



Integration of Refugees in Austrian Universities

by

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Abstract

The flow of migration recently in Europe with high numbers of asylum-seekers influenced not only the demographic scale of the European countries, but also the governmental instrumentality through which the crisis can be tackled. In regards to higher education sector, the social dimension of higher educational institutions has consequential responsibility in response to the refugee crisis in Europe. In this study, the amplitude of the research is to investigate the various integration methods that are utilized to prepare students with refugee background for Austrian higher education. The research method is qualitative in this study where the data collection relied mainly on structured interviews. Sampling techniques target two categories, students with refugee background and educational institutions' staff.

Based on a thorough analysis of the ongoing processes that are followed by higher education sector in Austria, one method is the establishment of preparatory courses and bridging programmes, that through this research, depict the current procedures that are undertaken by higher education sector to promote the refugees' potentials. Some Austrian universities took part in initiatives to integrate refugees in their educational system. Academic and social integration is the main purpose of these initiatives to ensure the well-preparedness of refugees for further education. Thus, the retention of refugees in the education sector in Austrian necessitates the compelling integration process that facilitate the befitting procedures between the refugees and higher educational institutions.

Statutory Declaration

I, Ola Mostafa born on 27.06.1986 in Alexandria, Egypt, declare that I have developed and written this master thesis entirely on my own without any further assistance. I acknowledge that I have merely used sources that are clearly declared in the text. References and citations have been precisely adjusted to avoid plagiarism. Moreover, this master thesis has not been used for any external publishing sources.

Foreword

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Prof. Habil. Attila Pausits for his constant support during my master thesis. I highly appreciate his patience, motivation, and ample knowledge share that he willingly dedicated for the development of my thesis. Throughout the thesis writing process, he was generous with his guidance to help be better shape my research. On the other hand, he insisted that his guidance should not influence my research's development and my work should be highly independent.

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List of Abbreviations

AMS	Labour Market Service
EU	European Union
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OEAD	The Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
TUW	The Vienna University of Technology
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIKO	Universities Conference Austria
WVU	Preparation Programme for Universities in Austria

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Chapter One

Introduction

In this chapter, an introduction about the study is presented. First, the background of the study is to be presented. Second, the purpose statement of this study is explained to understand the main problem of the issue. Third, the main research question, along with the sub-questions, is stated to identify the purpose of the study's findings. The following section is the explanation of the theoretical framework for this study. In the last section, the significance of this study is highlighted through various literatures in the field.

1.1 Background of the study

The recent influx of refugees in Europe has demanded further considerations to handle this drastic change. The estimate number of refugees who have been displaced after the war in Syria and other parts of the Middle East is about 4.8 million who have sought asylum status in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq. While the number of refugees who have fled to Europe is about one million, about 300,000 refugees are displaced in Germany and around 100,000 are in Sweden which are both considered the EU's highest host countries for refugees since the crisis began (Syrian refugees, 2016).

Refugees and forced migration studies, which widely cover various sectors such as refugees, asylum seekers, internal displacement, development induced displacement, have recently considered of a critical and highly sensitive political issue, relatively after the Cold War (Castles, 2003). The scope of forced migration encompasses different aspects such as economy, sociology as well as humanitarian studies. Thus, it has been crucial among researchers to understand the complex relationship among all these aspects when it comes to understanding the issue of forced migration (Jacobsen, 2003). The aftermath of being displaced as a human being from their own home country has an impact on several dimensions in everyday life. A displaced person, regardless internal or external, has to face difficulties to adjust and adapt to new surroundings and circumstances (Paludan, 1981). Unfortunately, in many cases, this displaced person has to accept the fact that being resettled in a new setting requires time. Sometimes, people who seek asylum, for example, have to change their residence many times till they can be eventually relocated in a permanent place which results in delaying the process of adaptation.

