity enable refugees to not only achieve their goals but also emerge stronger from their experiences. Their newfound ability to advocate for their rights empowers them to stand up for justice and work towards changing negative behaviors within their communities.

Recent studies published in the literature (Erşahin, 2020; Şimşir et al., 2021), which have been thoroughly examined in this study, support the ongoing debate by demonstrating

that exposure to trauma and challenges can lead not only to psychopathological outcomes but also to positive new developments and changes among refugees.

In conclusion, assuming responsibilities at a young age contributes significantly to the growth and positive contributions refugees make to their communities. These findings narrate an inspiring story of refugees' empowerment and resilience, illustrating how they become stronger when confronted with life's challenges.

4.2. Discussion by The Mutual Cycle of Culture

The evaluation of the results of this study through the previously mentioned "The Mutual Cycle of Culture" approach is indeed important for a better understanding of the nature and experiences of refugees. The experience of "being a refugee" is a process that mutually shapes a person's identity, the culture of the host country, and the cultural baggage brought by the individual. In the continuation of the general discussion, the sub-dimensions of the approach will be examined based on themes of the study, along with the key findings.

Self. Under this heading, it is possible to examine the self-perceptions of immigrants and refugees and how this perception is affected by migration, refugee status, and the process of adapting to a new society. Additionally, we can understand how these individuals preserve and transform their personalities and values. For example, questions like "How do refugees define their identities? How does the migration process and their interactions with the new society shape their sense of self?" can be addressed under this heading.

In this study, it is found that refugees conceal their Syrian identities, are not speaking Arabic in public, practicing Turkish to protect themselves against discrimination. Moreover, they dress and try to be seen like Turks. In this context, it is observed that refugees' identities change after settling in Türkiye due to factors such as the social environment they live in, the political attitudes of the host community, and concerns about acceptance into society. The prevailing idea in this approach is that one's self-identity and socioeconomic conditions mutually influence each other. This mutual interaction has become visibly apparent within a short time frame in the context of refugee experiences. Refugees no longer find their own personalities as desirable as before, and they even carry a fear of harm and exclusion if their identities are revealed. It is important to highlight this change, even if it occurs within a short period.

Additionally, refugees' inability to tolerate being a refugee for longer periods and their desire to obtain the citizenship of any country indicate that individuals are not satisfied

with the identity they have acquired due to socio-economic conditions and want to change it. This situation can serve as an example of the results that emerge from mutual interactions.

Daily Situations & Practices. Under this heading, we can examine how refugees behave, carry out their daily routines, and practice their daily lives. For example, it can be observed that how cultural differences and similarities shape these individuals' daily lives.

Behaviors, activities, routines, and the relationships refugees have with the host community in places where refugees' daily lives unfold, such as school, home, work, and neighborhood, are examined at this point. As previously mentioned, when talking about the "refugee experience," refugees emphasize the negative aspects. Therefore, conflicts between refugees and the host community in their daily lives and practices will be more exemplified in this theme.

Xenophobia towards refugees has generated as a fundamental theme in this study. In contexts such as the neighborhood, educational environment, and state institutions, refugees have declared that they face discrimination due to their refugee identities. Therefore, they have had to deal with many problems in their daily lives. For example, when refugees first came to Türkiye, they experienced a lot of violence, but this has gradually decreased over time. These individuals, who define themselves based on different cultural norms (Turks and Syrians), have come to accept each other over time. An important observation that needs to be mentioned at this point is that participants have stated that refugees feel more comfortable and safer in areas where they are less concentrated. It is thought that the reason for this is that more frequent and prolonged exposure to an out-group can trigger more negative attitudes. It is known that negative and unplanned contact can lead to alienation between groups (Allport, 1967).

Due to these negative experiences, it is thought that refugees' acculturation processes may be harmed. Thus, the situation arises where refugees avoid displaying signs and routines that represent their own culture and identity within the society. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of creating a subculture in the long run.

Institutions & Products. Under this heading, it can investigate that how refugees interact with institutions in the society they reside in, as well as the products of these institutions. Specifically, we can discuss their relationships with education, healthcare, employment, and other official organizations, and how these institutions impact their lives. For example, we can examine the integration processes of refugees into the education system or their interactions with local governments.

In this study, refugees' relationships with institutions are discussed under the theme of "It's like I'm in prison." In this theme, the refugees' opinions about how host country laws and policies affect them are presented. Refugees believe that existing regulations restrict certain rights. One of these restrictions is the requirement to obtain a travel permit to go to a city other than the one where they are registered. It is understood that even if a person is a student in another city, they must obtain this document to visit their family. Otherwise, it can lead to consequences that may even result in the deportation of the individual and their family. It can be particularly emphasized that refugees feel as if they are confined like prisoners due to this document, as they turn to the "self" in this context. Additionally, refugees not considering themselves as "normal people" indicates that their perception of self is changing due to institutional and political structures, and it may further differentiate in the future.

