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School Integration in a Southern Norwegian Municipality

Factors that Hinder the Integration of Unaccompanied
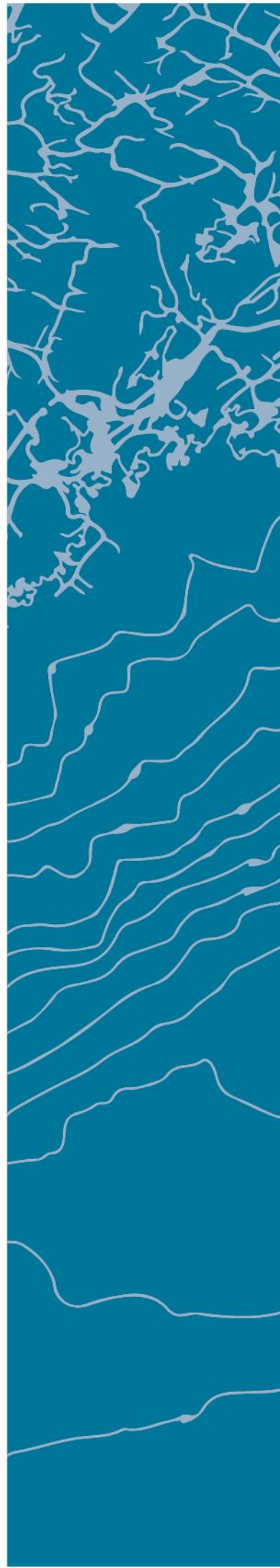Young Refugees into the Norwegian schools

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Abstract

Unaccompanied young refugees constitute a vulnerable portion of the refugee population because of the numerous hardships they contend with both in the country of origin and during the flight. Given the plethora of challenges they face, many often find it challenging to integrate into the school environment and society at large. This study attempted to explore and describe the challenges unaccompanied young refugee students faced as they navigated their everyday schooling in a southern Norwegian municipality. By applying a mix of purposive and snowball sampling methods, 15 unaccompanied young refugee school students, three schoolteachers, and one municipality official responsible for the municipal schools were interviewed through a semi-structured qualitative method. The data were analyzed thematically, which resulted in the generation of codes and themes. The findings indicate that the unaccompanied young refugee students struggled with numerous challenges such as separation from family, combining work with the school, language difficulty, and a lack of social network in the school context that significantly hindered their school integration. In order to build social networks and better integrate into the school context, many expected to transition to the mainstream school environment as they were placed in linguistically isolated classes and have more shared social activities with the Norwegian peers.

Acknowledgement

Declaration

I, Mohammad Osman Beg, declare that this master's thesis, titled "School Integration in a Southern Norwegian Municipality: Factors that Hinder the Integration of Unaccompanied Young Refugees into the Norwegian schools," is my original work. I have not submitted the present thesis to any other University or educational institution other than the University of Agder, Norway, to obtain any academic degree. Materials from other scholars used in the thesis have been duly acknowledged in the references.

Place: Signature: Date:

Kristiansand   Mohammad Osman Beg   1 December, 2020

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

RIES   Refugee Integration and Employment Service

ESS   European Social Survey

UN   United Nations

NGO   Non-Governmental Organization

UK   United Kingdom

UiA   University of Agder

NSD   Norwegian Center for Research Data

SSB   Statistics Norway

PPT   Pedagogical and Psychological Services

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Refugee and integration are some of the widely debated political topics for many host nations around the world. Although opinions diverge significantly on how successful or fundamental integration efforts have been and to what extent they have contributed to a comprehensive integration, there is a notion that integration and social incorporation of refugees require extra work and a more concerted approach that could enhance refugee integration in different areas of society including the school environment in their new homes. Integration refers to relations between nation-states and culturally diverse groups (Berry, 2011, p. 2.2). He further continues that when the "non-dominant" cultural groups show interest in participating in the mainstream society by adopting specific values of the host community while also retaining their heritage culture, the integration occurs (Berry, 1997, p. 9). He argues that integration is a *mutual accommodation* that requires that both the dominant society and refugee population play a role in providing the necessary conditions to attain integration (Berry, 2011). In the school context, I apply the term to describe and explore the unaccompanied young refugee students' challenges in adapting to the Norwegian school environment because of their diverse cultural and linguistic background given the predominant Norwegian school context.

Although integration and related challenges are many and are not necessarily peculiar to Europe or other countries, Koehler and Schneider (2019) argue that the recent massive influx of refugees, particularly between 2014 and 2016, posed significant challenges to the European member states and prompted them to revise their policies that could contribute to the effective integration of the new arrivals into society. Also, challenges do not only exist in integration at large; scholars have also pointed to some of the shortcomings and limitations in many European education systems and their impact on young refugees' school integration. For instance, by drawing on a comparative study of researchers and scholars in intercultural education, Catarci (2014) argues that European education is based on Eurocentrism and observes structural segregation of refugee students in many European schools given their social and cultural backgrounds. He believes that the European cultural and language homogeneity has led to young refugee students' isolation and therefore urges to address school integration from an intercultural perspective (Catarci, 2014). That is why schools must

acknowledge the cultural and linguistic diversity, adapt to the diverse needs of young refugees, and facilitate cultural and identity exploration (Pastoor, 2015; Schachner et al., 2018). Moreover, there is a need to distinguish between immigrants and refugees, particularly *unaccompanied* young adults, and their particular needs and concerns in the school context.

My definition of unaccompanied young refugees includes the youth who travel to final destinations without their parents or other caregivers. In the study, I use the term to refer to all refugee participants who are no longer minors (they are over 18 years old), and they all have been granted a residence permit. Unaccompanied young refugees are more vulnerable than many other immigrant groups considering their unpleasant past experiences and involuntary migration, which often impacts how they function in the school environment. In their analysis of the European education system, De Haene, Neumann, and Pataki (2018) observe numerous challenges young refugees face. They state that many do not have their childhood friends and family as they often leave their home countries unaccompanied; lack of close relations and a sense of community in their host countries are significant challenges for their school integration (De Haene et al., 2018). As one of the researchers in school integration and refugee education in Norway, Pastoor (2013) also argues that socioeconomic background, unfamiliarity with the school environment and its values, technical language terms taught at schools, and the dissimilarity between the Norwegian school system and their previous schools are some of the factors that lead to their poor performance at the Norwegian schools. Fangen and Lynnebakke (2014) also discuss some challenges such as stigmatization and racism young refugees struggle with and their coping strategies with the perceived prejudices at school and other learning contexts. They argue that while young refugees adopt different coping strategies such as avoiding the discriminating people, working hard despite the difficulty to achieve better performance or confronting challenging situations, they are not a lasting solution as the isolation affects their social and psychological development and limits their prospect of building social networks with the broader society (Fangen & Lynnebakke, 2014). Pastoor (2017) further contends that many Norwegian schools cannot meet the complex needs and concerns of unaccompanied young refugees; schools should act as mediators for unaccompanied young refugees as they need parental support and should provide the necessary assistance given their diverse needs. She argues that such assistance has the potential to help them in their psychological adaptation, as many have experienced trauma or other psychological disturbance (Pastoor, 2017).

As argued above, the challenges and hindrances unaccompanied young refugee students face at school are diverse and are not limited to what the scholars illustrated above. Although researchers like Pastoor highlight some of the school integration challenges unaccompanied young refugees face, their underlying causes and the degree to which they affect unaccompanied young refugee students are not fully understood and require further exploration. It also appears that there is a lack of focus on how the unaccompanied young refugee students perceive their own social world as they navigate schooling and how their needs and concerns are considered in this specific municipality the present research focuses on as its target area. This thesis's empirical data are collected from a municipality in the south of Norway, hosting many unaccompanied young refugees as they navigate their everyday schooling. Therefore, this thesis contributes to new knowledge by exploring their own perceptions, experiences, and attitudes in a bottom-up approach and analyzing their attitudes and challenges as they navigate schooling in a southern municipality in Norway.

Given the importance of school integration of unaccompanied young refugees in their transition to mainstream society and the importance of school as a springboard for their future aspirations in their new existence, it is essential to explore and analyze how they navigate their schooling and what specific challenges they encounter in their school integration in the municipality. As argued elsewhere, school means a lot for unaccompanied young refugees, and therefore understanding their specific school challenges would contribute to broader social integration and career prospects. Besides, as Koehler and Schneider (2019) argue, the education acquired in the host country would provide them with the tool they could use in transformation processes, including peacebuilding in their home countries in case they wish to return in the future. They can learn better in an environment that is not characterized by significant challenges.

1.2 Problem Statement

Young refugees leaving their home countries *unaccompanied* encounter many challenges, and their problems are further compounded by the tumultuous journeys they undertake to reach their final destinations. These conditions make them more vulnerable as they integrate into the school environment and society at large. School integration of unaccompanied young refugees is an essential aspect of social integration. Furthermore, a safe school environment may improve self-esteem and contribute to young refugees' better academic performance (Oxman-Martinez & Choi, 2014).

However, schools often cannot accommodate to the special needs and concerns of unaccompanied young refugees. On the one hand, they often lack collaboration and support from relevant professionals and community stakeholders to collectively address their developmental and psychological needs (Pastoor, 2015; Skovdal & Campbell, 2015). On the other hand, many schools do not have the required resources and teaching experiences to address their cultural and linguistic needs (De Haymes et al., 2018; Hughes & Beirens, 2007; Whiteman, 2005). As an illustration, Pastoor (2015) argues that many Norwegian schools have constraints in addressing unaccompanied young refugees' needs and concerns that often affect them as they function in the school environment and therefore advocates extensive collaboration involving the various systems such as teachers and health professionals in working with young refugee students (p. 253). She also observes ambivalence in the school system and its negative impact on teachers to support unaccompanied young refugee students efficiently; she believes that this often adds to the difficulty unaccompanied young refugee students have in adapting to their school environment (Pastoor, 2015). She also informs us of a vacuum between teachers and minority pupils concerning cultural knowledge in many Norwegian schools (Pastoor, 2005). She, therefore, proposes that "the social and cultural dimensions of learning and teaching are important themes to be addressed in future research on communicative interaction in classrooms with heterogeneous pupil populations" (Pastoor, 2005, p. 25).

Although Pastoor touches on some of the school integration challenges unaccompanied young refugees face, her research does not seem to have comprehensively dealt with how they perceive their social world and how their perspectives are taken into account, specifically in this geographical context this study aims to focus. Therefore, it is necessary and of interest to explore what other challenges they might face as they adapt to the Norwegian school system and how they cope with them as they attend school.

Therefore, the present qualitative study aims to explore the factors that hinder the school integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the Norwegian schools by applying an inductive research strategy and a case study design in one of the southern municipalities of Norway. The name of the municipality has been intentionally anonymized for the privacy of the study participants. The study intends to describe the school integration challenges unaccompanied young refugees face by focusing on their *own* narratives and analyzing their attitudes and perceptions as they navigate schooling in their municipality. Additionally, I

analyze the role schools may play in facilitating and promoting school integration for unaccompanied young refugee students. Exploring the challenges unaccompanied young refugee students face in the school context would contribute to a better understanding of their school adaptation and potentially inform future policy objectives.

1.3 Motivation of the Study

Unaccompanied young refugees are more vulnerable than many other immigrant groups, given their past traumatic experiences. Their education is often disrupted in their home countries due to many factors beyond their control. As a former International Civil Servant who has worked for many UN Agencies and NGOs for more than a decade in my home country Afghanistan, I was more aware of their vulnerable situation as they struggled with their education and how their schooling was often disrupted. Although this research in Norway does not focus only on unaccompanied young refugees from the same country, I would say that many school-age students from war-torn countries have similar situations.

When fleeing from the war in their home countries, they endure hardship as they cross many borders to arrive at their final destinations, hoping they could serve them as their new homes. Such conditions make them more vulnerable as they integrate into the school environment and society at large. As I have experience working with refugee integration in Norway, I witness how some refugees and unaccompanied young adults struggle with school integration. Therefore, the motivation for this study stems from these factors. As the student researcher, I hope that my study would give some fresh perspectives to integration and provide more insight into the school context because education is a crucial aspect for their social integration and career prospects and may culminate in the realization of their potentials.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study has the following research objectives:

- To explore the challenges that hinder the school integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the Norwegian schools in a southern municipality;
- To describe the concerns and expectations, unaccompanied young refugees have concerning their school integration;
- To understand the role schools may play in facilitating school integration;

1.5 Research Questions

➢ What are the factors that hinder the integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the Norwegian schools?

➢ What are the concerns and expectations of unaccompanied young refugees with regard to school integration?

➢ What role do schools play in the facilitation of integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the school environment?

1.6 Research Methodology in Brief

In order to get insight into how unaccompanied young refugees themselves perceive school integration, I applied a qualitative research method (Bryman, 2016). By using a semi-structured interview, I collected empirical data from 19 participants from three main categories. The first category included unaccompanied young refugee students (15) as they were the primary target for the study. The other research participants included schoolteachers (three) who taught young refugees and the local municipality (one) who closely worked with the school integration in the municipality. The research design to conduct the study was a case study that specifically focused on a single municipality. I inductively explored the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences unaccompanied young refugee students had about school integration and their challenges as they navigated schooling in the municipality (Bryman, 2016). However, as I reviewed some relevant literature in the field, deductions are also included in the study. That is to say; the research questions are somewhat inspired by the literature as it was not based on pure induction. They suited better as the study was qualitative.

The empirical data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). This method involved generating codes and themes from the entire data corpus and then organizing them into main themes to use in the study. Ethical issues are also an essential aspect of social research; I abided by the relevant rules and regulations. I exercised extra caution, given the delicate nature of the study participants. Unaccompanied young refugees are more vulnerable from other refugee groups, which require extra vigilance and care as one embarks on interviews.

Moreover, the study encountered some challenges related to accessing unaccompanied young refugee students due to the school closure caused mainly by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruiting participants out of school took longer than initially planned. (For more

details about methodology, definitions, and justifications, including the epistemological and ontological positions, See Chapter Three)

1.7 Study Area

The study area the present thesis focused on is one of the southern Norwegian municipalities. The area was intentionally anonymized to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants. Anonymization precluded discussing the target area more thoroughly, particularly the population and some other key features, because illustrating them comprehensively and in more detail could have identified the area, causing anxiety to research participants. Therefore, some of the information, including the population, is only an approximation. I also avoided providing some sources and links that could have identified the target area. This section briefly discusses some of the facts related to geography, demography, and the Norwegian school system.

1.7.1 Geography and Demography

Having located in southern Norway, the urban municipality is relatively large and is home to several thousand inhabitants. Among them are also refugees and immigrants who came from Europe and many other countries. The municipality is dynamic and is in constant change because of its relatively high opportunities in different areas, including work and education. According to SSB (2020), the common types of occupations include trade, transport, health, social services, teaching, property, and restaurant. The municipality has regular bus services to all neighboring communities, making daily commuting easier for students and workers. However, they are limited in some remote municipalities on weekends and public holidays. Therefore, many residents use private transportation, which can be expensive, particularly for unemployed or students who live on a tight budget.

1.7.2 Norwegian School System

Norwegian schools are made up of *grunnskole* (the compulsory primary and lower secondary school) and *videregående skole* (the upper secondary school), which together takes 13 years to accomplish. The *grunnskole* is ten years and is divided into primary school (classes from one to seven) and lower secondary school (classes from eight to ten). The upper secondary school takes three years, and students choose either general studies to continue at the university level or vocational study programs combined with an apprenticeship in a workplace or an institution (Pastoor, 2013).

The target municipality has both types of schools that provide lower and upper secondary education. Moreover, the municipality hosts several adapted education classes in the form of *grunnskole*, which provide fundamental language training and other school subjects for students with languages other than Norwegian. During my visit, I also observed that many of the unaccompanied young refugees who participated in this research project also attended the adapted education classes before going to mainstream Norwegian schools. Commonly, students attending such adapted education classes are mainly from language minority groups. While some students in this research would take vocational education upon completing their studies, others would pursue higher education at the university level. Some unaccompanied young refugees also worked in addition to the school. Traveling to school took less for some unaccompanied young refugees than others because they lived in the municipality's inner parts. However, those who lived outside the municipality had to travel longer distances to commute between school and home.