In respect to the chronological perspective of refugees and forced migration studies, it needs to take into consideration the different definitions of refugees in literature throughout a long time span. According to the 1951 Convention in Article 1 A, a refugee is someone who:

‘owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it...’ (Hyndman, 1987)

Based on this definition, there are certain conditions and circumstances that entail the status of refugees. First, a person to be considered as refugee has to be displaced from their own home country; being internally displaced excludes them from the refugee status according to the previously mentioned definition. Another crucial aspect is the reason behind the displacement; which is being persecuted based on the race or the religion or the political view of that person. However, there might be some critical views about the generalization of such definition to include all types of refugees in different countries. One aspect to start with is gender persecution which has not been directly addressed by the former definition. Many unprivileged women are being persecuted within their own community and families which has nothing to do with their religion, race, or political views. Being considered as a weak entity, due to some cultural constraints, positions them in a situation of persecution. Another criticism to this definition is the limitation of displacement where a person is entitled as a refugee only if that person crosses borders of a specific country which in return gives no considerations to people who are internally displaced because of severe conditions.

On the other hand, one neglected aspect that is a push factor to claim refugee status is natural disasters. When a person is exposed to any natural disaster such as floods, famines, earthquakes, etc., this person has the right to seek a haven in another place where he can manage to live a peaceful life. If a country is unable to protect and save its own citizens from a natural disturbance that occur due to lack of resources or unwilling to take remedial actions, this country should lose

its legitimacy due to its malfunction towards the local citizens (Shacknove, 1985). All these factors must be attentively examined when reviews of refugee's definitions are under discussions.

1.2 Purpose Statement/problem statement

The scope of this study is mainly about the process of integrating refugees into European higher education systems. It is claimed that there are about 450,000 who are between the ages of 18 and 22 out of an estimated four million refugees. Moreover, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates that approximately 90,000-110,000 Syrian refugee youths are qualified for higher education, yet fewer than 6% are actually enrolled. In Europe, many countries grapple with the fast number of refugees coming to them and they are trying to find ad hoc solutions to the problem of helping refugees to continue their education. However, some of these short-term solutions are not beneficial for displaced refugees' students who have aspirations to stay and have a better future in the host country.

Many European countries considered this matter of refugees' integration which is called also 'civic integration' as a priority in their political agenda. Thus, access to higher education for refugees is supposed to be a crucial attempt to better integrate them in the society. Many politicians even suggest that the integration of refugees in higher education would prevent them from participating in radical violence attacks and will help them to be better citizens. This topic is a current critical issue among most of the European countries. Many stakeholders are involved in establishing constructive solutions to this dilemma. The European Union holds the responsibility towards the State Members, especially when it comes to policy-making. Other stakeholders are university leaders who should exert some efforts towards changing the organization culture of European universities that would enhance better educational opportunities for refugee students. European universities should develop strategic plans which involve all stakeholders in order to come up with a comprehensive agenda that facilitates the process of refugees' integration. Most importantly is the position of refugees both students and academic staff in understanding the dimension of their integration in the educational systems. As main stakeholders, they have to acknowledge their roles and responsibilities since they are in a better position to identify their educational needs.

Most of the relevant work that has been done related to the issue of refugees' integration is mainly with a broader focus on international students. Since the movement of forced migration started in

Europe recently, after the Arab Spring, there are few relevant articles that discuss the issue. The scope of the research is to tackle the integration of refugees who mainly come from Arab countries or Africa so that the author can easily understand their circumstances and cultural values. Syrian refugees in particular became of a huge interest for researchers in Europe due to the vast number of people who fled to Europe after the Syrian war.

In an article entitled "Young Academy wants more research into refugee crisis" by Michael Gardner, it was suggested that further areas for the research community involve raising awareness among policy-makers of research in such matter and contributing to programmes supporting refugee students and academics which foster innovative partnerships in countries affected by the crisis. In addition, the Global Young Academy, which is a research center of young scientists, has recommended that the European research community should contribute better insights into the refugee crisis. European research community must conduct more research in this area for policy-making; conceptual theory, empirical evidence and better data.

The problem statement is confined to the factors that should be taken into consideration when the process of integration for refugees is tackled. Based on statistics, there is about 25 million people who come from developing countries that are currently living in the European Union which represent 5% of the overall population. The process of integration of immigrants, or in this case, refugees, requires both parties; the host society and the refugees to understand the needs and benefits aspired from each side to ensure better integration process (Jacobs D. , 2013). Within the context of higher education, the same perspective of shared responsibility is essential to facilitate the process of integration of refugees in higher educational institutions in Europe.