Another key theme is the high tuition fees that refugees have to pay for their university education. Refugees believe that if they were not refugees, they could pursue the education they want more easily. In this case, even though their scores qualify them for higher-cost programs, they mention that their economic situation does not allow them to study in these programs, forcing them to study in fields they do not prefer. While this situation is a general issue for all foreign students in Turkey, it makes refugees feel even more disadvantaged. The effects of these systems, which constantly reinforce each other, cannot be separated from one another.

Finally, language is an important factor in mutual constitution. It is observed that refugees make an effort to appear as Turkish, and this is particularly evident in their tendency to speak Turkish. As mentioned earlier, relevant literature also emphasizes that language acquisition has a facilitating effect on the refugee experience. Language acquisition makes the acquisition of the culture in which the language is spoken inevitable. This situation is an explanation of the mutual constitution of cultures and selves.

Societal Factors & Pervasive Ideas. Under this heading, it can be explored that how refugees interact with broader social, economic, political, and cultural factors within the societies they are a part of. For example, we can assess how they perceive the dominant ideologies, beliefs, and narratives of these societies and how these ideas affect their own identities and integration into the community.

When considering the entire refugee experience, we often encounter an active refugee who grapples with these challenging experiences. A refugee is not a passive recipient but an active agent. Their ability to cope with the challenging experiences and their assertion

of becoming stronger as a result clearly convey this. Regardless of how challenging their experiences may have been, the majority of refugees discover ways to cope and emerge from this process empowered.

Migration has been a phenomenon that has existed throughout history, driven by various social, economic, and geographical reasons. The adaptability of migrants or refugees, such as in the case of migration, is a part of the instinct for survival. Therefore, refugees are influenced by and, in turn, influence all the factors and systems at both macro and micro levels with which they interact. This study has shown that everything from societal structures to migration policies, interpersonal relationships, and economics affects refugees' migration experiences. The phenomenon of refugee, in itself, is a powerful force that influences and transforms these systems.

The collective findings of this study suggest that the concept of cultures and selves' mutual constitution is applicable in the context of refugee. Conducting more detailed studies on this mutual interaction and using this approach in identifying problems and solutions will lead to a more comprehensive understanding. This study does not aim to blame or support either the host community or refugees but focuses on recognizing the situation and understanding the refugee experiences. It discusses approaches that can be used to identify the situation. There is a need for more comprehensive efforts in the areas of refugee and cultural adaptation, not limited to situation analysis alone, but involving active prevention and intervention.

4.3. Research's Contribution, Implications, and Limitations

This study primarily focuses on the strengths of refugee university students, thus contributing significantly to the literature that predominantly employs deficit-based approaches. However, despite this, the strength-based approach, which plays a significant role at the core of the study, was not adequately understood by the participants. Questions aimed at examining participants' strengths and their processes of post-traumatic growth were often left unanswered. Therefore, it is not believed that the study has adequately achieved its goal of focusing on the identification of refugees' strengths. In order to help participants better understand the question and its purpose, it was rephrased using different words and sentence structures. However, participants often emphasized negative situations in their narratives. This is considered a fundamental limitation of the study. While some of the findings of this study directly align with existing literature, the tendencies of refugees to conceal their identities and act like Turks have been included as a new finding to the

literature. The overlapping aspects of this study with existing literature have been observed to enrich these topics by addressing different events and occurrences.

I believe that the findings of this study will serve as a fundamental input for future research. This study is important for a better understanding on the phenomenon of "being a refugee," a detailed examination of the issues associated with this phenomenon, the identification of potential adjustments that can facilitate the adaptation of refugees to the society they live in, and a profound understanding of the areas where refugees need support. This goes beyond problem identification and extends to the thoughts of refugees about their strengths and the processes that empower them, which is crucial for future research. Intervention and prevention programs aimed at addressing identified issues or risks can be made more effective by utilizing the outputs of this study. Furthermore, I believe that by implementing the recommendations mentioned in the next section, refugees and host community members can move closer to living in a more harmonious society.

One of the limitations of this study is that all participants are university students, which may imply a higher socio-economic status, higher educational levels within their families, and greater awareness of societal issues compared to other refugees on the same age. In other words, the sample of this study may not represent the entire refugee population, even they are at the same age group. Additionally, the fact that none of the participants had any difficulty in communicating in Turkish suggests that they may have a positive and advanced understanding of social integration, and of the importance of knowing Turkish in the society. For these reasons, it can be argued that this study only examines the experiences of one layer of the refugees related to phenomenon of "living as a refugee." However, another limitation of this study is that participants may not have been able to express themselves as they wished due to their first language not being Turkish. Furthermore, participants, despite giving permission for audio recording, reported that they wanted to share more but felt restricted due to the recording, which indicated that the act of recording had a constraining effect in conducting a qualitative analysis, given the sensitivity of the study group. Another limitation to consider is that participants' experiences may have varied significantly due to differences in their durations of stay in Türkiye, ages of arrival, and the cities where they settled after arriving.