Nevertheless, they did not have transport problems traveling daily to school. Their school navigation, challenges, and concerns relating to school integration and expectations are discussed in Chapter Four. The following section focuses on the structure of the thesis.

1.8 Thesis Structure

Chapter one presents the introduction and discusses the context and organization of the study. It illustrates the background, problem statement, motivation of the study, research objectives and questions, brief description of the methodology, study area, and the thesis structure. In chapter two, the theoretical perspectives, such as social capital and acculturation hassles used in the analysis of the empirical material, will be introduced. Chapter three outlines the methodological choices and justification for their application. Research methods, strategies, design, epistemological and ontological considerations, sampling methods, data collection tools, data analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations are discussed in this chapter. Chapter four presents the empirical data from the fieldwork gathered through qualitative interviewing of *unaccompanied* young refugee students, schoolteachers, and the municipality. Chapter five analyzes the empirical data and discusses them in light of previous research and theoretical perspectives presented in chapter two. Since the study is qualitative, the findings decide its direction. Chapter six concludes the thesis by presenting and assessing the overall objectives of the study. It summarizes key findings, the contribution of this thesis to the field of knowledge on the integration of young refugees, and points toward further research needs.

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

2.1 Introduction

The phenomenon of immigration and integration is not a new concept and has been widely discussed by scholars and practitioners over the past decades. As discussed above, numerous studies have been conducted regarding the school integration of refugees, yet few studies explore how *unaccompanied* young refugees perceive and tackle their everyday schooling and the *challenges* they face.

This chapter presents an overview of relevant literature, concepts, and theories regarding the school integration of unaccompanied young refugees and how they tackle their everyday schooling in their respective host communities. My research problem is to "explore the factors that hinder the school integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the Norwegian schools in a southern municipality." This study attempts to explore and describe possible challenges unaccompanied young refugees face in their school context and how such challenges hinder them from attending schools, from their own perspectives.

The chapter has two components; the first part encompasses some of the core discourses regarding integration in a broader context and school integration of unaccompanied young refugees as a specific topic. Further, it touches on some of the core discussions surrounding integration, including the integration of unaccompanied young refugees, into the Norwegian school environment. The second part presents some theories and perspectives that will be applied in the analysis of the empirical data.

2.2 Literature Review

Immigration and displacement of people are higher than they have ever been. According to UNHCR (2019), the global population of displaced persons increased by 2.3 million in 2018, bringing the total number to 70.8 million worldwide. While the displaced persons are heterogeneous in terms of age categories, unaccompanied children and young adults constitute a significant portion of the refugee population (Eide & Hjern, 2013; Wade, 2011). Despite being the most vulnerable of all refugee groups, they are often neglected in integration policies (Fili & Xythali, 2017, p. 1). In her study from the Norwegian context, Pastoor mainly focuses on unaccompanied children, referring to the youths under 18 years old who arrive in receiving countries without parents or other people with parental

responsibility (Pastoor, 2013). However, the term unaccompanied may be applied to young adults who are over the age of 18 and have similar characteristics. They all often leave their home countries in groups and encounter many challenges to arrive at their final destinations. Factors contributing to their displacement are usually the same, such as state collapse, political instability, armed conflict, religious, and ethnic persecution (Dryden-Peterson, Dahya & Adelman, 2017; Jani, 2017; McBrien, 2005; Pastoor, 2015).

How to face immigration and refugees has been one of the priorities for many receiving nations worldwide. Their integration has particularly captured the attention of world leaders over the past years. Hagelund (2005) argues that immigration and the resultant cultural diversity have been one of the heated political issues in public debates since the mid-1980s, often leading to polarization across the political spectrum. Some scholars such as De Haene et al. (2018) and Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher (2017) relate these political discourses to the massive number of refugee arrivals, particularly in 2015 and its subsequent widespread reverberations across Europe, posing a significant challenge for many host countries.

Although there is plenty of literature regarding refugee integration, most of them address specific knowledge areas that often concern policies and practices. As an illustration, Keles, Friborg, Idsøe, Sirin, and Oppedal (2018), for example, argue that much research has mainly focused on early traumatic experiences of unaccompanied young refugees, and therefore, urge a need to address other aspects of integration, including acculturation hassles, upon resettlement in the host country. While acculturation refers to cultural changes that occur from interacting with other cultures (Berry, 1997; McBrien, 2005), hassles refer to the annoying, frustrating, or stressful demands of everyday life and their impact on individuals as they function in their environment (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer & Lazarus, 1981, p. 3). They may include irritating practical situations like financial and family concerns or other disappointments that occur from daily encounters (Kanner et al., 1981, p. 3).

Keles et al. (2018) discuss the impact of acculturation hassles over unaccompanied young refugees upon arrival in the host country and how they expose them to challenges as they navigate their everyday life. They argue that four out of ten unaccompanied young refugees showed mental distress, which they attribute to acculturation hassles (Keles et al., 2018, p. 58). To mitigate their daily stressors, providing cultural competence initiatives would be useful as they may retain better mental adjustment, which is essential for their social integration (Keles et al., 2018). Similarly, Seglem, Oppedal, and Roysamb (2014) state that the high level of acculturation hassles about family and the environment leads to depressive

symptoms; therefore, reducing their daily hassles would improve their life satisfaction and promote social integration. In examining the daily hassles of unaccompanied young refugees and their coping strategies, they argue that those who adopted a "disengagement coping strategy" to deal with their daily hassles experienced a lower level of life satisfaction and a more stressful life than those adopted an "engagement coping strategy" (Seglem et al., 2014). The daily hassles were related to unaccompanied young refugees' social relations with friends as the main stress domain, and those with a low level of life satisfaction and other depressive factors stemming from the disengagement coping strategy had the potential to interfere with their school transition and social networks (Seglem et al., 2014).

Furthermore, creating "protective factors" to enhance young refugee students' resilience to address their integration is another measure observed by Eide and Hjern (2013). Their protective factors entail adequate coping strategies and promoting psychosocial caring for unaccompanied minors in their environment; those involved in psychosocial work with unaccompanied adolescents should create a trustful relation and enhance their understanding of unaccompanied minors in dealing with their psychosocial issues (Eide & Hjern, 2013). However, their protective factors do not seem to be adequately defined and only address psychosocial caring for refugee minors as part of their cognitive development. They also touch upon school group dynamics and their effects on unaccompanied young refugees. However, they do not adequately address how a safe school environment where unaccompanied children and youth feel school satisfaction and achieve academic success could be promoted. Further, their focus is mainly on unaccompanied minors under 18 who arrive in their host countries without their parents. Other researchers like Pacione, Measham, and Rousseau (2013) propose even more inclusive integration interventions such as linguistic, cultural, and psychological services to improve their resilience and cognitive development. Although these studies provide an in-depth insight into various integration processes undertaken by the relevant governments and practitioners, they nevertheless lack a focus on refugees' viewpoints, which form the core focus of the present thesis.

The needs and concerns of unaccompanied young refugees are complex, and several factors affect them in their integration. For instance, Bronfenbrenner (1986) introduces several systems as part of human development ecology and their influences on adolescents as they function and adapt to their immediate environment. To understand how children and adolescents develop in their environment, he introduces five systems and their impact on adolescents' growth. The first system is Microsystem, which is the closest natural setting for

adolescents and directly affects them in their everyday life situations; they may include home, school, kindergarten, and neighborhood, among other things, and interactions in such settings are bidirectional and have a direct bearing on how they function in a particular setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The second system he introduces is Mesosystem, denoting the relationships and interactions among the various settings such as family and school within the Microsystem and their indirect impact on the adolescent (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The third system is Exosystem, which does not directly affect the individuals but indirectly influences them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The fourth is Macrosystem, which includes broader social and cultural contexts and how they affect the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Chronosystem views the individual's ecological development through their lifespan; for example, how transitions and shifts such as divorce affect a child over an extended period (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner's theories are interdependent as one layer affects the other, and their influences on different transitional phases of an individual are significant. It indicates how adolescents, not only in their young age but also in adulthood, are affected by their environment.

Despite being a dynamic and resilient population that adapts to the host culture by participating in various activities (Lidén, Stang & Eide, 2017), young refugees are also vulnerable to adversities (Pastoor, 2013; Thommessen & Todd, 2018; UNHCR, 2019). For instance, findings of other scholars such as De Haymes, Avrushin, and Coleman (2018) and Omland and Andenas (2018) also indicate that many young refugees are preoccupied with their families in their countries of origin, and such preoccupations are often associated with the plight of their parents as they struggle to survive economically. Also, Spiteri (2015) narrates that separation from family and having to fend for themselves specifically make their school adjustment difficult. According to Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) and Pastoor (2013), such events can expose refugees to vulnerability as they struggle to integrate into unfamiliar environments, such as the Norwegian education system, in my study's target groups. However, what begs the question here is how schools cope with such integrative programs, and to what extent unaccompanied young refugees run into challenges as they struggle to adapt to the school environment is not comprehensively dealt with in the reviewed literature.

2.2.1 Integration Trends in Europe

Integration policies within Europe have also undergone many variations over the past decades. By basing their data on the European Social Survey (ESS) between 2002 and 2007 in 17 European countries, Meuleman, Davidov, and Billiet (2009) argue that Scandinavian

countries seem to have more lenient and welcoming policies toward immigrants, while countries like Hungary, Austria, Portugal and Poland were found as being least friendly toward immigrants in Europe. Similarly, a study conducted by Plener, Groschwitz, Brähler, Sukale, and Fegert (2017) in Germany shows that most of their participants favored the deportation of unaccompanied young minors, which they believe can stem from Islamophobia and negative public attitudes of the broader society. Furthermore, Valentine, Sporton, and Nielsen (2009) conducted a comparative study in the UK and Denmark, mainly focusing on Somali refugees in Aarhus and Sheffield. They found that while refugees living in Aarhus were not fully integrated despite having adapted to local secular norms, and there were instances of prejudice and discrimination in the community, Sheffield-based Somali refugees experienced less prejudice, which could have been due to the less strict nature of immigration policies (Valentine et al., 2009).

In the Scandinavian context, Larsen (2011) argues that the Danish and the Scandinavian integration policies are characterized by their interventionist traits as they tend to intervene in their citizens' domestic affairs and private lives. Additionally, Olwig (2011) observes that the integration policies are often designed in light of the Scandinavian welfare system principles, often ignoring refugees' specific needs and potential expertise.

As one of the refugee receiving countries in Europe, Norway's integration policy has been relatively different about the immigration population. Former policies were somewhat declined to favor some refugees over the others, given their professional skills, particularly during the "oil crisis" that caused economic stagnation in the 1970s (Aalberg, Iyengar & Messing 2012, p. 100). However, Hagelund (2005) claims that the new wave of refugees started later than many other European countries in Norway but has had similar results with other European nations in the integration process resulted in more comprehensive and inclusive policy formulation. Furthermore, Pastoor (2013) asserts that the influx of refugees and immigrants into Norwegian society during the last decades has contributed to a diverse society, both culturally and ethnically. This augmentation prompted immigration authorities to focus on refugee integration by adopting appropriate policies to integrate them into society (Hagelund, 2010).

With this in mind, Hagelund (2005) recognizes the Norwegian government's efforts to address refugee integration, including in the school environment, by expanding previous integration policies. Nevertheless, Pastoor (2017) argues that paving the way for successful

integration and how to relate to the refugee youth in Norwegian schools have become a significant challenge. She demonstrates that educational authorities, both at national and local levels, appear incognizant of the specific needs and concerns of refugee students, and the ambivalence in the school system has impacted how teachers deal with refugee groups (Pastoor, 2015).

Arguably, the complexity of adapting to the diverse needs and concerns of the refugee influx might have resulted in the formulation of a more robust integration policy. However, how such integration policies address the complex needs and concerns of unaccompanied young refugees, particularly in the school context, is an area of interest to explore. For example, some scholars claim that the Norwegian integration policy does not encompass an interdisciplinary approach to address all integration aspects. To give an illustration, Engebrigtsen (2003) claims that many young asylum seekers do not benefit from the same comprehensive assessment policy as native children since the immigration officers often do not take the "best interests" of young refugees. For example, many immigration officers are lawyers and are versed in interpreting legal texts; their decisions are often based on judicial and political criteria and do not necessarily consider other dimensions like psychological and cultural aspects of young refugees (Engebrigtsen, 2003, p. 192). Given this, it is worth noting that cultural and linguistic aspects constitute an essential component of integration at school and the mainstream society and may provide a springboard for future career development.

2.2.2 School as a Setting for Integration

School as a setting for integration is one of the main areas of young adults' integration, widely reflected in the literature. School plays an instrumental role in the lives of refugees and young adults as they integrate into the society, both as a setting for psychological development and for building social networks (Fazel, 2015; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Pastoor, 2013; Schachner, Juang, Moffitt & van de Vijver, 2018; Seker & Sirkeci, 2015; Skovdal & Campbell, 2015; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016; Thommessen & Todd, 2018). A safe school environment may also lead to improved self-esteem and contribute to young refugees' scholastic achievements (Oxman-Martinez & Choi, 2014). According to Pastoor (2013), it may also strengthen their opportunities to tackle their new lives to become active participants in the host society.

However, despite their significant role in strengthening young refugees' academic performance, bolstering their opportunities, and facilitating their integration into the host

society, some schools often face significant challenges. On the one hand, schools often lack collaboration and support from relevant professionals and community organizations to collectively address students' developmental and psychological needs (Pastoor, 2015; Skovdal & Campbell, 2015). On the other hand, many schools do not have the required resources and teaching experiences to address refugee students' cultural and linguistic needs (De Haymes et al., 2018; Hughes & Beirens, 2007; Whiteman, 2005). This fact suggests that schools may face specific challenges if appropriate support is not extended by relevant local professionals such as health organizations and local government when dealing with school integration of young refugees. Furthermore, several scholars have underlined the importance of active interaction between refugee students and school staff as potential discrepancies may cause misunderstanding in classroom contexts. According to Pastoor (2015) and Thommessen and Todd (2018), some young refugees either prefer to withhold personal stories, or they do not find someone interested in their stories.

It could be argued that the adaptation of schools to the diverse needs of unaccompanied young refugees and the construction of a platform in which young refugees interact with their teachers and school staff is essential. As described, many unaccompanied young refugees have a longing to be heard in the classroom context for various reasons. For instance, Dávila (2017) asserts that young refugees are often placed in isolated intensive courses upon arrival before enrolling in mainstream classrooms. Although mainstream classrooms are an essential part of social integration as they interact with other students, they can also cause stress and anxiety as the new arrivals do not often have a basic understanding of the local language in their host country (Naidoo, 2009).

A handful of literature also focused on voluntary organizations and school counselors' role in integrating young refugees into the school environment and how a lack of financial resources may affect school persistence. Gateley (2015) illustrates that financial cuts to the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES), which provided advocacy and support for refugees in the UK, have dramatically affected its performance to deliver integration services. In the meantime, Crawford and Valle (2016) explored the role of school counselors in promoting school attendance of undocumented students in Texas school districts and argue that counselors serve as "institutional agents" as they encourage young refugees to pursue school by advocacy and fund-raising.

Challenges of school integration are also observed by Kanu (2008) in her research in the Canadian province of Manitoba. She finds psychological, economic, social, academic, and linguistic challenges to be the main barriers of African refugee students in school, which have affected their ability in the school environment (Kanu, 2008). Additionally, many scholars stated that a lack of refugee students' language proficiency in their host country was a specific barrier to their integration in the school environment and the mainstream society (De Haymes et al., 2018; Seker & Sirkeci, 2015; Thommessen & Todd, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to understand what challenges unaccompanied young refugees face as they integrate into the Norwegian school environment.

School can play a supplementary role in school adjustment and broader societal integration for young refugees. Borsch, Skovdal, and Jervelund (2019) recognize schools' critical role in facilitating a broader societal integration in the Danish context. However, Pastoor (2017) vouches for a holistic integration approach in schools and other learning contexts. In the absence of a clear educational policy, Bezemer, Wold, Pastoor, Kroon, and Ryen (2005) believe that teachers may often struggle to adapt to refugees' diverse needs and may encounter challenges as they facilitate the school integration of young refugees.