It is crucial to acknowledge the discrepancies between European higher education systems and the ones in the developing countries where refugees come from. One of the main issues is how to detect the differences between both systems and be able to narrow the gap or build bridges to alleviate the transition process from one educational system to another. Investment in human capital and empowering the potentials of refugees should bring about improvement for enhanced possibilities for the socio-economic integration of refugees into the host country.

However, the challenge that is faced by foreign educational systems is to analyze the needs of the refugees and be able to fulfill them. Taking into consideration the academic and the social

dimension of higher educational institutions entails the necessity of satisfying the needs of both the students, refugees in that case, and the institution that is obliged to integrate them in the system. Understanding the differences between the academic and social potentials of refugees is a leading factor to better integrate them in the system. According to Tinto (1975), he identifies that both dimensions, academic and social ones are most of the times not correlated to determine the integration and retention of refugees or any other students into the system. In one case, it is possible to find a student who excel in his academic capacities while failing to better integrate in the social dimension of the university which could be described through student activities and participation in various extra-curricular activities within his studies (Tinto, Vincent, 1975). On the other hand, some active students can find difficulties to excel in their academic studies due to lack of time management to balance academic and social dimensions during their studies in university.

1.3 Research Questions

The research question is 'How to prepare recent Arab refugees for better integration in Austrian universities?' Within the scope of my thesis topic, I aspire to analyze the factors that enhance the retention of under-represented students who come from traumatic conditions, in that case, warfare. Being a part or a witness of war is an atrocious life experience that can dramatically change the pace of someone's life (Lifton, 1992). A person who chose to leave his country to seek haven in a more peaceful destination is more likely to be vulnerable when facing more difficulties in his life. Thus, considering the obstacles that they will face if they decide to continue their interrupted education to ensure better chances for themselves in the future is a significant challenge.

On the other hand, through my research study, I strive to understand the needs of refugees to be well-integrated in the system. There are many aspects that need to be taken into consideration in regards to student integration with a traumatic background. A crucial aspect is transition; it is a complicated process to facilitate the smooth transition of refugees from a distressful situation like war to a more structured and organized stage which is higher education. According to Schlossberg's theory of transition, the process is time consuming and need to be applied through step-by-step change with consistent adjustments throughout the whole process (Schlossberg, 1995). It is highly significant for all involved stakeholders to understand that the integration process requires both time and effort from all participants to guarantee a mild transition from war to education.

Based on the research question, clarification of all the dimensions and factors that would facilitate the process of integration as well as the obstacles that the Arab refugee students might face during their study period are to be presented. There are some sub-questions that I need to consider within my topic which are the following:

- How can refugees have access to degree/non-degree programmes in Austrian universities?
- How do national and institutional initiatives support the welfare of refugees before and during higher education system?
- What are the methods that are currently used to integrate refugees in the academic sphere in Austrian universities?
- What are the methods that are currently used to integrate refugees in the social aspect of Austrian universities?
- How do universities cooperate to prepare refugees and integrate them into the higher education sector?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