4.4. Suggestions

When considering the results obtained from this study, below are recommendations provided for both practical and academic fields:

Support and Empathy: In general, efforts should be made for societies to show more empathy towards the challenging experiences refugees go through. Empathy is believed to arise from being aware of the other person's situation, understanding their difficulties, and having knowledge about them. It is thought that by enhancing empathy, a supportive and understanding approach towards refugees can also be developed.

Language Education and Integration: Learning Turkish for Syrian refugees holds significant importance in various crucial areas such as finding employment, accessing healthcare services, education, and meeting basic needs. Opportunities for learning Turkish should be provided to refugees of all age groups, and assistance should be given to overcome this language barrier.

Combatting Xenophobia and Discrimination: Combating xenophobia and discrimination against Syrian refugees is the responsibility of society. Education, awareness campaigns, and increasing opportunities for mutual interaction can be steps taken in this regard, which should also be actively pursued on social media.

Decent Government Policies: Government policies in Türkiye that affect the daily lives and future of refugees should be reviewed and improved. Particularly, more equitable and accessible policies should be developed concerning issues like freedom of travel and higher education fees for students.

Identity and Self-Esteem: Understanding strategies for refugees to preserve their identities and protect themselves from discrimination is important. Societies should display more social tolerance and understanding to enable refugees to maintain their self-esteem and develop their identities in a healthy manner. Achieving this goal is possible by implementing the previous recommendations, but efforts should also be made to support refugees' self-esteem and self-confidence.

In addition to these, it is important for researchers to conduct descriptive studies on refugee experiences and strive to understand the mechanisms that trigger these processes. However, going a step further and designing inclusive and real-world prevention and intervention programs in this regard is even more essential and prioritized.

These recommendations can be considered as steps that can assist refugees in coping with their challenging lives. Respecting the rights of refugees and supporting them is a humanitarian responsibility and a task that requires collaboration among societies.



5. CONCLUSION

This study primarily focused on university student refugees' experiences related to their refugee background and the concept of "being a refugee." Its objective was to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties refugees encounter throughout their migration experiences, the process of acculturation, interactions with members of the local society, as well as their responses to these experiences, adopted strategies, and the advantages they derive from such encounters. The analysis conducted resulted in the generation of nine fundamental themes. These themes are as follows: "We couldn't live a good life" - Challenges of migration, "Struggling just to survive," Difficulty in daily life due to the lack of understanding of Turkish, Xenophobia towards Syrians, Concealing Syrian identity: Self-protection against discrimination, "It's like I'm in prison" - Effects of government policies and legal systems, Refugees' future aspirations, Strategies for coping with challenging experiences, and resilience or agency in the face of adversity.

The findings of this study align with the outcomes of existing literature. It both solidified previously established themes in the literature and brought to light some previously unexplored themes. Furthermore, this study contributed to a deeper understanding of themes already present in the literature by enriching them with detailed sub-themes. Given the inherent nature of qualitative studies, while similar themes may emerge, the significance lies in the specific details included in the study and the examples provided by the participants. Therefore, this study has made a substantial contribution to the discussions surrounding "being a refugee" and "refugee experiences" in the literature. Additionally, the study's reliance on strength-based approaches and the cycle of mutual constitution framework has paved the way for a broader and more productive discussion of the findings from various perspectives.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM

BİLGİLENDİRİLMİŞ ONAM FORMU

Hoş geldiniz!

Bu tez çalışması sadece zorla yerinden edilmiş kişilerin katılımına açıktır. Bu tanım mültecileri, geçici koruma statüsünde olanları, uluslararası koruma statüsünde olanları ve sığınmacıları kapsamaktadır. Ben yapacağım tez çalışması deneyimleriniz hakkında daha fazla bilgi edinmek istiyorum. Lütfen soruları içten ve gerçeğe uygun olarak yanıtlayın. Katılımınız gönüllülük esasına dayanmaktadır ve çalışmadan istediğiniz zaman herhangi bir olumsuz durum yaşamadan ayrılabilirsiniz. Bu çalışmaya katılarak yanıtlarınızı araştırmamızın amacı doğrultusunda kullanabileceğimizi ve yanıtların analizi amacıyla ses kaydınızın alınmasını kabul etmiş olursunuz. Bu tez çalışması Başkent Üniversitesi Psikoloji Bölümü'nden Doç. Dr. Zuhal Yeniçeri Kökdemir danışmanlığında ve Viyana Üniversitesi Motivasyon Psikolojisi Anabilim Dalı'dan Dr. Christina Bauer'ın eş-danışmanlığında yürütülmektedir.