An open school environment might lead to better academic performance, as alluded to by many scholars. Research acknowledges that there is a correlation between school belonging and a high level of resilience and life satisfaction among refugee students; those who felt that their school openly accepted them had a lower level of depression beyond other support mechanisms (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Venta et al., 2019). In this thesis, I explore how school integration challenges are navigated in the context of a municipality in Southern Norway.

2.3 Theoretical Concepts and Perspectives

Reviewing the literature, I identified some theoretical perspectives and areas relevant to my research problem. In analyzing the empirical data, some of the relevant perspectives and literature would be used. However, it is worth mentioning that as this is a qualitative study, its findings guide the study's direction for the most part.

2.3.1 Social Capital

Social network plays a pivotal role in supporting refugees' integration both in school and the broader society. Schuff (2019) emphasizes the significant role of social networks in

supporting young refugees as they provide them with necessary assistance in different contexts, including culture, in their transition processes. The importance of building networks and making friends, as described by Pastoor (2013), is significant in enhancing the psychological adaptation of young refugees to their host societies. According to Berry (1997), adaptation refers to changes that occur as individuals or groups respond to environmental demands that exist around them.

Social capital is therefore a key theoretical perspective in my later analysis of the empirical data. It refers to resources among the members of a social network whose members are supported by mutual recognition, and the resources can be either actual or potential (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). He further argues that people build social networks by their individual or collective investments to improve and promote social relationships to achieve their aims in specific circumstances (Bourdieu, 1986). He also introduces the cultural capital theory, which we use to navigate our social world and status in relation to others in society (Bourdieu, 1986). He divides cultural capital into three forms – *embodied*, *objectified*, and *institutionalized* (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). The embodied cultural capital is directly linked to the body, like the intrinsic skills and knowledge the individual brings with (Bourdieu, 1986). While objectified cultural capital refers to materials such as properties that indicate our social class, institutionalized cultural capital denotes academic qualifications one acquires, which places them in a relatively higher social position than others (Bourdieu, 1986).

Speaking of social capital and networks and their roles in the school context, they can exist both in school and beyond, often playing an essential role as refugee students strike up friendships and build networks. However, it could be argued that the type of social capital a member of the society or a school student needs may differ depending on the resource availability. Scholars have elaborated on the types of social networks and social capital. For instance, Putnam (2000) differentiates between two types of social capital, i.e., *bonding capital* and *bridging capital*. While bonding capital refers to relationships among members of similar groups such as family and ethnicity that people rely on to get support, bridging capital refers to heterogeneous groups (Putnam, 2000).

Despite its significant role in providing the necessary conditions for refugees' integration in the school environment and the broader society, some scholars have also discussed downsides associated with social capital, particularly in terms of labor integration. For

instance, Lin (2000) illustrates that inequality occurs when specific group clusters associate with other social groups with similar socioeconomic characteristics, and it creates a gap among them. However, despite its potential drawbacks, it would be argued that the significant role social networks play in integration processes cannot be overlooked. Family, cultural, and voluntary organizations play a central role and are integral to refugees' integration (Pastoor, 2017; Thommessen & Todd, 2018). In their study in the New Zealand context, Elliott and Yusuf (2014) found that the Somali community had bonding and bridging social capitals as they had social networks both within their homogenous groups and beyond. However, building broader social capital may hinge on different factors, such as adequate cultural knowledge. As Thommessen and Todd (2018) discussed, the mainstream society did not have adequate knowledge of some refugees, and such a lack of understanding led to the fact that many built networks with people from their native background. Keles et al. (2018) also demonstrate that unaccompanied young refugees' lack of language competence and a limited number of contacts with the mainstream Norwegian society led to integration problems. Moreover, Fangen (2006) analyzed some Somali refugees' experiences in Norway and found that a lack of language proficiency and cultural knowledge of the mainstream society caused humiliation for the Somalis in their public and private lives, limiting their chances of building social capital. Arguably, it indicates how a lack of cultural understanding causes challenges in building social capital, particularly the bridging social capital, as Putnam (2000) calls it.

In a similar study, Fazel (2015) reiterates the importance of peer interaction and social recognition as they bolster young refugees' confidence in their transition processes. She contends that social recognition granted by peers in the school context gave young refugees the courage to make more friends, study harder, and better integrate into the host society (Fazel, 2015). Similarly, in a qualitative case study of a folk high school in Denmark, Borsch et al. (2019) argue that many refugees who lived collectively with the Danes in the school were better integrated because it helped the Danes to change their prejudiced attitudes toward refugees as they lived together and understood each other in a more nuanced manner. Therefore, I consider it essential that a welcoming posture, such as social recognition and a more in-depth understanding of the refugee population, would often remain a prerequisite for building social capital.

As Fazel (2015) observed, many young refugees often desire to be accepted by their peer groups and by the broader society and attempt to integrate into their host countries. However,

surprisingly, they also tend to adopt various other coping strategies as part of their integration. According to research, many young refugees found solace in religion as it played a central role as a coping strategy that instilled meaning into their everyday lives (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Spiteri, 2015). However, religion is not the only coping strategy. Many studies show that refugees find different ways of integrating themselves into their societies, for example, by maintaining continuity and positive outlook, suppressing their emotions, and using perceived prejudices and stereotypes as "motivators" to achieve their goals (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Spiteri, 2015; Thommessen & Todd, 2018).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed some of the relevant literature, concepts, and perspectives in integration, including the school integration of unaccompanied young adults. The literature review focused on general integration trends and school as a setting for integration. Additionally, the chapter discussed some theoretical perspectives and concepts such as social capital, identified by reviewing the relevant literature.

The core discussions centered on the importance of refugee and immigrant integration and their effectiveness at school and beyond. Although much of the literature discussed various integration approaches pinpointing the areas that are refugee specific in host countries, there is little literature among the reviewed ones that discussed school integration of unaccompanied young refugees in this specific geographical context this study aims to focus on. The lack of cultural understanding between some host countries and their respective refugee communities that often lead to poor integration is also discussed. Further, poor communication and discourse in the school context that can cause misunderstanding was also indicated in the reviewed literature.

Above all, it could be argued that although integration strategies spearheaded by respective government and practitioners to address school integration of young refugees cover many areas, they nevertheless lack a focus on how *unaccompanied* young refugees, particularly in this specific geographical context, perceive their everyday schooling, to what extent their *own* perspectives are taken into account and what challenges they face.

As a result, the present study explores their school integration and focuses on unaccompanied young refugees' *own* perspectives and viewpoints to understand the potential barriers that may hinder them from regularly attending school. The student researcher hopes that a closer

look at their experiences and dispositions would pave the way for a deeper understanding of their situation.

In the next chapter (Chapter Three), I discuss some of the common methodological choices I applied to conduct this study and their justifications for using them.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological choices employed in the study and justifies their application in the execution of the project. The chapter includes research methods, research strategies, research design, and their relevance to the research project. Moreover, epistemological and ontological considerations, sampling, data collection, data analysis methods, ethical considerations, the student researcher's role, and limitations are illustrated and justified. The conclusion summarizes the discussions of the chapter.

3.2 Research Method

I employed a *qualitative* method to explore the factors that hinder the school integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the Norwegian schools in a southern municipality. Qualitative research focuses on words rather than numbers in collecting and analyzing data and is broadly constructionist and interpretivist (Bryman, 2016, p. 374). Polkinghorne (2005) also argues that the primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe characteristics, understand patterns, and the lived experiences of social phenomena gathered from extensive exploration with participants (p. 137). Therefore, this method was more appropriate for my research since I interviewed unaccompanied young refugees to understand their problems and challenges in their school integration as they tackled their everyday situations in their respective schools. By employing this research method, I assessed how the unaccompanied young refugees perceived their social world and explored their viewpoints and dispositions from their *own* perspectives.

Although the research was based on pre-existing perspectives as outlined in the literature review (see Chapter Two) to some extent, it was predominantly based on a bottom-up approach to explore the everyday situations of young refugees and understand their lay perceptions. Blaikie (2010) states that qualitative research describes social relationships and situations, particularly the meanings people give to their everyday activities. Therefore, I believe that conducting personal interviews with my target groups and exploring their everyday interactions in their school context paved the way for a broader understanding of their situations. Most importantly, its flexibility, such as going back and forth and not necessarily basing my data on any pre-existing theories, made it more suitable for me to employ this method. O'Reilly (2012) opines that new theories unfold as the researcher

embarks on a qualitative study, making it difficult to base the research findings on concrete, existing theories and concepts.

3.3 Research Strategies

The research strategy is predominantly *inductive*; however, it also entails *deductions* as I reviewed relevant literature in my research field. Bryman (2016) contends that a deductive approach is based on pre-existing theories and concepts, and researchers test hypotheses by basing their theories on their empirical findings. In contrast, an inductive approach is based on empirical findings and observations that lead to theory as the result of data analysis (Bryman, 2016). Hyde (2000) also recognizes the distinction between deductive and inductive reasoning as the former is combined with a quantitative research method and used to test a theory, and the latter is associated with qualitative inquiry and applied to build theory (p. 82). While an inductive research strategy focuses on descriptions of patterns and characteristics and then relates the findings to research questions, a deductive approach is used to test theories by matching them with data explanation to corroborate or reject the tested theories (Blaikie, 2010). Although deductions are included in the study as I reviewed pertinent existing literature and discovered relevant perspectives to be used in the study, this research is predominantly based on an inductive approach. The research questions were developed using a deductive approach; that is, I reviewed some earlier literature in my research field and discovered relevant perspectives to use in my empirical findings. Despite this, the study is based on an inductive strategy as the findings determined the study's direction. Bryman (2016) argues that although the deductive approach appears to be linear in a logical sequence, it does not always apply as the researcher's view of the literature or theories may vary during the data analysis (p. 22). Hyde (2000) also argues that qualitative and quantitative researchers do not always consider this distinction, as both processes are required in research.

Therefore, the study outcomes were given priority over the actual theoretical perspectives discovered during the literature review and do not necessarily support or reject them. They are only used to the extent appropriate and relevant, and the empirical data are given more emphasis than the perspectives as they are the participants' "personal feelings." That is to say; I emphasized the importance of findings as they were fresh perspectives and had the potential to contribute to new knowledge. By using an inductive research strategy, I aimed to minimize restrictions and avoid preconceptions. Therefore, while I applied two research

processes, namely inductive and deductive, in the study, the findings are not predominantly correlated with the deductions reviewed in the literature. In other words, the study was inspired by a rather deductive approach as I undertook a literature review and discovered pertinent perspectives therein and developed through induction.

3.4 Research Design

According to Bryman (2016, p. 40), research designs provide a framework for data collection and analysis and guides the research process by providing a structure for its implementation. Although there are many types of research designs depending on the type of research method one chooses, I used a *case study* research design in this research project. This research design explores a specific case comprehensively, be it a person, community, or organization (Bryman, 2016). As described earlier in the chapter, my research method was qualitative, and therefore, adopting a case study was more appropriate to my study. Bryman (2016) also concedes that case studies are more appropriate with a qualitative research method; they focus on an extensive exploration of social phenomena and the generation of detailed data from the social setting, as is the case in the qualitative research method. As I researched the school integration of unaccompanied young refugees in a single municipality in southern Norway and explored the factors that hindered their school integration, a case study research design was more suited. Using the case study was particularly useful when understanding their perceptions and viewpoints more thoroughly. Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 223) observes that researchers' proximity to social reality may lead to a nuanced understanding of the context.

3.5 Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

Epistemology and ontology are the paradigms that are used to construct knowledge. While an epistemological position concerns the question of what is an acceptable knowledge in a given discipline, an ontological position is concerned with the nature of social reality and whether they should be regarded as objective entities or should be regarded as social constructions that are built from the perceptions of social actors (Bryman, 2016, p. 28). In other words, Blaikie (2010) contends that an epistemological assumption is about what kinds of knowledge are possible, and how we can understand them; an ontological position is concerned with the existence of social phenomena and their interrelations (p. 92). Each of the paradigms is associated with certain doctrines used differently, given their epistemological and ontological positions. For example, Bryman (2016) notes that positivism is closely related to the natural sciences from an epistemological perspective; the knowledge is

confirmed by human senses and is concerned with generating hypotheses that can be tested. However, interpretivism contrasts with positivism from an epistemological perspective, and it aims to view the world from a subjective point of view (Bryman, 2016, p. 26). From an ontological perspective, Bryman (2016) divides the paradigm into two domains – objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism denotes that social phenomena have external existence and are beyond our influence; they exist separately and are not related to social actors (Bryman, 2016). However, constructionism is concerned with the notion that social phenomena are in a constant change, and researchers present their understanding of the social world based on their observations from the social reality and, therefore, not regarded as definitive (Bryman, 2016, p. 29).

Given the explanations above, I used *interpretivism* and *constructionism* in terms of epistemology and ontology, respectively. By using interpretivism, my aim was to look at social phenomena from a subjective perspective while also avoiding preconceived notions in my data analysis. For instance, Blaikie (2010) posits that inhabitants construct social reality in a given society, and their world is interpreted as they engage with their everyday activities. My aim for using constructionism was to consider social phenomena from a more in-depth perspective and arrive at a conclusion from a holistic perspective. As stated, using constructionism allowed me to interpret social patterns and to construct an understanding of young refugees' perceptions in terms of their school integration. These two epistemological and ontological assumptions are also closely related to my research method (qualitative) and research strategy (inductive). Given the nature of the research method and strategy, it was imperative to adopt these positions in the research project.

3.6 Data Material and Sampling Methods

Considering my research objective, which was to explore the factors that hinder the school integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the Norwegian schools in a southern municipality, I used a mixture of *purposive* and *snowball* sampling methods. Both methods are non-probability sampling approaches and are commonly used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016, p. 408). Purposive sampling is used to identify participants with reference to the research questions, which indicate what units (organizations and people) need to be chosen as respondents as they are most relevant to the research questions; the researcher prefers to have a variety of insights from the sample that could best suit the research questions (Bryman, 2016). In a snowball sampling approach, however, the researcher samples a limited number of participants who are most relevant to the research questions;

they will further propose other participants relevant to the research and have had similar experiences and characteristics (Bryman, 2016, p. 415).

I collected data from 19 participants who came from three main categories of respondents. They included unaccompanied young refugees, attending schools in a southern municipality, schoolteachers predominantly involved in teaching young refugees, and one municipality official. Unaccompanied young refugee students constituted the primary cohort of the study. The inclusion criteria were only young refugees who have had a residence permit, arrived in Norway unaccompanied, and currently between 19 and 30 years old. A total of 15 refugees were interviewed and included in the study to explore possible challenges as they navigated schooling in the host municipality. The unaccompanied young refugees attended four schools that included both *grunnskole* – the compulsory primary and lower secondary school and *videregående skole* – the upper secondary school in the host municipality and received different school subjects. (See Chapter One for more details of the school system in Norway.) Some young refugees were in the last stages of school year waiting to start apprenticeships or higher education at universities. The refugee participants were from a variety of countries such as Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Kurdistan (Syria) whom all came as unaccompanied (without their parents or other primary caregivers) and except three refugees, they all had come as minors (under 18 years age) to Norway. However, as stated, they all were over 18 years old at the time of interviewing, and the length of their stay in Norway ranged roughly from two to seven years. Concerning gender, only one unaccompanied young female refugee participated in the interview. It may be uncommon for young female refugees to leave their home countries unaccompanied. Additionally, researchers argue that unaccompanied girls and young women are not extensively researched as boys are often overrepresented in research processes (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020). They further state that unaccompanied young refugee girls' needs may be greater than those of the boys in their adaptation transitions, and may need additional support from female caregivers or substitute parents during their resettlement processes (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020).

Schoolteachers were the second target group of the study as they taught young refugees at school. Three teachers who were predominantly involved in the teaching of young refugees were interviewed. It was essential to include them in the study because they were indispensable for understanding young refugees' concerns and needs in the school setting. Furthermore, the local municipality was one of the study participants as I sought their

insights into the school integration of young refugees. Although two municipality officials were included as indicated in the initial research stage, since I found the person closest to my research questions, it was deemed unnecessary to approach the second participant to avoid any possible replications. I interviewed one public official from the municipality who closely worked with school integration. It was of paramount importance to include them as part of the local government as they were involved in the administration of diversity policies. In the research proposal, legal guardians of unaccompanied young refugees were also included as participants as they had caring responsibility when unaccompanied young refugees lived with them. However, they were excluded from the study because of their partial irrelevancy to my research questions. Given the purposive sampling approach, they were less pertinent to my study. Besides, legal guardians had nothing to do, for the most part, with unaccompanied young refugee students as many refugees resided separately from their former guardians after completing the legal age of being an adult. Bryman (2016) argues that changes occur in the sample size because of the qualitative nature of social research.