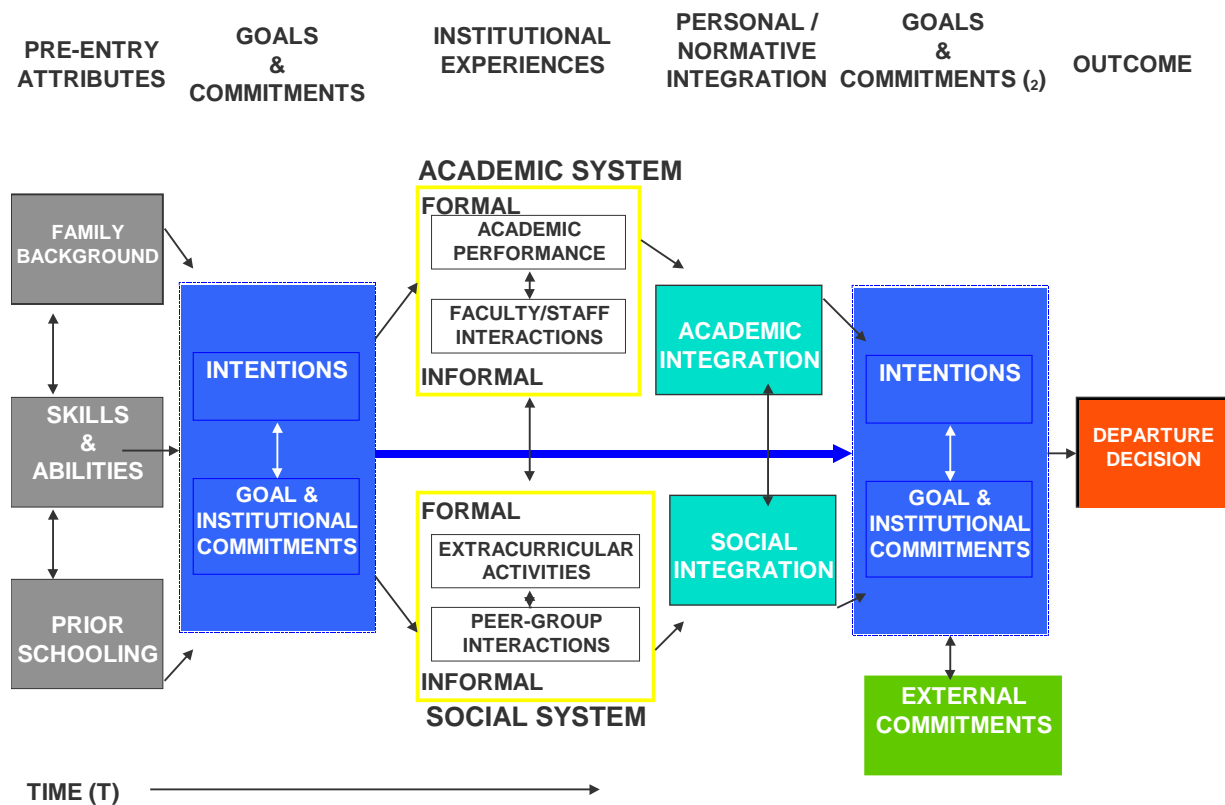
Since integration and retention are two keywords in my research question, I selected Tinto's 'Student integration model' as my theoretical framework for my research study. Throughout higher education research, many researchers have attempted to ponder and analyze students' problems (Shushok Jr, 2006). The rate of students' retention relies on several factors that are not exclusively related to the study performance of the students. Academic performance, peer interaction, campus climate as well as other crucial elements have huge impact on the retention of students in higher educational institutions. Retention of students in university setting is an ongoing process that starts with admission and lasts till graduation (Berger, 2005). Thus, university administrators, academic staff as well as students have major roles to enhance the retention rate within the university.

Based on Tinto (1975) student integration model, there are two main factors: academic and social integration. In this model, the more the student is well-integrated in the learning process as well as the university campus, the more likely the completion rate of that student will be higher. There have been many adjustments and changes that occurred to Tinto's student integration model in the past 35 years. One major enhancement has been adding other factors in relation to motivation which is goal commitment. Retention theories in general have gone through some intervention from other disciplines like educational psychology and social psychology which clearly borrowed some external factors that would affect the persistence of students with a university. Moreover, there are other theories that have been compiled, for example, attribution theory, goal setting theory, expectancy theory, self-efficacy beliefs, academic self-concept, etc. These theories have added value to better understand the reasons behind dropouts from higher education (Demetriou, 2011).

In Tinto's model, he asserted that the decision-making process of retention from both sides, the student and the institution, depends on the ability to match student expectations to institutional mission, alongside with the smooth and consistent transition of student throughout all the stages during his study period (Swail W. S., 2004). In order to successfully achieve that, through this model, we should identify clearly the needs of the students and their expectations from the university. Furthermore, universities on their part must be able to delicately select their prospect students that meet their mission and quality standards.

According to Tinto (1975), he identifies three main stages that any student passes through before they decide on the dropout procedures. The first stage is concerned about the individualistic background of the person when it comes to various aspects such as social status, individual attributes and pre-college schooling. To start with the first aspect which is the social status of the student when enrolled in the university, it is crucial to take into considerations several perspectives when one examines the relationship between the student social status and their persistence in college. Family background, for instance, posts high impact on the decision-making process of the student when considering dropping out from the university.