Katılımınız için şimdiden teşekkür ederim.

Sorularınız için: Arş. Gör. Muhammed Refik Tekeli

Katılımcı Ad Soyad:

Katılmayı kabul ettiğine dair imza:

APPENDIX 2: DEMOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FORM

SOSYODEMOGRAFİK SORULAR

- **Cinsiyetiniz:** Kadın, Erkek, Diğer, Belirtmek İstemiyorum
- **Yaşınız:**
- **Sınıfınız:**
- **Bölümünüz:**
- **Türkiye’de kalış süreniz (24 Ay, 2 Yıl, 15 Ay gibi):**



APPENDIX 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FORM

YARI YAPILANDIRILMIŞ GÖRÜŞME SORULARI

- Mülteci olmak sizin için nasıl bir şey?
 - o Şimdiye kadar ne gibi deneyimler edindiniz?
 - o Mülteci olarak deneyimleriniz sizi nasıl etkiledi/hayatınızda neler değiştirdi?
- Mülteci kimliğinizden dolayı yaşadığınız olumsuz deneyimler nelerdi? Olumlu deneyimler nelerdi?
- Deneyimlerinizin sizin üzerinizdeki olumsuz etkileri nelerdi? Olumlu etkiler nelerdi? (örn., kampüs içerisindeki arkadaş ilişkileri, akademik başarı, romantik ilişkiler).
- Geleceğinizi düşündüğünüzde neler hedefliyorsunuz? Nelerin sizi bekleyebileceğini düşünüyorsunuz?
- Üniversite eğitiminiz süresince yaşadığınız mülteci olduğunuz için yaşadığınızı düşündüğünüz olumsuz deneyimler nelerdi? Dışlanma, ötekileştirme ve damgalamaya maruz kaldığınızı düşündüğünüz oldu mu?
- Türkiye’de devlet kurumları ve politikalar sizi nasıl etkiliyor?
- Daha önce mültecilerin yaşadığı deneyimlerin genellikle çok zor olduğunu duymuştuk; aynı zamanda bazı mülteciler bize güçlü yönler ve önemli beceriler geliştirdiklerini de söylüyorlar; bu konuda ne düşünüyorsunuz? Siz de deneyimleriniz sayesinde bu tür güçlü yönler geliştirdiniz mi?

APPENDIX 4: ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 20.10.2023-277839



1993

BAŞKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Akademik Değerlendirme Koordinatörlüğü

Sayı :E-62310886-605.99-277839

Konu : Muhammed Refik Tekeli'nin Etik Kurul
Başvurusu Hk.

20.10.2023

SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE

İlgi : 22.09.2023 tarih ve 269364 sayılı yazınız.

Enstitünüz Sosyal Psikoloji (Tezli) Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencisi Muhammed Refik TEKELİ'nin, Doç. Dr. Zuhale YENİÇERİ KÖKDEMİR'in danışmanlığında yürütmeyi planladığı, "Understanding refugee experiences from a different perspective: Strength-based approach" adlı çalışması değerlendirilmiş ve bilgilerinize ekte sunulmuştur.

Prof. Dr. M. Abdülkadir VAROĞLU
Kurul Başkanı

Ek: Değerlendirme Formu

Sayı : 17162298.600-228
Konu : Bilimsel Çalışma

9 Ekim 2023

İlgili Makama

Üniversitemiz Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sosyal Psikoloji (Tezli) Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencisi Muhammed Refik TEKELİ'nin, Doç. Dr. Zuhale YENİÇERİ KÖKDEMİR'in danışmanlığında yürütmeyi planladığı, "Understanding refugee experiences from a different perspective: Strength-based approach" adlı çalışma değerlendirilmiş ve yapılmasında bir sakınca olmadığı tespit edilmiştir. Bilgilerinize saygılarımızla sunarız.

Başkent Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler ve Sanat Araştırma Kurulu

Ad, Soyad	Değerlendirme	İmza
Prof. Dr. M. Abdülkadir Varoğlu	Olumlu/ Olumsuz	
Prof. Dr. Gözen Güner Aktaş	Olumlu/ Olumsuz	
Prof. Dr. Sadegül Akbaba Altun	Olumlu/ Olumsuz	
Prof. Dr. Hasan Tahsin Fendoğlu	Olumlu/ Olumsuz	
Prof. Dr. Filiz Kalelioğlu	Olumlu/ Olumsuz	
Prof. Dr. Hidayet Hale Künuçen	Olumlu/ Olumsuz	
Prof. Dr. Özcan Yağcı	Olumlu/ Olumsuz	

APPENDIX 5: MIND MAP OF THE THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