Given the flexibility of the sampling approaches stated above, they were more appropriate to my research as I adopted a qualitative research method. By purposive sampling approach, I focused only on the integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the Norwegian schools in a specific municipality, and no other groups or cohorts of refugees were included as respondents of the research. The snowball sampling technique was particularly useful in reaching the wider refugee community. Although some schoolteachers acted as gatekeepers and facilitated contacts with unaccompanied young refugee students in their schools, I had to rely on the snowball method, for the most part, as a way to reach other young refugees. I requested my participants to find other unaccompanied young refugees, and they were very helpful in finding others that they knew or were in the same classrooms. I also availed myself of some youth unions to reach unaccompanied young refugees, and they were also good intermediaries.

3.7 Data Collection: Qualitative Interviews

My data collection tool was also *qualitative interviewing* to gain first-hand knowledge and more in-depth insight into unaccompanied young refugees' social world and understand their experiences as they navigate schooling in a southern municipality. According to Bryman (2016), interviews are common data collection methods in qualitative research as they are less structured than interviews in quantitative methods and create flexibility despite being

time-consuming because of transcription and data analysis. Bryman (2016) further contends that through qualitative interviewing, researchers want to understand interviewees' worldviews from their *own* perspectives and obtain detailed answers from their respondents. Also, Polkinghorne (2005) posits, "The most widely used approach to the production of qualitative data is interviews with participants" (p. 142). He further continues that the purpose of adopting an interview as a data collection tool is to gain a full account of the social world and describe and understand the human experiences in the study (Polkinghorne, 2005). According to Blaikie (2010), primary data are collected directly by the researcher who is responsible for the whole research process; they are elicited by using particular methods and as a result of direct contact with the source, the researcher has control over how to apply them into more theoretical context and analyze them by using their analytical capacity.

My interview type was only *semi-structured*. Bryman (2016) notes that in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a set of relatively specific questions that are tentatively included in an interview guide. The researcher can change the sequence of the questions and ask further questions depending on the significance of the answers they elicit from the interviewees; respondents also have a great deal of freedom to answer the questions they suit them best (Bryman, 2016, p. 468). I used three relatively different types of interview guides for my participants, given their three different categories. Although the contents were relatively the same to a great extent, they nevertheless varied as the interview guide for the local municipality official and schoolteachers was somewhat different from those of unaccompanied young refugee participants. During the interview, I would ask the tentative questions I had on my interview guide, and on rare occasions, I would also ask follow-up or supplementary questions depending on the narratives they would explain.

Semi-structured interviews proved to be useful during my interviews with unaccompanied young refugees. It gave them the leeway to answer the questions that they felt confident. Further, it gave me the freedom to ask further supplementary questions depending on the answers and insights I obtained. Although it was time-consuming to reach unaccompanied young refugees to make appointments, it provided them with the flexibility to answer my questions at their convenience. Using an interview guide is less specific in qualitative interviewing than in quantitative methods (Bryman, 2016, p. 467), I nevertheless, prepared an interview guide to track the sequence of my interview questions as I went along with each

interview. Despite being flexible and less specific, it was a useful tool to keep an overview of my interview questions.

The venue for the interviews included school premises, my residence, and on the phone. Initially, five unaccompanied young refugees were interviewed separately in an empty classroom facilitated by school staff and one in my residence. However, given the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the remaining interviews took place by phone. Although it is less common for qualitative researchers to conduct interviews on telephone despite its potential benefits such as reaching dispersed groups and reducing research costs (Bryman, 2016, p. 484), my situation was different for adopting telephone interviews as the conditions were not conducive to face-to-face interactions. The interviews were implemented between March and October 2020. All the data were audio-recorded by using an Olympus digital voice recorder and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. I altered some specific names such as schools and workplaces when I transcribed the interviews. The rationale behind doing this was to ensure that their schools or workplaces did not identify participants. I also ensured that altering such names did not influence the quality of data analysis as they were only some names that did not necessarily have any significant bearing on them. I only recorded their voices after having obtained their consent in writing. I distributed both written and oral consent and conducted the recording only after they agreed to participate in the interview. The recording is essential in many ways in qualitative research. For example, Bryman (2016) argues that qualitative researchers are more interested in a deeper understanding of their interviewees' social world, and having a complete account of what the interviewee has said facilitates more accurate data analysis.

3.8 Thematic Analysis

Following the completion of data collection through qualitative interviews, the next step was data analysis. As stated, all the interviews were recorded by a digital voice recorder, placed on the servers of the University of Agder, and then transcribed. The Code of practice from the University of Agder (n.d.) requires that all personal data be stored in Office 365 – OneDrive of the University of Agder to protect personal data. All the interviews were conducted in the Norwegian language as unaccompanied young refugees preferred, and I only translated those chunks of the data into English used in the citation. I speak the Norwegian language fluently, and the use of a translator was therefore not necessary. I used a *thematic analysis* approach because of its compatibility with the qualitative method I applied in the study. Braun and

Clarke (2006) assert that "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). They further opine that thematic analysis is a flexible research tool that involves a constant iteration of the entire data corpus and extracts from the relevant data set and codes; its theoretical freedom provides a rich and detailed account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I conducted qualitative research and adopted an inductive research strategy predominantly, employing thematic analysis was very useful as I had the freedom to explore patterns and themes within the data.

The central idea of thematic analysis is to find relevant themes within the data set, and what counts as a theme and how prevalent the themes should be across the data often has a bearing on researchers as they judge to determine what a potential theme should be in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Bryman (2016) writes that themes are the categories that analysts discover from their data set closely related to their research focus; themes stem from codes identified in the transcribed data and make the basis for understanding the data theoretically (p. 584). Although Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is not currently praised as an independent analytic method and is rarely acknowledged despite its widespread application among researchers, using the method provided me with a good analytical base as I went along with the data analysis. I followed the six steps Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) introduce in thematic analysis; they include data familiarization, generation of initial codes, searching for potential themes, reviewing themes, defining and giving appropriate names to themes, and writing up the report.

I familiarized myself with the entire data corpus by continually reading all the interview transcripts. I immersed myself in the data and scrutinized them until I was able to identify patterns. I was also meticulous in transcribing the interviews, which helped me comprehend subtle nuances in the interview transcripts. The second step involved identifying codes from the transcriptions and highlighting appropriate sentences/phrases that supported them. All the initial coding occurred in the same file I had transcribed the interviews. This way, I could smoothly go back and forth in the entire data corpus. After I generated all the possible codes, I also copied them to a separate Excel spreadsheet with their pertinent supporting extracts in Office 365 of the university. I picked up as many codes as possible, hoping that they would make up potential themes as I processed the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the third phase, I started searching for potential themes by keeping in mind the aim of my study – the factors that hinder the school integration of unaccompanied young refugees into

Norwegian schools. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that this phase (phase 3) only begins after all the data have been coded and collated, which makes a long list of various codes the analyst identified across the data set (p. 89). They further argue that here the analyst finds relationships between codes, subthemes, and overarching themes. In this phase, I was able to identify several themes (subthemes and main themes) by going through the initial codes. The main themes include Separation from Family, Work, and its Partial Impact on School, Language Difficulty, Social Network in the School Context, and School as a Promoter of Integration. They are further described in chapter four and discussed in chapter five. As Braun and Clarke (2006) state, some of the codes did not belong anywhere, and I had to keep them for possible later use. The procedure to generate themes was based on their prevalence in the data corpus and how pertinent they were to my research focus, as emphasized by Bryman (2016). In phase four, which is theme reviewing, I had to meticulously think about the candidate themes if they really could be used as themes. I had a considerable number of themes at this point. Braun and Clarke (2006) touch upon two distinctive reviewing and refining themes at this stage; one involves reviewing the coded data extracts, and the other applies to the entire data set. Therefore, I had to consider the data holistically, whether they represent and constitute the overall research focus.

In phase five, I had to define and refine themes by giving them appropriate names to ensure that they are representative of the entire data corpus. Although a handful of subthemes emerged, I had to merge some of them with the main themes to make them more convincing and use the others. Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that subthemes are useful and give organization and structure to central themes, specifically if they are complex. At this stage, I determined whether the themes were comprehensive enough to use, or they need more structure and coherence. An appropriate way to ensure whether the themes are comprehensive is to define their content in a couple of sentences; if they are not definable, additional refinement is required (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). The themes seemed relatively cogent and could be used as themes in the research. The last phase (phase 6) was writing up the report, which involved going through the whole data corpus to ensure that all the significant ideas were collected and used with sufficient details in the relevant themes to support them and that they cohered with the overall structure. It is important to note that the whole data processing and analysis took place in Office 365 – OneDrive of the University of Agder to respect and abide by personal data protection rules and regulations.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues constitute an integral part of social research and must be considered carefully in a research process. Bryman (2016) states that ethical issues are concerned with how researchers treat their research participants in terms of ethical values and considerations and whether certain activities should be avoided if they are likely to cause ethical issues. Likewise, Etikkom (2016) illustrates that researchers must take a wide range of responsibilities as they engage in social research; they must carefully respect values such as human dignity, privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent during the entire research process. As a student researcher, I followed research principles and abided by pertinent rules and regulations during the entire research process.

As my research involved collecting personal data, I applied to the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) to acquire their approval. According to the Code of practice from the University of Agder (n.d.), NSD is appointed by the university, and researchers collecting and processing personal data must notify them. As stated by the Code of practice from the University of Agder (n.d.), I waited until NSD approved the research proposal. After the research proposal was approved, I abided by the rules and regulations and filled in the relevant parts of the information letters to distribute them with consent forms to my prospective participants.

All the research participants were given information letters and informed consent forms as required by NSD. According to Etikkom (2016), informed consent means that the researcher has given enough information to their prospective participants about what it means to participate in a research project. Silverman (2014) also asserts that informed consent should not involve any pressure or coercion exerted by social researchers on their study subjects (p. 147). After the participants familiarized themselves with the scope, focus, and purpose of my study, which was an academic requirement for a master's thesis, I obtained the signed informed consent forms. The participants I interviewed personally returned the informed consent forms in person; however, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the remaining informed consent forms were sent and received by emails. In either case, participants gave their consent either by signing the form or replying to my email, clearly indicating that they agreed to participate in the interview. Bryman (2016) notes that the advantage of giving such forms to prospective research participants is that they get the opportunity to know more about the content and scope of a research project and the implications it may entail (p. 131). Besides the written notification and consent forms, I also

verbally explained the purpose of my research. Verbal explanations mainly focused on what will happen to their data and audio-recording, for example, after completing the study. Most importantly, I emphasized that their names, schools, and municipality will be anonymized.

O'Reilly (2012, p. 65) believes that many research participants do not fully understand the purpose of research despite explanation; children are particular participants who are easily convinced to agree to research projects as they view the researcher from an authoritative perspective. Although my target group of refugees was not children, I still acted tactfully and thoroughly explained the purpose of my study. The information letters and consent forms were distributed in the Norwegian language, and the returned consent forms were kept locked.

Unaccompanied young refugees encounter many challenges in their countries, and such challenges are often compounded by the arduous journeys they undertake to reach their final destinations. They are particularly vulnerable if they leave at a tender age. As many young refugees came as minors, I had to be extra careful about ethical principles not to awaken their harsh childhood experiences. Erikson (1967, p. 370) argues that social researchers oversimplify the implications of their research on the social setting and admits that the human mind is poorly capable of understanding the intricate and elusive complexities in such settings. Therefore, it was necessary to be meticulous about the process and proceed with the utmost caution.

The ethical pitfalls were other important issues as I had to consider during my interviews with young refugees. According to Silverman (2014), some of the ethical pitfalls include exploitation, deception, and research on vulnerable people. As stated, my refugee target group came from various countries and were heterogeneous from linguistic and cultural perspectives. At the same time, they were school students, and many did not possess a high level of academic understanding of research, which could have made them prone to vulnerability if I had not explained my research project adequately. Given the delicacy of the project, I was extra careful in approaching and explaining the research purpose. Some of them initially did not understand what it meant to participate in a research project. One participant particularly asked if my research had anything to do with the Norwegian authorities like the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). I assured this participant that it had nothing to do with the Norwegian Government as it was academic research to fulfill a study requirement. However, I explained my research purpose as explicitly as possible and using simple expressions until they understood it adequately. Silverman (2014)

argues that respondents should be given a comprehensive and non-technical account of the research project. It assured them and widened their understanding of the research project. I did not delve into their educational trajectories or private realm and did not instill any fear that could reveal their accounts to any other organization or government body. I was cautious enough to ask them questions during the interview, given the delicate ethical pitfalls in qualitative research.

Data anonymization was another critical aspect I considered across the data. I did my utmost to uphold the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity during the research process. Although it is common to use pseudonyms in research projects, I avoided using them as they have the potential to reveal and identify study subjects. I reiterated that their names, including their schools and municipality, would be anonymized. Further, I always asked them to contact me (I provided them with my contact details) if they wondered about anything, and also they could withdraw from the study any time they want without giving any reasons, as also emphasized by Etikkom (2016).

3.10 Limitations

This study encountered some limitations to access the unaccompanied young refugees to conduct interviews. The limitation was mainly caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in temporary school closure where unaccompanied young refugees attended. My approach to reaching them was, for the most part, through their respective schools by contacting their teachers and making appointments to visit them before the interview to explain the research project. Although I interviewed five young refugees in person when schools were not closed, the remaining interviews took more than expected as I had to find young refugees outside of schools. During this period, I mostly relied on friends and acquaintances to introduce unaccompanied young refugees. It was a time-consuming and challenging process, and while some of them were busy and never called me back, others did not find anybody for the interview. Therefore, I had to wait until I found other intermediaries and gatekeepers who could help me identify unaccompanied young refugees. Although the intermediaries and gatekeepers introduced candidates for the interview, they were all not ready as some did not fit into my research questions or were possibly reluctant to participate in the research. One young refugee was particularly skeptical and refused to participate despite receiving an information letter and informed consent form. If there were face-to-face interviews with the unaccompanied young refugees throughout the interview process, this shortcoming could not have occurred, and I could have had the opportunity to find more

respondents. It could also have allowed the unaccompanied young refugees to know me in person and put them at ease. The limitation encountered in this study led only to the extension of the thesis submission deadline, not necessarily had any implications on the empirical findings or the data analysis. I went with the flow until I found participants, and the interviews were also conducted at their convenience, which took longer than initially planned. I was still able to interview the targeted number of young refugees over an extended period.

It might be prudent to secure accessibility as early as possible and perhaps have alternative approaches to deal with unexpected events to ensure that respondents are prepared to participate in future research. It is particularly important if target groups are special categories like the unaccompanied young refugees. Although unaccompanied young refugees in this study were all adults (over 18 years old), their solitary departure from home countries at a tender age makes them special, thus demanding careful attention when including in research.

This study also focused on a smaller number of informants, which could be considered a limitation as it did not reflect the views and perceptions of a bigger number of participants. Given the relatively short period, coupled with the inaccessibility of reaching informants, it was challenging to increase participants to explore a wide range of ideas and perceptions. Because of the limited number of interviewees and this study's nature, its findings can only be generalized to a lesser extent. It may be essential to include larger samples, including unaccompanied young refugee girl students, in future research. It would help to grasp a more comprehensive understanding of their school integration challenges.

3.11 My Role as a Student Researcher

In conducting the whole research project, I presented myself as a student researcher, explaining everything related to my study. Because of my Afghan background, I felt that it was easier to reach some unaccompanied young Afghan refugee students than others. Nevertheless, the difference was not huge, and I do not feel that accessing one particular refugee type was overwhelmingly difficult than others. As indicated previously, I had difficulty in reaching almost everyone, particularly after the school closure. My gender did not play any significant role, as I had only one female participating refugee student. We had relaxed interviews and are conducted in a friendly manner.