Figure 1. Tinto’s Student Integration Model



Source: (Tinto, 1993)

Particularly, an important factor that is perceived by some researchers is the socioeconomic status of the family during the study period of the student (Astin A. W., Personal and environmental factors associated with college dropouts among high aptitude students, 1964). It is commonly acknowledged that students who come from low income families are more prone to drop out from the university due to financial restraints. In addition to this factor, the educational level and background of the parents play a significant role in the decision of persistence of the students (Chase, 1970). The higher expectations that educated parents impose on their children enhance their chances of educational attainment. On the other hand, students who come from not well-educated or uneducated families might lose motivation to continue their studies due to lack of appreciation from the parents' side.

Referring to individual attributes, sex, personal abilities as well as race and other attributes may influence the decision of education completion. For instance, it is assumed that the higher proportion of study completion is relatively manifested in male students' population more than females (Astin H. S., 1972). Due to financial and social pressures, many female students tend to drop out from universities. On the other hand, students who belong to a certain race or ethnic minority tend to leave education because of being not a 'social fit' with the environment of their educational institutions.

Past educational experiences, on the other hand, immensely depict the students' performance during their education. The qualifications and the skills that are previously acquired by the student during his school study period frame the student's abilities towards his future studies in university and his learning expectations as well (Davis, 1966). The grade performance of the students during high school is not the only measure of study success during university stage. However, it entails the students' expectations from the learning experience during college.

The second stage based on Tinto's integration model is individual commitments towards the learning process and the institution. Students' educational plans and career aspirations denote their commitments to completion of studies (Sewell, 1967). Based on students' educational plans, the choice of higher education is decided to fulfill career paths. Many students consider the current needs of the labour market, and the demands as well as the supply of jobs. On the other hand, the choice of higher education might bring about prestigious image in the family perspectives. Family pressures and expectations can shape the students' commitments towards specific fields of study.

Similarly, the students' commitment towards a particular institution presumes their intentions to continue their studies in this specific institution till graduation. Making decisions regarding enrollment in one higher educational institution is relevant to different factors. Some students choose certain universities due to their ranking and reputations in a specific discipline. In other cases, the choice of university is based on previous experiences from relatives or direct family members who attended in certain universities. Others choose educational institutions in regards to their residence and the location of the intended university. Regardless the reasons behind the choice of the institution, students should demonstrate their own commitments towards the completion of their studies.

The final stage is the integration process which is divided into two different processes: academic system and social system. Based on Tinto's model, academic integration encompasses grade performance of the students as well as their intellectual development. Students' progress and grade performance would entail the willingness to proceed with their studies. Motivation as an outcome of study success plays a vital role in student's persistence.

On the other hand, social integration of students within the institution draws clearly an inclination from the student side towards completion. The established interaction channels for communication between students and university staff could increase possibilities of students' persistence. Student-professor relationship has a tremendous impact on the study progress of students. Moreover, easy access of information and availability of student support from the institution provide students with more confidence in their study progress. Peer relationships among students will strengthen the bond among students and enhance the spirit of community learning.

1.5 Significance of the study

Based on the framework introduced earlier, one of the main priorities is promoting equity, social cohesion and academic integration. Consequently, it is to be interpreted that facilitating access to refugees' students in European higher education fulfill this priority. The achievement of equity in higher education can be processed on the European level through exerting more efforts to limit the constraints facing refugees to access higher education. On the other hand, national and institutional initiatives should pave the way for reformation in policy documents based on their best practices in such matter (Miles et.al, 1995). Higher educational institutions should take into consideration when designing and implementing policies the fact that these new policies should align demand

and supply of higher education with the actual characteristics and needs of refugees' students. That's why, it is a must to call for the real involvement of refugees' students as main stakeholders to decide on their aspirations from receiving education in European universities and their needs based on their educational background and potentials.

Another priority that is pushed by European policies is diversification in higher education. Thus, many Member States have established a variety of educational programmes that would serve a wider range of students from different backgrounds, for example creating more vocationally-oriented non-university institutions aside from research universities (Teichler, 2008). For instance, since the late 1960s several countries decided to develop binary or multi-type systems to account for institutions' different missions.

Diversity as a concept might cast further burden on educational institutions to be able to deal with a set of quite different needs of students. Referring to refugees' students in particular, some scholars will argue that these students should be considered a part of the international student community to avoid a sense of discrimination. On the other hand, others would argue that refugee students have special needs as an outcome of forced migration. For refugees, there are some educational and professional goals towards the reconstruction of post-war situation in their own countries. Consequently, some specific educational needs, in that case, might be considered by higher educational institutions to fulfill the special educational requirements that are expected from those students (Birnbaum, 1983). One of these needs that are expressed by the OECD (1973) is the introduction of different types of degrees that serve their educational needs, for example, the establishment of more short cycle educational programmes which have more vocational approach.

To frame the issue from a humanitarian point of view, we need to examine how different scholars addressed the definitions of refugees. One sociologist examined the issue from a migrant point of view. Clifford Jansen (1969) identified immigration as an issue that exists in different disciplines. He stated that 'it is geographical aspect where human move across space, influencing and changing the environments of both the places of arrival and of departure; it is also demographic, since it affects the structures of the populations at both origin and destinations; it is economic to the extent that many shifts in population are due to economic imbalances between areas; it may be political problem, where states feel the need to control or restrict departure or entry of international migrants and refugees; it involves social psychology in as much as migrants' motives for leaving and their

problems of adapting to the new host society have to be studied; and it is a sociological phenomenon since the social structure and cultural systems, again both in the places of origin and arrival, are affected by migration and in turn affect the migrants themselves' (King, 2002) .

Refugees are deemed to be people who have undergone a violent 'rite' of separation and unless or until they are 'incorporated' as citizens into their host state (or returned to their state of origin) find themselves in 'transition', or in a state of 'liminality' (Harrell-Bond et. al, 1992). This transitional stage has not only legal constraints when it comes to the refugee's status, but also a profound impact on the social, psychological and economic level.

In regards to the circumstances that refugees came through, the involvement of higher educational institutions is compelling. As a necessary response to the refuge crisis, universities have the responsibility to establish a welcoming environment for refugees not only as student but also as a newcomer. Since EU countries are deemed as immigration countries experiencing current migrants flows from Africa, many policies have to be issued so that refugees can be well-integrated in the system (Wrench et.al, 2016). Referring to higher education sector, national and institutional strategic plans have to incorporate the inclusion of the recent migrants as a means for investment in the human capital.

Chapter two

Literature Review

In this chapter, the issue of integration of refugees is investigated through literature. There are many aspects that correlate with the purpose of the study that has been introduced in this chapter. Literature review about underrepresented students, resilience, integration, and retention is presented to frame the issue in literature.

2.1 Underrepresented students

Many concerns have been raised to address the issue of fostering underrepresented students for the sake of retention in higher education. In consideration of this issue, many factors have to be thoroughly scrutinized when tackling the issue of underrepresented students in higher education. On the one hand, the role of higher educational systems as well as institutions is vital towards the retention of underrepresented students. On the other hand, social and financial aspects are to be taken into considerations since they have ample impact of the decision of drop out among underrepresented students.

Although the access rate of underrepresented students in various higher educational institutions is increasing rapidly recently, large number of these students are not well-equipped to succeed academically in college. Many of these underrepresented students encountered arduous learning experience during schooling period. Even though, they managed to graduate from high school and receive their graduation diploma, they lack indispensable qualifications and skills that will allow them to be well-prepared for college learning experience (Kinzie, 2008). It is stated in the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) that almost 29 percent of the freshmen students in four-year colleges as well as universities on one hand, and 41 percent of the students who are enrolled in community colleges on the other hand, demand remedial education (Parsad, B., & Lewis, L., 2003).

A variety of factors have an influence on the decision of retention among underrepresented students. Some of these aspects have direct relation to individual ordeals and for others, it has institutional reasons (Eaton, 1995). Other common issues related to persistence of underrepresented group of students are background characteristics, previous academic knowledge, characteristics of educational institutions (Astin A. W., How “good” is your institution's retention rate?, 1997). In order to be able to identify the reasons behind dropouts among underrepresented

groups, we need to meticulously examine some of these factors since the intention of the students to continue their education is not solely a valid proof that they are able to achieve study success.

One of the crucial variable that can determine the persistence of the students who come from unprivileged background is academic preparedness. Many aspects as student's high school rank, first-year college grade, and self-evaluation are critical indicators for the retention of students and the study success (Neal, 2004). In addition, parental educational background and their motivations towards their children to continue their educational as personal achievement is another aspect that has a prominent role in prospect student retention for underrepresented group (Allen, 1999). When parents, even belonging to underrepresented groups, have completed their education, it definitely contribute to the possible chances for their off springs to attain educational opportunities if accessible.