As indicated in the Introduction, I have worked for the United Nations for about a decade, mainly in political, civil, and humanitarian areas, which provided me with knowledge and experience in these fields. My work experience with refugees and immigrants in Norway also gave me a nuanced perspective on refugee and immigration dynamics. Nevertheless, I tried my best to avoid any possible prior assumptions and biases in analyzing and discussing the empirical materials.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter presented some of the common methodological choices I applied to conduct this thesis project and their justification for using them. Some of the main issues I discussed in the methodology included the research method, research strategy, and research design. The chapter also focused on epistemological and ontological considerations, sampling methods, data collection, data analysis, ethical consideration, encountered limitations, and the student researcher's role. In the subsequent chapter (Chapter Four), I present empirical findings collected through qualitative interviewing.

Chapter 4 Empirical Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter narrates the challenges unaccompanied young refugee students faced during their school integration and describes their concerns and expectations relating to school adaptation in a southern Norwegian municipality. Further, the chapter focuses on describing the role of schools in promoting and facilitating integration.

I developed three research questions to conduct the study: What are the factors that hinder the integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the Norwegian schools? What are the concerns and expectations of unaccompanied young refugees with regard to school integration? What role do schools play in the facilitation of integration of unaccompanied young refugees into the school environment?

In analyzing the interview data through thematic analysis, the following five main themes emerged: Separation from Family, Work and its Partial Impact on School, Language Difficulty, Social Network in the School Context, and School as a Promoter of Integration. I further divided them into smaller themes.

4.2 Separation from Family

All the refugee students I interviewed in the study were unaccompanied. It was difficult for many to manage independently, and living away from their families was one of their main concerns as they navigated schooling in Norway. Many refugee students stated that they were concerned with their families who still lived in their home countries. The loneliness often affected their everyday education as they functioned in the school environment.

> I cannot concentrate on my school because I am often preoccupied with my family in Syria. I cannot decide what I will study in the upper secondary school, and if I cannot bring my family here [Norway], then I will go back to them because they will be old. Then who will take care of them? Of course, it is me. I had two brothers, both of them died. (A male Syrian refugee student)

Other refugees also voiced concerns about their families, who lived away from them. "Perhaps you know that my family still lives in Syria, and there is still war. And I think about my family – my parents. My only concern is my family" (a male Syrian refugee student).

According to one of the female schoolteachers, the absence of their family affected the refugee students immensely. Their concerns and preoccupation were huge distractions for them. She noted that the problems had left no space for some of them to learn.

Another refugee participant also mentioned sleeping difficulties because he was obsessed with his family. He noted, "I cannot often sleep at night and oversleep in the morning. Even when I go to school, I have no concentration on the school assignment because I am obsessed with my family" (a male Kurdish refugee student from Syria). Another refugee student also stated that he was too obsessive about his family even though his parents had passed away. "I do not have mother or father; they both died. I think about them, and I have intrusive thoughts coming to my mind" (a male Afghan refugee student).

When I asked another refugee student about his concerns, he expressed the following:

> My family was a huge concern for me; because I am the only son of my parents. When my family lived in Syria, I had big psychological problems because I thought very much about them. I was very preoccupied that I could have almost committed suicide once. (A Kurdish refugee student from Syria)

However, some refugees could bring their families to Norway, which reportedly helped them ease their anxiety, believing that their parents were no longer living in the war zone. A male Syrian refugee noted this: "As of now, I do not have any concerns because I have my sibling here in the municipality. However, my parents left Syria for Turkey one month ago, and I expect them to reunite soon." This refugee student further added that he still had two sisters in Syria, where there is war. He reiterated that he was happy because he had at least some of his family members closer to him.

Avoiding school and staying at home was also raised as a challenge by some schoolteachers during the interview. They attributed it to their separation from family and the preoccupation that stemmed from their absence. "… the school becomes challenging for some [student refugees], and they often skip it; many are apathetic that they often cannot manage: too much shirking ..." (a female schoolteacher). Likewise, several other refugee students stated that waking up early in the morning and going to school was a big challenge. Some preferred to

stay at home the whole day and sent messages to their teachers that they would not come to school that particular day because they were not in a good mood. A male Syrian refugee stated, "Last week, I did not come to school three days; I was not sick, I had nothing to do, and even I woke up at 7 o'clock, but I suddenly got negative thoughts and did not come to school." This refugee student illustrated that he liked the school when he had first come to Norway as a minor. However, he began hating it as time passed because he was obsessed with his family, preventing him from focusing on his schoolwork.

> When I was under 18, I lived in a reception center with many other people. Some employees spoke with us, cooked for us, helped with our homework, and drove us around. I was new, and it was pleasant to live that way. However, when I became 18 years old, I moved to live alone. So things started to worsen. (A male Syrian refugee student)

The male schoolteacher also stated that many unaccompanied young refugees did not have someone to receive support from, for example, for their homework, especially after living independently. Another schoolteacher also pointed out that many refugee students suffered from the absence of close adults after abandoning their guardians upon completing the legal age of being an adult. She noted, "… some do not have close adults who would help them with their homework, regulations and leisure" (a female schoolteacher). Another refugee student also mentioned the absence of family as a challenge as he struggled to do the household chores and cooking while also trying to keep up with school. "Since I do not have [my] family here, I have to cook for myself both before and after school, which makes it difficult to concentrate on education" (a male Kurdish refugee student from Syria). The absence of family has also affected how young refugees received support for their homework and other daily activities. A refugee student explained how annoyed he was when he would receive an offer for help. "I am tired of hearing people help me because they tell me that they only help me because I do not have my family. I do not want to hear that, and I just decline it" (a male Syrian refugee student).

The absence of family has also affected how some young refugees built social networks with their peer groups in their immediate environment. It was often an issue when they cooked food and had parties together. "Many invite me to their houses to eat together, but I say no

because if I go, I should also invite them to [my place] and cook. This, I cannot; I can only cook an egg" (a male Syrian refugee student). Others also expressed that their friends looked down on them because they did not have a family in Norway, and this has often led to the fact that they had to cut ties with some of their peer groups outside the school. According to them, living without family was viewed as a weak life that deserved help until they could independently manage their lives.

> I do not feel like hanging around with folk. I will not be friends with some of them. As I think, they smile at me because I do not have a family. I do not want this. They should only be friends with me as I am; they should not be friends because I do not have a family or respect my father (a male Syrian refugee student).

Another student reported that he was irritated by his fellows as they asked questions about his family issues, such as where they lived. One male Eritrean refugee mentioned: "There are many who ask questions about my family, and whenever I speak with them, what they say is always on my mind; I try to forget it."

The lack of contact between the refugee students and their respective families was also raised during the interview. Some young refugees did not have regular contact with their families in their countries of origin. This situation was often difficult for them as they concentrated on their education. Lack of communication was often attributed to inadequate network coverage and sometimes also disrupted due to security reasons in their home countries. A male Eritrean refugee narrated: "I have limited contact with my parents because they do not have the means to Wi-Fi." Likewise, a schoolteacher raised the lack of contact as a big concern as some refugee students could not establish with their families living in their home countries. "Because some of them [refugee students] do not have regular contact with their families; some Afghans whose families might live in areas where there is poor network coverage or disruption …" (a male schoolteacher).

Other refugee students stated how their memories from the war period affected their concentration at school. It was mainly an issue since their family still lived in their home countries. A male Sudanese refugee revealed: "When I have presentations in the class, if I am

asked to write something about my home country, then past experiences would come to my mind, and I go in deep thoughts."

The interview data also showed that some of the refugee students suffered from trauma and anxiety. During the interview, a female schoolteacher noted, "… some refugee students are plagued by psychological problems such as anxiety, and they perhaps could have been sent to a work-related training as they would not fit in with the school system." The male schoolteacher also illustrated that some refugee students were traumatized and potentially attributed it to a lack of adequate follow-up. He observed that some refugee students showed more motivation to work than attending school. "Yes, some [refugee students] can be integrated better into the workplace. I have some examples where some students have functioned poorly at school but like work arenas better" (the male schoolteacher). When I asked about the school's role in addressing their psychological concerns, the female schoolteacher noted that some students were referred to Pedagogical and Psychological Services (PPT) to receive appropriate support about their school challenges. She further pointed out that the students could also receive psychological support to get rid of their thoughts at the hospital. According to her, however, such interventions did not always help.

4.3 Work and its Partial Impact on School

Many of the refugee students worked despite going to school. Work was described as one of the challenges that often affected the everyday schooling of unaccompanied young refugees as they functioned in the school environment. Some refugee students said it was difficult for them to combine work with the study and often became very tired. "… I work and feel tired somewhat … you cannot rotate it and does not always fit in your schedule. You go to school in the morning, and you do not get the job in the evening" (a male Afghan refugee student). A female Eritrean refugee student also stated: "I began working a little, so perhaps I do not do too much homework."

Similarly, speaking about combining work and school, an Eritrean refugee student mentioned: "I have work, you know. I work after school, and I become exhausted. I am not able to train [at the gym], but I never skip school." Other expressions like "It is not easy to work, but I only work after school" by a male Sudanese refugee student and "It is difficult to combine work with school" by a male Eritrean refugee student were also mentioned during the interview. A male Syrian refugee student stated that he was overwhelmed as there were

many new things to catch up on at school besides his work. One of the schoolteachers also noted the following:

> It is tempting to work. If one gets a part-time job perhaps on the weekend, one [may] also begin working on Monday or Tuesday, which often overshadows the schoolwork. Yes, it is wonderful to earn money, but they have less time for school. It is something we frequently observe [at school]. (A female schoolteacher)

The other female schoolteacher stated that many refugee students worked a lot, and they were accustomed to working from a relatively young age, such as ten. She said that it was difficult for some to recognize the importance of education as they did not have role models they could follow. While almost all the refugee students stated that they worked beside the school, none of them touched on if they sent money to their families in the home countries or had economic difficulties. However, it was something that was often raised by other participants during the interview.

According to a schoolteacher, many families had expectations, often unrealistic ones, of their children living in Norway. For example, she mentioned that some of their families press them to send money to their home countries and succeed academically. According to the teacher, this situation has put some in a terrible predicament.

> They have a big press [pressure] from their families to succeed academically in this new country. They acquire an outstanding education as quickly as possible and earn money to send home [to their parents]. They nag them a lot to send money, and they also send money to the extent that they retain almost nothing for themselves and do not have the means to buy a pair of winter shoes when the winter sets in because they feel responsible for sending it. (A female schoolteacher)

Some of the interviewees also illustrated that a handful of the refugee students tried to bring their families to live together in Norway, which often led to the fact that they had to work more and often skip school. "… some of the [refugee students] stopped school and started

working to send money and try to see if they can bring their families [to Norway]" (the Managing Director for Schools). Likewise, a female schoolteacher narrated that one of her Afghan students had to work for months to bring his family to Norway. She said that her student did poorly at school because he had to work extra to pay for his brother's travel expenses. During this period, the refugee student also suffered from a lack of concentration at school. She noted: "… his attention was only directed to his small brother [who was on his way to Europe]; both his security, whereabouts and checked his mobile phone all the time" (a female schoolteacher).

4.4 Language Difficulty

Learning the Norwegian language was one of the challenges most of the interviewed unaccompanied refugee students contended with both in the compulsory and the upper secondary schools. The majority of them said that although it was easier to learn the everyday verbal communication to some extent in Norwegian, the technical terms and the professional language was a more significant challenge for their learning at the school.

One of the male Afghan refugee students who had never gone to school in the home country stated that the Norwegian language was difficult for him to learn, and there were many new concepts he had to go through to untangle them.

> It is not easy to learn the language because there are many technical terms and theories. You can learn the language [everyday language] but not thoroughly; even though you could communicate to some extent, new technical terms appear [making the language acquisition more difficult]. (A male Afghan refugee student)

Other participants also voiced concerns about the difficulties language caused them and stated that learning language was frustrating, especially the written language. "Themes and assignments are becoming worse. Yes, the written language is difficult to grasp" (a male Syrian refugee student).

The difficulty of technical language was also expressed by other participants other than the refugee students. One of the female schoolteachers stated: "It is the technical language that many [refugee students] struggle with … and when it comes to the written language, they have the difficulty." She added that the language was essential for refugee students and was

the "master key" for integration. The male teacher also noted that the technical terms and concepts his students encountered were significant challenges.

> Such texts [technical texts] are difficult for refugee students they encounter, for instance, in the natural science and social study textbooks. Yes, there are many complicated words, perhaps written using metaphors or other methods, and block the understanding of texts to a certain degree. We have to use too much time to unpack them. An ordinary Norwegian student could understand it almost intuitively. (The male schoolteacher)

Other participants also expressed that language acquisition was challenging for many, particularly the professional language in the school context. "It is only the Norwegian [language] that is difficult," said a male Somali refugee student. An Eritrean male refugee also noted, "Perhaps, I do not speak good Norwegian. I feel so." A male Afghan refugee student also pointed out that the Norwegian technical terms were still a challenge as he struggled with the professional language. The municipality representative also opined that acquiring the Norwegian language was a struggle, particularly with the professional vocabulary.

> The refugee students can learn the daily verbal language relatively fast. But when they come to school and begin learning the [concepts], it is not only sufficient to know the spoken language, and they should have a more profound knowledge of the language. So this is a challenge because learning Norwegian is difficult. (The Managing Director for Schools)

The other female schoolteacher also stated that the learning of concepts and technical terms was something they focused on at school as it was difficult for all refugees. "It is complicated for refugees [students] to learn the Norwegian language and the abstract concepts, words, and expressions … and one should have a relative understanding to be able to continue" (a female schoolteacher).

A male Eritrean refugee student mentioned that he almost gave up learning the Norwegian language and return to his home country. He said that he was very desperate when he could not get the hang of it. "I give up. For two and three years, the language was the most difficult thing for me. When I felt desperate, I thought that I would return home and why I should learn this language" (a male Eritrean refugee student).

Other refugees revealed how difficult it was to socialize with their peer groups because of the language difficulty. "But I cannot go out as I wish. The language is difficult …" (a female Eritrean refugee student). She also believed that poor language skills could lead to bullying but did not comment on whether she experienced it. This female participant also thought that if she could learn the professional language adequately, she could quickly learn other school subjects because the language was a precondition for different themes.

> Maybe it is not the subject that is difficult. But it can be a difficult language. For instance, I like mathematics, but I am not smart at the language itself. I do not entirely understand all the rules or the purpose of a specific assignment [at school]. Yes, it is not easy, but we [I] only speak a little bit of language, and we have not gone deeper into it. (A female Eritrean refugee student)

Another male Eritrean refugee student noted that he was placed in a compulsory school without any foundational Norwegian language support from an Adult Learning Center. The lack of fundamental Norwegian language was a stumbling block for him. "Only Norwegian is difficult for me because I did not go to Norwegian Course [Adult Learning Center]. I directly started the compulsory primary and lower secondary school, which slowed my language progress …" (a male Eritrean refugee student).

However, living with a Norwegian family as an unaccompanied young refugee helped another refugee student learn the everyday language more easily. "When I came to Norway, I believed that I would never learn the Norwegian language, but I gradually learned it when I started living with a Norwegian family" (a male Sudanese refugee student).

While a few refugee students stated that they had the possibility of using other dominant languages as a tool to interpret specific texts to understand them better and to help with their language learning, everyone did not have the same opportunity. "In the beginning, I believed that I would never learn the language, but as I could speak English, I was able to translate some texts to grasp their meaning" (a male Somali refugee student). Another Afghan male student mentioned that he used Google or other search engines to find a solution to his language challenges.

However, other refugee students who did not have such tools to unpack the complex terms struggled even more. "It was challenging to speak and understand Norwegian because I did not speak English to communicate with people and also to translate and learn the language"

(a male Syrian refugee student). Another male Eritrean refugee student also expressed that it took him quite a while to begin speaking the Norwegian language. He did not have English as scaffolding to learn Norwegian and communicate with ordinary citizens.

Refugee students who had a different mother tongue other than the dominant national language in their home countries also struggled with school. One of the male Kurdish refugees from Syria noted that he already spoke some languages, and learning a new language [Norwegian] slowed down his progress. One of the female schoolteachers, describing the previous negative school experiences of refugee students from their home countries, added that those taught in a different language other than their mother tongue struggled more at school.

> It is evident that many have negative school experiences from their home countries; perhaps the rules were more stringent and were not taught in their mother tongue. For example, it applies to many Kurds who only receive education in the Arabic language and cannot often manage to learn [adequately] …. (A female schoolteacher)

Other refugee students also explained different previous school experiences and their stringent rules. Many stated that their former school experiences were harsh and strict. In some cases, teachers would beat them to discipline. Some refugee students had not gone to school in their home countries and come to Norway as illiterate. These were some of the difficulties they struggled with as they adapted to school. "If one goes to school and does not work with the assignment, the teacher comes and beats the student in my home country" (a male Eritrean refugee student). Another male Kurdish refugee student from Syria also noted that his school experience was very tough as he had to cram for his exams all week. "The difficulty is that you have exams the whole week continuously – for example, on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday … that is very demanding" (a male Kurdish refugee student from Syria). The female Eritrean refugee student also noted that she had about 65 or 70 classmates in the same class, making it difficult for her to learn in the home country. Two of the male Afghan refugee students also noted that they had never been to school in the home country and found it difficult to adjust to the school environment.

According to the schoolteachers, the previous school background and illiteracy were two of the hindrances to refugee students' learning and school adaptation. They observed that their

learning expectations from the home countries were difficult to adjust. One of the female schoolteachers noted, "It is quite evident that refugees' biggest challenge is being illiterate because they do not know how they could behave in a school environment." She further added that it took way too much for them to teach refugee students, particularly those who had no previous schooling from their home countries or had not been in a learning situation.

Another schoolteacher also recognized the difficulties of refugee students associated with their previous schooling and the expectations they had when they entered Norwegian schools.

> If they have gone to school for a while in their home countries, so they have expectations about going to school and how the school environment would be. If the Norwegian school does not look like their schools from the home country, it becomes sort of a "mismatch," and many end up preparing for exams by rote learning or cramming for long texts that would never be asked on an exam. They would still answer those questions because they have expectations about how a school environment would be. (The male schoolteacher)

He further noted that different schools prioritized different subjects in the home countries of refugee students. He added that "some Eritreans had good knowledge of mathematics, but many did not have deep knowledge of history" because they were not prioritized by the schools they attended in their home countries. According to another female schoolteacher, the lack of former schooling has also led to the dropout of some refugee students because they could not live up to the expectations the school required.

> For example, I had a student who was in the adapted education class for two years. He was 16 or 17 when he came, and since he was illiterate, he was placed in a class with other illiterate adult refugees. He could not adapt to the school environment because he did not desire to study [because of being illiterate] and instead worked at a street vendor. (A female schoolteacher)

4.4.1 Homework Help

The majority of the refugee students wanted additional homework support as they struggled with different school subjects because of their inadequate Norwegian language skills. Many said that they had homework help when they were in the classroom and at school provided by their teachers and others, but needed homework support when they were also out of the

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school area. Because of the lack of additional help, many struggled with their school subjects. They raised it both as an expectation to receive additional support and as a challenge that often affected their school progress.

> It is hard if a student returns home with a school assignment that requires additional explanation. The professional language is difficult, and when the student goes home and finds nobody who could help him, that would be quite challenging. One should have someone show him how to do it, for example, math or English homework because these two subjects require someone to help. (A male Kurdish refugee student from Syria)

According to one of the male Afghan refugee students, some people supported students who needed homework help for two hours. These were only at certain times and were not available as students frequently needed additional support after school. Another male Syrian refugee student noted, "If I get some homework, I cannot do so, I lose marks since nobody helps me." Another male Afghan refugee student also voiced his concerns about the lack of homework help.

> I am weak in these subjects – mathematics and English. I need more help to learn more, and no one helps me. We [I] only get help and do my homework when I am at school, and when I return home, there is nobody to help me. (A male Afghan refugee student)

Expressions from other students included these: "But I am bad in math also" by a male Afghan refugee student and "I am concerned for exams" by a male Somali refugee student.

Another male Syrian refugee student noted, "I can manage some [assignments], and I cannot manage some others; when I cannot, I lose hope and become sad." Another male Eritrean refugee student noted that his teachers wanted to help him with his homework at school, and he was encouraged to speak Norwegian in the class. However, he did not get help from the teachers because of his poor Norwegian skills and [also lacked the courage to ask]. Therefore, he only received homework help from his Norwegian classmate. Another male Syrian refugee student noted that he changed his class because the class he attended was very high. "… I changed my class because I had started in a class that was too high for me."

However, when I asked the teachers about how they catered for different refugee groups given their varying school experiences, one of the female schoolteachers illustrated that they

often shifted classes to address their specific needs. She also pointed out that they had language assistants who acted as interpreters between the teachers and some refugee students. However, they were occasionally available in their classes.

4.5 Social Network in the School Context

Many refugee students were placed in linguistically isolated classes and were taught separately from the mainstream Norwegian school environment. According to my teacher participants, it was essential for them to acquire a good knowledge of the Norwegian language and learn other necessary school subjects before joining the mainstream Norwegian school system. However, building social networks with Norwegian youth through social activities and making friendships with them was one of their expectations during the various interviews. One male Sudanese refugee student explained the importance of friendship in the school context. "Of course, a school is a place for learning, but the most important thing is friends. I go to school because I have a goal – become something [in the future]. You cannot achieve something without friends."

The refugee students wished to be part of the wider society to be better integrated into the school environment and spend more time with the mainstream Norwegian school youths through social activities, arrangements, and leisure pursuits. Many refugee students believed that doing social activities with their Norwegian peer groups in the mainstream Norwegian school environment would also improve their language proficiency because they would speak more Norwegian as they would spend more time with them. However, the type and nature of social activities they wanted to be involved in were different. Many believed that participating in social and sports activities were necessary as part of their school integration.

One of the refugee students opined that it was important to have more social activities with Norwegian school students. "Maybe, they [sports activities] can be dance, drama, football or training, for example. It should be a place where youth can meet youth" (a female Eritrean refugee student). Other expectations involved utterances like "one can have more activities such as basketball with the Norwegian youth" by a male Eritrean refugee student and "the only [school] integration one can be part of is through the sports activities" by a Somali refugee student.

A male Afghan refugee student stated that he wished to have more shared social activities with other Norwegian upper secondary school students when he had sports or other training

activities. He expected that he wanted to work with people from an upper secondary school class. One schoolteacher also emphasized the importance of shared social activities as students from the linguistically isolated classes and upper secondary schools would do jointly. "… suppose if they [refugee students] could have the chance of doing joint projects with the students from the upper secondary school, that could help them to bond with the Norwegian youth for better school integration" (a female schoolteacher).

However, another male Somali refugee student who studied in upper secondary school with the mainstream Norwegian school students emphasized classroom relations to better school integration. He said that it was essential to have the telephone number of classmates in the class to keep in touch and ask if some classmates would not come to school because of sickness or something else. He noted: "If you do not have the contact number of a student in your class and cannot provide it to your teacher when she needs it, then it is a bad integration" (a male Somali refugee student). He further underscored the importance of intermingling refugee students with their Norwegian peers for better school integration. He expected that classes should have more group work by a mixture of different students, not only with the one that was your neighbor [the one sitting closest to you] in the classroom. Furthermore, a Kurdish refugee student from Syria reiterated the importance of classroom representatives in promoting classroom relations and its positive role for better school integration.

Another Syrian refugee expected Norwegian [informal] evening classes after school to build social networks and get support to do his homework. Other expectations included going on tour, mountain trek, or a beach and not formal teaching all the time. "Not only Norwegian [language], language, language, and language! Have something enjoyable too" (a male Syrian refugee student). The female Eritrean refugee student also stated: "We [refugee students] must also be out [of school], not only inside." Another male Eritrean refugee student also emphasized the importance of leisure activities outside school. He noted, "Maybe a little more [activities], it has recently decreased. One should not be at school all the time, and must also go out and do something different" (a male Eritrean refugee student). One Afghan refugee also wished that he could have more leisure activities, especially in the COVID-19 period, as there was a decrease in social activities. "More activities than they have; people are sociable. It is the COVID-19 period now, and there are not many leisure activities. In the past, we had some [leisure activities] at school" (a male Afghan refugee student).

Although some refugee students mentioned that some voluntary organizations in the municipality helped refugees and immigrants through social activities, the refugee students wished for more social activities outside of school and in their respective school environment with other Norwegian youth. Further, the Managing Director for Schools stated that the social arrangements, organized by some voluntary organizations in the municipality, were often for the general public, refugees, or immigrants alike. Therefore, it was difficult to know if the unaccompanied young refugee students could also be part of such gatherings and find Norwegian friends. That is why it was essential to become members, for example, in football teams and have social activities with the Norwegian youth on different occasions, including sports activities as the Norwegian youth students are accustomed to being part of such groups from a relatively young age.

Other participants also had varying expectations, such as competitions at school between refugee students and the Norwegian youths and music during the lunch hours with the mainstream Norwegian school students. One of the male Kurdish refugee students from Syria noted: "It is through sort of sports activities and competitions [one can integrate into the school environment]."

However, some participants noted that building social networks with the mainstream society and the Norwegian school youth was difficult and attributed it to several factors, including culture, socioeconomic background, and the environment. One refugee participant noted, "It can be the language first, the culture and the environment you are not accustomed to and can [hinder school integration]" (a male Afghan refugee student). A male Kurdish refugee student from Syria also noted that it was difficult for him to be befriended with Norwegian youths and learn the language as he wanted. Another refugee participant also attributed the limited social network in the school context to their different cultural backgrounds. "It is different [culture]. We have a different background, and we were raised in a different culture" (a male Eritrean refugee student).

One of the teacher participants also attributed the lack of social network to a relatively different culture many refugee students had. She noted, "There are cultural challenges of these boys; they have come to a new culture where we have equality to a great extent, and it is the opposite of what they experienced in the past" (a female schoolteacher). She added that many of them were not adequately brought up. Therefore, they lacked a "moral compass" to be guided as they ventured into the world at such a tender age, like 13 or 14, that could affect

how they could integrate into society, including the school environment. Another participant said, "What cultural background one comes from and what religion one is affiliated with could limit their [young refugees] school integration, especially if the refugee is a girl …" (the Managing Director for Schools). Speaking school integration for girls, one of the female schoolteachers also noted: "I would say that many girls have experienced greater social control …. It could affect them in the school context and hinder them from behaving in the same way as Norwegian youth would normally do in a school setting" (a female schoolteacher).

The Managing Director for Schools also noted that some refugees would feel isolated to find Norwegian friends by speculating that they did not belong here or might not fit in and believing that they [Norwegians] were different. Several refugee participants also noted that the lack of self-confidence and prior assumptions some refugees had hindered their social networks. One male Eritrean refugee student stated: "... you can be shy because one does not speak good Norwegian. So if you do not speak good Norwegian, they recognize you immediately, and then they laugh at you." Another male Somali refugee student explained how prior assumptions could affect the school integration of refugee students. "If you think that you have a different culture, different [skin] color, and language, they could hinder your school integration …."

Another challenge, according to the Managing Director for Schools, was the low income of refugees that hindered them from building social networks. However, it did not only apply to the unaccompanied young refugees attending schools. Instead, refugees had a low income in general. "Many refugee families have low incomes because they do not have a job; in the absence of a job, their children cannot attend social events like holidays, trips, or other things as they cannot cover the expenses." However, none of the refugee students mentioned that they could not attend such social events due to low income or other types of economic constraints.

While interviewing the teachers and the Managing Director for Schools, I also found that some refugee students were unwilling to be part of the Norwegian social network and the school environment. Speaking about her former refugee students who went to a different class now, a schoolteacher stated: "And the feedback I received about the students is that they avoid doing music and dance with Norwegian school youths" (a female schoolteacher). She also elaborated on some girl and boy groups the refugee students formed with people from

their countries of origin and participated in different sports activities. She urged that it was essential to participate in various social activities with Norwegian youths and integrate into the school environment.

> I believe that it is easy to watch TV in your own language, speak with those who come from your home country; I understand that it is enjoyable to do that, but if one wants to learn the Norwegian language as soon as possible, it is also important to be in contact with the Norwegians …. It is not only important to be [with Norwegians] in the school environment but also at leisure. (The Managing Director for Schools)

Another female schoolteacher also urged that the refugee youths should take the initiative to participate in society. "The youths should contribute by participating in society. We [teachers] educate them as we educate the Norwegian youths, and they should give us the 'gift package' by integrating into the society."

While many refugee students believed that it was difficult to make friends with the Norwegian youth, some also stated that they showed initiative and took proactive approaches to build social networks and were not bothered about what others said. "We need to be with them. For example, Norwegians do not say hi immediately. We have to follow them and say hi to them" (a female Eritrean refugee student). However, she also added that she was not good at approaching people and making friends despite advice from her teachers' to be more proactive in building social networks. When speaking about the difficulty, another refugee student said: "It is good to integrate with the Norwegian youths, but they should also open the way for us to show who we are, what we keep on and where we came from" (a male Kurdish refugee student from Syria).

4.5.1 Transition to Mainstream Norwegian Schools

As stated above, many refugee students attended the classes that were linguistically isolated from the mainstream Norwegian schools but still received similar subjects that could typically be found at a Norwegian mainstream school. The research participants stated that many refugees and immigrants were placed separately in special classes adaptive to their particular needs and taught separately from the mainstream Norwegian schools.

My school informants explained that the purpose of teaching young refugees separately from the mainstream schools was to address their specific needs more individually, considering

their previous educational background and level of Norwegian language proficiency. One of the female schoolteachers explained: "The municipality chose to place them [refugee students] in these classes because they could attend their own school, which could be enjoyable, strength and also comfort to be in a similar situation."

The Managing Director for Schools also explained that refugees were placed in a different school other than the mainstream Norwegian ones. He continued that after they studied there for a while, they could get admission to the regular schools to learn together with the Norwegian youths and build social networks. He elaborated on the expectations refugee students had in transitioning to the ordinary schools. "Many youths have a desire to be part of the ordinary schools in the municipality and find [new friends]" (the Managing Director for Schools).

It was not typical for the Norwegian youths to attend these classes, and only refugees and immigrants were taught there. Many of the refugee students who participated in these classes stated that they wanted to study with the Norwegian youths in the mainstream Norwegian schools. According to them, learning with other refugees and immigrants in the same class was challenging for their language acquisition and school integration. Therefore, going to the same classes with their Norwegian peers was one of their expectations.

Speaking about the importance of going to school with the Norwegian youths, a male Sudanese refugee student stated: "You can integrate very quickly if you attend upper secondary school because you are obliged to speak Norwegian all the time there." Another male Eritrean refugee student also wished to attend upper secondary school. He noted, "I have a desire just to begin the upper secondary school and find a job immediately."

Another participant also stated that he attended a class where there were many other refugees and immigrants. Since some refugees were from the same country, it was not easy to concentrate on the schoolwork, and therefore expected to continue upper secondary school. "Everyone is a refugee at this school, and when I go to upper secondary school, it will be better [to learn Norwegian] and get acquainted with the Norwegian youths because there are many Syrians and Turks here" (a male Syrian refugee student). He further added that many of the refugees who studied in these classes were old, like 40 or 50, and mixing young refugees like 20 was a challenge for language acquisition. He noted that the elderly had many things to

do like children, family, and so on, and the young refugees only heard them spoke about their children, etc.

Another refugee expressed his frustration when he attended the linguistically isolated classes as it was difficult for him to learn the language and find friends from the Norwegian youth. "When I attended this class [refugee class], I had many friends from my own country in the classroom, and it was challenging to learn Norwegian and thought that I would never learn it" (a male Kurdish refugee student from Syria). He illustrated that everyone in the classroom spoke their native languages like Arabic or Kurdish.

Another participant also stated it was difficult to concentrate on learning in these linguistically isolated classes because other refugees made noises that distracted them from their schoolwork.

> Also, since the beginning [of school], we receive homework from the teachers who require us to do it in the classroom. When others only make noise, speak or create problems, you lose your motivation [because of the distraction] and cannot concentrate on your school assignment. (A male Syrian refugee student)

Other distractions were reported to be associated with intercultural differences that often led to physical fights among refugees of different ethnic backgrounds in the classroom. The incident was expressed both by one of the female schoolteachers and the Managing Director for Schools. "Conflicts occur between two cultures of different backgrounds in the classroom, and in severe cases, we have to expel them from the class as a punishment" (a female schoolteacher). The Managing Director for Schools also noted a similar instance: "Some of the boys have problems at school and they are not ready to properly behave and adhere to the school rules, and often make noises."

A male Sudanese refugee student also stated that it was difficult for him in the "refugee school" as they did not speak Norwegian: "You could see the same folk every day and you do not speak Norwegian there [refugee class]." Another male Eritrean refugee student stated that he went to a class where there were elderly refugees between 50 and 60. It was challenging to learn Norwegian due to the domination of other refugee languages. He noted that "in such classes," it was not easy to practice the Norwegian language.

Some students also thought of changing the school because there were many old refugee students, which hindered them from concentrating on the schoolwork. For example, the female Eritrean refugee student said she had thought of changing her school when she studied together with other refugees because they were elderly. She could not acquire a good education and spoke the same language. "We could not get a good education. Do you understand? Because we were only foreigners – only the foreigners" (the female Eritrean refugee student). She also wished that she could have been born in Norway to learn the language more naturally.

The male schoolteacher had a relatively different perspective other than the one the refugee students had. Although he believed that it was often a challenge since they operated in isolation from the rest of the mainstream school environment, he emphasized the importance of accommodating the refugees in such classes. He noted that the refugee students could help each other by speaking the same language and using it as a scaffolding to deepen their Norwegian language proficiency. "It helps to have somebody who speaks the same language and could help others" (the male schoolteacher). He also noted that "people who learned in a school environment where there is diversity" often had better learning outcomes and a greater understanding of others. According to him, refugee students could learn more Norwegian in informal settings, such as among friends from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In this case, they would be obliged to use the Norwegian language as a lingua franca. One male Somali refugee student also noted that he learned better Norwegian with refugees studying in the same class because he was the only one who spoke Somali and had to use Norwegian as a lingua franca. "… since there was only me from Somalia in the class, I had to speak only Norwegian."

However, the male schoolteacher also informed about class segregation for different age groups among refugee students as it did not exist in the past. However, it did not necessarily mean that they [young refugees] became part of the ordinary Norwegian school system. They still studied with other refugees but with their similar age groups this time.

Even though most refugee students had a desire to transition to the ordinary Norwegian schools, some also dreaded joining the regular Norwegian school system because of unfamiliarity and not understanding their Norwegian peers at school. One of the Kurdish refugee students from Syria noted: "It can be difficult to adapt to the Norwegian schools …." One of the students who transitioned to the ordinary Norwegian schools and attended upper

secondary school also expressed some difficulties he encountered when studying with Norwegian youths. "When I studied in the Adult Learning Center last year, I received a lot of support. It was laid-back. Here in the upper secondary school, rules and regulations are rigorous and demanding" (a male Eritrean refugee student). Another refugee student also expressed how difficult it was for him when he transitioned to the mainstream Norwegian upper secondary school.

> After I came to the upper secondary school, it was tough for me to integrate into the school environment and get acquainted with the Norwegian youths; because we had two different cultures, worldviews, and so-called brains. I felt uncomfortable since I was the only one who looked different because of age. (A male Kurdish refugee student from Syria)

He continued that his cultural and linguistic background also led to some of his classmates distancing themselves from him for a while because they believed that he would only befriend those from the same religious and cultural backgrounds. However, after they got acquainted, they became close friends.

To decrease possible distances that may exist due to unfamiliarity, another male Syrian refugee student emphasized the importance of proactive approaches to introduce oneself to the Norwegians and believed that this would help them know the refugees better.

> Perhaps some [Norwegian youth] knows our situation pretty well, but not everyone. We came from a country ravaged by war, and I lost everything in Syria and started from scratch here [Norway]. You need to explain and tell them the situation there [Syria] and what you do here [Norway]. (A male Syrian refugee student)

Another male Afghan refugee student mentioned that he would explain his situation to the people around him if he felt uncomfortable. "I can speak with them and explain my situation" (a male Afghan refugee student).

4.6 School as a Promoter of Integration

This section describes the role school played in facilitating and promoting integration for unaccompanied young refugee students in the school context and the broader society. According to the teachers, the school played an important role in facilitating social networks

and leisure activities for young refugees organized by various voluntary organizations. The male schoolteacher stated: "There have been voluntary language [Norwegian] training and Culture Cafés where you could improve your language; the school facilitated them." He added that the school also facilitated sports activities like girl and boy groups organized by the municipality. They also had other entertainment activities at school. According to one of the female schoolteachers, they included, among other things, playing cards to improve young refugees' Norwegian language skills.

According to the male schoolteacher, teachers who would want to teach refugees should also have additional education of sixty credits as a criterion to teach refugee students. The Managing Director for Schools also informed of some arrangements that the municipality had concerning different cultural courses for teachers who taught students of refugee background. However, the male schoolteacher said that the teachers' experience from earlier refugee education was often a decisive factor in landing a job, not the additional cultural courses and studies.

Both of the female schoolteachers recognized the limited role of school in addressing integration on a broader scale. They believed that while schools could play an intermediary role in disseminating related information and facilitating social networks, teaching constituted an integral part of their mandate and was reported to be fundamental.

> The main task of the school is to teach the language and other subjects. Of course, we disseminate information relating to social activities, when the girl and boy groups are, and when the cricket is. We continuously give this information at school. (A female schoolteacher)

However, speaking about the school's cooperation with students, a male Eritrean refugee student said that his school did not often consider his will and was unresponsive when he needed a meeting to discuss his school issues. "One day, I had an appointment for a meeting with my advisor at school, and I had to wait a lot, and she did not show up" (a male Eritrean refugee student). He also stated that if some students wanted to change classes because it did not suit them or did not have a good relationship with others in the classroom, the principal would often say, "There are no available classes." He wanted the school to promote closer cooperation with students and prioritize their needs and concerns.

The male schoolteacher also mentioned that school criteria for refugees were too high given their previous educational background and wanted more adaptive and adjusted schooling and fewer requirements.

> I want more adaptive and adjusted classes and fewer requirements at the compulsory and upper secondary schools. If they demand the same requirements for refugee students as the Norwegian youth, it would be impossible for many to integrate. (The male schoolteacher)

Chapter 5 Analysis

5.1 Introduction

My empirical material demonstrates several challenges associated with the school integration of young unaccompanied refugees. They include the lack of social networks across the school context and beyond, poor language skills, separation from family, work, and its partial impact on their everyday schooling. This chapter discusses and analyzes their school integration challenges by drawing on some of the relevant theoretical perspectives and narratives discussed in the literature review. It is worth mentioning that only the relevant perspectives and literature are used in this chapter since the study was qualitative and guided its direction.

5.2 Social Network across School and Beyond

The limited social network of unaccompanied young refugee students who participated in the present study is one of the main themes, and I discuss it through the social capital theory. Although the theory does not exclusively apply to school integration because of its broader application in other fields, analyzing school integration and its associated challenges through the social capital lens is essential. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital refers to potential or actual resources among the members of a particular social network, and such networks exist to achieve specific goals through mutual recognition. As my empirical data suggest, many unaccompanied young refugees had limited social capital, particularly bridging capital (Putnam, 2000) in the school context and beyond, which often hindered their school integration. Bridging capital refers to relations among heterogeneous groups (Putnam, 2000), which would indicate the relations and existence of social networks between the unaccompanied young refugee students and their Norwegian peers in the mainstream school context in my study.

While factors contributing to limited social capital could be multiple depending on circumstances, it is mainly due to their placement in linguistically isolated classes for the refugee participants in this study. They are often isolated from the rest of the mainstream Norwegian school environment, and their isolation is often reported to be a hindrance to building social networks. Segregation can take many forms depending on circumstances. In his discussion in the American context, Schelling (1969, p. 488) divides it into sex, age, income, language, and color. Placement of young refugee students in linguistically isolated classes before they transition to the mainstream school environment is not uncommon (Dávila, 2017). As suggested in the data, the rationale is to address their specific educational

needs and concerns more individually, given their previous schooling background and other circumstances.

Although linguistically isolated classes would be beneficial as they acquire adapted education and learn the Norwegian language more intensively, it can nevertheless be a source of concern and frustration. As expressed by the study participants, their exclusive schooling hindered them from building social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), particularly bridging capital (Putnam, 2000), as they could not attend the mainstream Norwegian schools. Attending regular Norwegian schools may enhance their chances of building networks and develop social and linguistic capitals in situations where they interact with other peer groups from the majority population. Putnam (2000) notes the importance of informal social networks in the school context and other areas such as social events and sports activities individuals get involved. Social recognition and peer interaction and their positive role in school integration are also observed by other scholars like Fazel (2015).

In so-called refugee classes, they often meet their fellow countrymen and other refugees with similar characteristics that could be a stumbling block for their language acquisition as they would often communicate in languages other than Norwegian. As per my empirical data, many were placed with elderly refugees, often came from the same country that prevented them from learning the Norwegian language more effectively. However, it is essential to indicate that the school administration looks at this isolation arrangement as something beneficial for and supportive of the unaccompanied young refugees. They argue that learning in isolation from the rest of the mainstream Norwegian school environment would help them to learn the language more quickly by getting support from each other and using their native language as an anchorage to unpack complex terms, a view that was rejected by the majority of the study participants.

Referring to the definition of integration by Berry (1997, p. 9) as a *mutual accommodation* both by the "non-dominant" and "dominant" cultural groups in a pluralistic society, the linguistically isolated classes would be considered a hindrance to young unaccompanied refugees' integration. According to Berry (2011), to pave the way for better and inclusive integration in a pluralistic society, it is necessary that the dominant culture, that is, the host society, should also be receptive to the individual needs and concerns of ethnocultural non-dominant groups. As the empirical data suggest, many unaccompanied refugee participants expressed wishes to be part of mainstream school and broader society,

which indicates that they take a keen interest in being integrated into the broader community through interaction by peer groups.

Berry also distinguishes between assimilation and marginalization in diverse societies. If the non-dominant groups do not wish to cling or hold on to their heritage culture and are inclined to adopt the dominant culture in their daily encounters, Berry (2011) calls it assimilation. In marginalization, however, the ethnic minorities often alienate themselves and do not show interest in interacting with the mainstream society; such a tendency may often result from a lack of interest in the maintenance of heritage culture and enabling necessary conditions provided by the dominant culture for better integration (Berry, 2011). Although many refugee participants desired to be part of the mainstream schools, some also expressed frustration and avoided school, which may lead to marginalization if their frustration persists for an extended period.

There may also be factors that hinder young unaccompanied refugee students' integration in the mainstream Norwegian school environment. This is despite the fact that many refugee students desired to be part of the mainstream Norwegian school to learn Norwegian through peer communication and building social networks. As Naidoo (2009) argues, mainstream classes could also be frustrating, particularly if the refugee students lack fundamental language training from an earlier language school. This claim is similar to what teachers in the segregated classes cited. Some of the refugee students who already studied in the mainstream Norwegian school also expressed difficulties adjusting to the mainstream school environment and were hindered from building social networks.

Although inadequate language skills would often be considered a barrier to building social capital in the school context, as indicated in my empirical findings, other factors could also lead to limited social capital, specifically bridging capital (Putnam, 2000) in the mainstream Norwegian school environment. What bridging social capital denotes here is similar to what Putnam (2000) calls "informal social connections," where individuals socialize in casual settings such as attending sporting activities, meeting up for drinks, attending a reading group at a library, and so forth. According to participants, socialization such as spending more time in the classroom and other informal settings and participating in social events were desired expectations. However, it was often challenging because of several contributing factors. For instance, as excerpts from the empirical data suggest and also discussed in the literature by Fangen (2006) and Thommessen and Todd (2018), lack of cultural understanding could be a

significant obstacle for building bridging capital both at school and the broader society as the mainstream host community would not often have adequate cultural knowledge from the refugee population. Cultural knowledge would be a crucial element for building social capital and could often be learned by participating in shared activities. In the absence of social capital, attaining the desired integration would often remain a challenge. Thus, the importance of social contact (Keles et al., 2018) cannot be overemphasized.

However, despite having limited social contact with the mainstream Norwegian school environment, a proactive approach was something many unaccompanied young refugee students adopted. As per the empirical data, many refugee students dared to approach their Norwegian peers and explained their plight, which seemingly helped them expand their cultural understanding. Nevertheless, building a broader social capital may require a greater cultural and linguistic understanding of the refugee situation, which was difficult given the relatively limited period of their stay in Norway.

Above all, although it may require some fundamental language training for the unaccompanied young refugees before they transition to the mainstream Norwegian school environment, it is essential that they get acquainted with Norwegian adolescents through, for example, shared social activities, which they often lacked in their school environment. Creating joint interactive school projects through which young refugee students can build bridging capital with their Norwegian peers and foster a closer relationship with them would be useful in their school context. Their isolation from the mainstream school system would affect how they function in the school arena and often lead to social alienation, as indicated elsewhere. Additionally, their separation from the rest of the dominant school context may lead to building only bonding capital (Putnam, 2000) from their own ethnic and cultural background, as noted in my empirical data. Bonding social capital refers to relationships among similar groups, often come from the same ethnocultural background and mutually benefit from one another (Putnam, 2000). The empirical data signify that many unaccompanied refugee students often had intergroup socialization from similar ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, seemingly due to limited social connections with the broader Norwegian school youth and the wider community.

5.3 Separation from Family and Acculturation Hassles

All the refugee students who participated in this study were unaccompanied, meaning that they came to Norway without their parents or other primary caregivers with parental

responsibility. Their separation from families and the resulting acculturation hassles have impacted their school environment and everyday lives. Acculturation refers to cultural changes that occur due to interactions with other cultures (McBrien, 2005). Hassle refers to the annoying and stressful demands of everyday life and their impact on individuals in their immediate environment (Kanner et l., 1981, p. 3). In the context of this study, acculturation hassles refer to the difficulties of tackling daily stresses such as attending school, doing household chores, trying to fend for themselves, and other daily encounters in the absence of unaccompanied young refugee students' families.

Seglem et al. (2014) explore acculturation hassles of unaccompanied youth related to family, friends, and work/school by predominantly basing their social relations with friends as the main stress domain. Their study indicates that those who adopted a "disengagement coping strategy" had a lower level of life satisfaction than those who adopted an "engagement coping strategy" (Seglem et al., 2014). My empirical data also indicate that there existed all four types of daily hassles, as found in the study conducted by Seglem et al. (2014). The separation from family, however, appeared to be the most significant daily hassle they encountered. Others included struggling to build friendships with Norwegian peers and trying to combine work and school.

As the empirical data further illustrate, such daily hassles have created specific challenges in unaccompanied young refugee students' daily encounters. For example, separation from family also resulted in social alienation, partly due to not being able to host guests, because they could not cook as they did not have someone to do it. Moreover, peer groups looking down on refugee students who did not have parents living together appeared to stand out as another challenge that resulted in social alienation. Those who adopted social alienation, similar to the disengagement coping strategy applied by Seglem et al. (2014), had lower life satisfaction because they did not have many friends because their peers looked down on them. The lack of socialization in the school context could significantly impact how unaccompanied young refugee students function in the school environment and overshadow their school performance to a certain extent, which seems to be also in line with Fazel (2015).

This study's empirical findings show additional acculturation hassles associated with unaccompanied young refugees' school integration that has not been widely reflected in the reviewed literature. Young refugee students may receive support upon arrival to the host country, especially if they are minors and placed either in foster care or reception centers

under adult responsibility; however, as per the empirical data and Spiteri (2015), many find it challenging to live an independent life after leaving their primary caregivers upon being an adult. As my findings suggest, living an independent life and adjusting to the school environment at the same time cause significant challenges for the unaccompanied young refugees.

Although scholars like Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) and Pastoor (2013) point out challenges resulting from the lonely life some unaccompanied young refugees lead, they do not specifically describe what particular challenges they contend with concerning their independent life. However, as my findings reveal, many refugee participants felt that they did not have anyone to help them with their everyday activities, such as doing household chores and school assignments. Additionally, many suffered from apathy and were inattentive to the school demands because of the overwhelming distraction and a lack of concentration. This fact indicates their struggle as they function in the school environment and would be considered an additional hassle to their everyday life. Moreover, although not so frequent, and the level and harshness may vary, young refugee students are also reminded of their past traumatic episodes through schoolwork such as class presentations and writing activities. Such events can also be considered some of the possible hassles unaccompanied young refugee students might need to tackle as they perform in the classroom context. Such hassles, which occur daily in unaccompanied young refugees' school context, as shown in the data, are not consistent with the reviewed literature due to a lack of focus.

The necessity of having adult support for unaccompanied young refugee students is also discussed by other scholars such as Eide and Hjern (2013), who outline the importance of "protective factors" for unaccompanied young refugees in their transition processes. Their discussion is not widely reflective of practical elements of protective factors in the school environment and only includes developing adequate coping strategies and promoting psychosocial caring for unaccompanied minors through nurturing a trustful relation among health personnel. However, in line with some literature narratives, the data indicates relative dependence on protective factors, specifically substitute caregivers as they navigate their integration. For instance, they may need an adult to feel the same as their peers who have families and receive support, for example, for their homework, among other things. Many unaccompanied young refugees had sleeping difficulties that often led to school avoidance and shirking school obligations because they did not have an adult who could play a parental

role in their lives. Completing adulthood and striking out on your own may not be the same for unaccompanied young refugees compared to youth born and raised in a peaceful country without almost no or partial interruption in their education. Although they may not be entitled to substitute parents and guardians after the legal age of being adults, they could have adults in their lives to help them navigate their prospects in the new country. One reason for their vulnerability would be their premature departure from their home countries at a tender age that often lack adequate guidance in their adolescence. Scholars like Pastoor (2013), Thommessen, and Todd (2018) also similarly observe their vulnerability to adversity and other unfavorable conditions as they venture into the perilous journeys searching for refuge.

As observed in the empirical data, work may also affect how unaccompanied young refugee students perform at school, especially if they also send part of their earned wage to their parents in the home country. The findings of some scholars like De Haymes et al. (2018) and Omland and Andenas (2018) likewise indicate how some young refugees struggle to earn extra to support their surviving families in the countries of origin. Trying to send money and having less time for school is likely to affect their concentration as they perform the schoolwork, often leading to underachievement. As research shows and the data also demonstrate, many refugee students seem to be more preoccupied with the responsibility of supporting their families than their school integration. While some may not skip their school to work, combining work and school would seem a daunting task for many, especially if the unaccompanied young refugees receive expectations from their families to support them financially because they often feel indebted to their families. Although many students studying at Norwegian schools and other educational institutions may have a right to receive financial support from the Norwegian government, this amount of money may be only sufficient for the student applying for it. Any attempt to work extra may encroach on their school performance and leisure activities. My empirical data suggest a correlation between inadequate academic performance and work.

Because of the numerous challenges and uncertainty many of the unaccompanied young refugee students encountered in the absence of their families, it may often be challenging for them to decide what to study. The skepticism and reluctance about their study options, which often stem from the absence of their families, seem to have hindered young refugees' school integration to a certain extent as per my empirical data. My data further illustrate that some unaccompanied youth preferred to return to their home countries to support other family

members stranded in the conflict zone. Although they may feel safe living in a peaceful country like Norway, they may not be safe psychologically because of their separation. This uncertainty impacted on their school integration to a certain extent.

Moreover, they might also be the only breadwinner of their families and would be triggered by their emotional connectedness to live in a similar situation with their other family members in the home country. The feeling of closeness with the family and the enthusiasm to share their happy and sad moments with them would indicate their upbringing in a collectivistic culture and an extended family structure. Such emotional feelings, coupled with previously discussed acculturation hassles and limited social capital, could be considered substantial challenges to their school integration.

5.4 Integration in the School Context

Integration in the school context consists of the following themes, namely common challenges and language challenges. Under common challenges, issues such as psychological distress, school dissimilarity, and a lack of school expertise and resources to address unaccompanied young refugee students' specific needs are discussed. Similarly, language barriers highlight illiteracy, technical terminologies, a lack of dominant language command, and adapted language programs.

5.4.1 Common Challenges

As indicated previously in the literature and found in my findings, school as a platform for integration, specifically for young refugees, plays a significant role in integrating them into the dominant society. One of the areas where the role of school in integration in the literature emphasized is the psychological development (Fazel, 2015; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Pastoor, 2013) that schools play for all refugee students, including the unaccompanied youths, as they function in the school environment. The role of school in facilitating the psychological adaptation, especially those with traumatic experiences, is also elaborated in my findings. For example, some of the refugee students in the present study noted that they wanted to be part of the school to be better integrated, helping them psychologically as they functioned in the school environment. Psychological distress seems to be a considerable part of unaccompanied young refugee's school integration challenges. For instance, skipping school, failing to do homework, and inattentiveness, among other things, are due to their psychological distresses, something somewhat underestimated in prominent integration

discourses. For example, the literature highlights a general lack of attendance to their psychological problems and a lack of capacity to address the root causes (Pastoor, 2015; Skovdal & Campbell, 2015).

A similar factor that often leads to school integration challenges that appear both in the literature review by scholars such as Pastoor (2013) and in my empirical data is the dissimilarity between different school systems. Although the literature does not fully describe how the school differences affect unaccompanied young refugees' school performance, my empirical data illustrate that many young refugee students have learning expectations from their previous schools. They tend to learn in the same manner as they previously used to, which often creates incompatibility as they learn in the school context. Another aspect of this challenge can be related to a structural difference between the two school systems. This kind of challenge could often be manifested through school-driven effort in the home country versus individual-driven effort in Norway. Although the literature is vague regarding how the schools cope with school dissimilarity and bolster young refugees' adaptation capabilities in the school environment, my empirical data shed some light on how the Norwegian schools cope with them. For example, school officials noted that they expended more time and changed classes for adaptation. However, it may seem impossible to predict how long it may take for the desired level of adaptation to achieve optimal school integration.

It appears that schools in Europe, not only in Norway, seem to have structural limitations to meet the unique needs and concerns of young refugee students in the school context (Catarci, 2014). In the Norwegian context, Pastoor (2015) indicates schools' incapability to address young refugees' psychological and linguistic challenges due to the lack of required resources. My empirical data likewise suggest a shortfall in school capacity in addressing young refugees' specific integration needs in the school setting and the wider community. Therefore, adapting each refugee student and providing them with the necessary tailored programs seemed to be a challenge that often led to school dropout. Moreover, as my empirical material indicates, schools' role is often related to teaching and facilitating social networks for a limited period. Unaccompanied young refugees may need long-term support both in the school context and outside to fend for themselves and start living independently. The Norwegian school system could address young refugees' individual needs more inclusively by expanding on current school integration policies and placing more emphasis on their individual needs as school is also a setting for social integration. In order to understand

integration from a broader perspective, it may be necessary to facilitate and promote integration in a broader context, such as the dominant society where young unaccompanied refugee students may have the chance of fostering social connections and building social and linguistic capitals. The school, being the "secondary socialization" of youth (Pastoor, 2013), could pave the way for broader social integration if enabling conditions are afforded.

5.4.2 Language Challenges

As my empirical data indicate, language learning was also pointed out as a challenge and concern for many unaccompanied young refugee students in their school adaptation. Language is instrumental for young refugee students to communicate and follow teaching instructions to carry on their school subjects. The importance of linguistic ability was often described as the "master key" for entering the school and the broader society. As the present study's empirical data demonstrate, many unaccompanied young refugee students struggled with language difficulty, particularly technical language terms.

This particular problem is stressed both in the literature (De Haymes et al., 2018; Seker & Sirkeci, 2015; Thommessen & Todd, 2018) and the empirical findings. The literature defines it as a specific barrier not only in school integration but also in society. Although my findings are consistent with the above assertion, they mainly vary in technical aspects; for example, terminologies and other technical terms found in textbooks were particularly described as significant linguistic challenges. Although the literature is somewhat ambiguous about the causes of language difficulties, my empirical data suggest that they mainly resulted from multiple factors, ranging from illiteracy, a lack of previous schooling, and current state of mind that are impacted by the separation from their families and limited social network in the school context and beyond.

My empirical data further illustrate the resulting consequences of inadequate linguistic ability on refugee students' school integration. One of these is the unavailability of homework support after school, which is not accessible for many, especially for those who suffer from psychological distress and daily acculturation hassles such as doing the household chores, eating healthy, training, doing homework, and sleeping, among other things. The participating refugee students demonstrated that the technical language was difficult and hindered learning other school subjects, as some did not learn technical concepts more fundamentally. The technical language can be written in particular formats and perhaps using different methods, as described by the participants, making language acquisition more

challenging for young refugee students. As the participants illustrated, the abstracts and theories require additional delineation, thus taking up extra time as the teachers unpack them for their refugee students.

Moreover, the school environment, rules, and regulations governing teaching methods in the home country may be more stringent, as elaborated previously, making schooling more challenging for many unaccompanied refugee students. For example, as my empirical data point out, many young refugee students' learning expectations from their previous educational background was often a challenge as they transitioned to the Norwegian schools because they felt that their new schools were also similar to those previously experienced in their home countries. Therefore, they did not distinguish between the two in terms of learning methods. For example, many learned in the same manner as they often did in the home countries, which often included rote learning and cramming for exams. Pastoor (2013) also argues that technical language terms taught at Norwegian schools and the dissimilarity between their schools of home countries and the Norwegian schools often pose specific challenges and may overshadow their schoolwork and hinder school integration, as indicated above.

Although many young refugees are commonly sent to intensive language classes to acquire fundamental language skills upon arrival to the host country, such as Adult Learning Centers, it may not be the case for everyone, and they may often be placed in regular classes with the natives when deemed necessary by their advisors. Their premature placement in higher Norwegian classes may create a language gap among refugee students and often cause tardiness in their learning as they may lag behind other students, as suggested in my study. Pastoor (2005), in a Norwegian multiethnic classroom, finds that minority students who do not participate in classroom discourses due to inadequate language ability to express themselves in the classroom context and ask teachers for clarifications may be excluded. As noticed during the interviews, some refugee students often remained silent and did not dare to ask teachers for clarification or support because they felt shy and nervous due to their low language proficiency. If teachers do not discern and proactively approach them, they will not be often heard, and their misunderstandings will not be identified if they do not speak up as an individual in need of additional support.

As indicated previously, their resources are limited and what some of them told me during the interviews was that a few of them used online language services such as Google Translator to

learn concepts and theories, which is unlikely to help them in fundamental ways. A suitable strategy to help unaccompanied young refugee students with their language learning, particularly technical language acquisition, would be to provide additional language support after school. It is imperative to provide such assistance to those who did not have a chance to attend school in their home countries or came as illiterate to the host society. If they do not have anyone to help them with their homework and at the same time feel the difficulty of learning the Norwegian language in a fundamental way, they are likely to lose motivation and struggle more with the schoolwork. The vulnerability resulting from separation from family, coupled with a lack of motivation due to inadequate linguistic skills and limited social network, may often account for their poor school integration and school dropout. Although teacher participants stated that they occasionally benefited from language assistants who acted as intermediaries between them and the unaccompanied young refugee students in the classroom context, more language support may be required to target their specific linguistic needs and concerns.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Concluding Remarks

As part of an academic requirement in the form of a master's thesis, this study explored the factors that hindered the school integration of unaccompanied young refugees in a southern Norwegian urban municipality. The study was conducted in a qualitative method through semi-structured interviewing, focusing on a single municipality as a case study, and the data were analyzed inductively using the thematic analysis method. The sample consisted of three main categories: young unaccompanied refugee school students, schoolteachers, and the municipality official responsible for schools in the entire municipality. This study's overarching objective was to explore challenges unaccompanied refugee students struggled with during their school integration. The study found four main challenges related to their school integration: Separation from Family, Language Difficulty, limited Social Network in the School Context, and Work and its Partial Impact on School.

Separation from family was considered one of the main challenges unaccompanied refugee students faced in their school adaptation. Having arrived unaccompanied and trying to fend for themselves after leaving their legal guardians upon reaching adulthood was a considerable hindrance to their school integration. A wide range of other acculturation hassles, including doing domestic chores while trying to keep up with school, impeded their school progress to a great extent. In the absence of their parents, many of them longed for adults who could play a parental role by providing them with necessary support such as offering homework help, among other things.

Moreover, inadequate linguistic ability, particularly technical and professional language, to follow school instructions was often cited as a considerable challenge for school integration. Given their diverse educational trajectories and different schooling backgrounds from their home country, their adaptation to the Norwegian school system was often a hindrance to their learning in the school context. Their chances of finding resources to unpack complex technical terms found in school textbooks were limited, especially in the absence of their parents, who may have helped them after school if they lived closer.

Another significant school integration challenge that was mainly brought to the fore by unaccompanied young refugee students who attended the linguistically isolated classes was the lack of social networks because of their placement in isolated classes. Because of their

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classes' nature that accommodates exclusively refugee and immigrant populations to address their specific academic and linguistic needs, they were hindered from attending mainstream Norwegian classes, which could help them build social capitals with Norwegian peers in the dominant school environment. Those who also attended the ordinary Norwegian schools expressed concerns about the lack of possibilities for building social capital, particularly bridging capital, due to mainly inadequate linguistic abilities and limited cultural knowledge in their school context.

Study participants also expressed that work after school was also a challenge that affected unaccompanied young refugees' school integration. Many students combined school with work, which overshadowed their school activities to a great extent. It was often exacerbated when they would have to share part of their money with their surviving parents in the home country. Teacher participants particularly noted that many young refugees did not keep anything for their needs. Although refugee students might not want to skip school solely to work, their limited time seemed to have affected their school integration.

In describing the concerns and expectations of unaccompanied young refugee students, the main concern included the absence of their families as they lived in the country of origin. The refugee students seemed to be preoccupied with their families, which hindered them from regularly attending school. Their expectations included building broader social and linguistic capitals by joining the Norwegian dominant school system to succeed academically and be active citizens in the broader society. It is worth mentioning that the separation from family was raised both as a challenge and concern and was a considerable barrier in their school integration because it caused them obsession and preoccupation.

Understanding the role of school in facilitating integration has been quite complicated in the literature and my empirical findings. Both the literature and the empirical findings recognized the limited role of schools in facilitating integration. My interview data suggest that schools' primary mandate was often confined to teaching refugee students and facilitating their broader social networks to a limited period. For the most part, they did not have any follow-up arrangements after young refugees left the school.

In order to support unaccompanied refugee students, their linguistic and academic careers, it may be necessary to provide them with additional assistance in the long run. Although they may not live under substitute parents or guardians after they become adults, they are more

vulnerable given their past adversity in their home country and the perilous journeys they venture into at a tender age. Such additional assistance may include providing psychological and advisory services under close guidance to equip them with the necessary tools to overcome barriers and navigate the broader society.

Although some challenges unaccompanied young refugee students face in school integration are reflected relatively in the literature, mainly describing them in a general fashion, this study sought to explore them by mainly focusing on unaccompanied young refugee students' personal experiences themselves. I prioritized listening to their *own* narratives as the primary stakeholder concerning school integration, forming the core element of my problem element. While the literature mainly focused on describing the problem from a broader theoretical perspective, this study, on the contrary, had a relatively narrow yet specific focus on their take on the issue of their school integration. This approach was more practical in exploring their integration challenges than looking at them solely from established theoretical perspectives. The qualitative interviewing took me, as the student researcher, into the lives of unaccompanied young refugee students and how they coped with integration challenges and acculturation hassles, which would not have been possible if I would have used a different research method, such as quantitative surveys or secondary data analysis. Thus, I would consider this aspect of the study a contribution to academia because it gave a closer insight into unaccompanied young refugee students' social world in a bottom-up approach.

6.2 Suggestions for Further Research

Further research could focus on a comparative exploration of school integration challenges both for unaccompanied young refugees and those who come with their families. It is essential to understand what challenges young refugees who come with their family members in the host country face in their school functioning and to what extent their integration challenges vary from those of unaccompanied young refugees this thesis attempted to investigate. Moreover, future research may benefit from a more extensive study sample, including a wider geographical area, perhaps more than one municipality, emphasizing gender balance, as this study lacks a broader representation of girls' participation in school integration. This study could not accommodate given its limitations indicated in the Methodology Chapter. This comparative study may shed more light on the nuanced nature of challenges young refugees of different classes face in their school integration and discover the challenges that might be characteristic of each category.

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