On the other hand, some individual characteristics can be a reason to either retain or drop out from higher education (Terenzini, 1996). Besides the parental experience, the students' awareness of the importance of education attainment is crucial to be prepared for universities. Among their peers, they need to share the value and the foremost mission of higher education. Understanding the importance of educational achievement in various higher educational institutions is a core asset for the motivation of this group of students for their completion rate. Another individual aspect is the self-motivation of these students towards higher educational system. Some students have the will to study, however, they cannot cope with the organizational culture of specific higher educational institutions.

Most significantly is the role of higher education system and institutions to support underrepresented students. Academic as well as social reinforcement that are practiced through different higher educational institutions have an immense impact on the educational choice of underrepresented students (Harris, 2007). The unsolicited underpinning of faculty as well as administrative staff provides assistance to students from underrepresented groups. Underrepresented students have less confidence in their educational potentials, thus it is highly required that they receive academic counselling services in order to boost their capacities for better educational attainment. Moreover, the administrative staff can provide help when it comes so the admission process and financial aid if possible when needed.

2.2 Resilience

Student retention is not merely confined to the push factors that can result from student's inability to overcome academic hurdles. There are other factors that can affect the student retention's decision. Resilience is one crucial factor that is by all means relevant to refugee's dilemma. Resilience is an active process that includes positive adaptation in regards to crisis circumstances. Most of the empirical research that has been conducted over resilience in the recent decades focused on selecting the protective factors through which one can understand the protection asylum process. Some researchers urged to acknowledge the underlying factors that cause the positive outcomes after the resilience experience. The specific attention that has been drawn on the indispensable factors that result in positive benefits as the aftermath of the resilience circumstances is considered significant for the advancement of the resilience theory and the resilience field of research in general so that through these identifications, more prevention and intervention plans can be formulated as an effective solution for individuals encountering adversity (Luthar, 2000).

Students at risk in those specific situations where they seek haven in a safe environment aspire for more facilities than a convenient shelter. As an outcome of war, these students were forced to leave their education that not be exposed to any learning experience for long time. Thus, the essential decision that has to be made by students at risk after they seek a safe space, is to find alternatives solution to stop their interrupted education stage. The predicaments that they have passed through bestow them with strength and motivation to end the distress. In that case, it is the focus on the elements that can eliminate the aftermath of the individual' crisis.

There are some common features that can be identified among at risk-group of people. One factor is personality character, a person's attitudes towards a personal dilemma differs from other personalities (Catterall, 1998). In some cases, the outcomes of the crisis result in severe depression and lack of interest to proceed with life in general. However, the persistence of the at-risk individual to cause a positive change in his own situation can immensely affect the resilience process. Although war situation is overwhelming to many people, there are possible solutions that a person can alter the situation for his own benefit if there is the positive will. In many cases, students after facing a dilemma will choose to surrender to their own distresses and will lose their motivation to proceed with their education.

Other factors that were identified that are commonly relevant to resilience are environmental characteristics, parental behavior, relation with educational institution, teacher support, student engagement, sports, and community support (Wang, 1994). To start with the educational environment, it is to be discussed that it is a significant indicator for the retention of the student. This factor reflects the social and emotional needs of the student during the study period.

Organizational fit is an aspect that is not considered crucial from the university point of view. Some universities apply entrance exams system to select qualified students in regards to academic excellence but not providing considerations for the aptitudes of the students and the resemblance between the students' needs and the institution's aspirations from its graduates. There are three main mechanisms where the educational environment can promote resilience: caring relationship, high expectations and participation opportunities (Benard, 1991).

Parental behavior and support assuredly affect positively the resilience process of the students. Parents can reflect the student strengths and skills through their constant participations in activities. Their meaningful role can be asserted through establishing enduring bonds with the educational institutions (Greenberg, 2003). Similarly, the vigorous relationship constructed between the student and the educational institution entails the perseverance of the student to prolong his studies which results in better retention rates. When the educational vision of both the university as well as the student meet the same expectations, and follow the same direction, the ultimate educational achievement will be satisfactory for all stakeholders in the learning process.

Student engagement in the learning process adds enormous value to the student stage of resilience. The sense of belonging of the student can contribute to the retention of the student in the educational institution for longer period. When a student shares his own skills and talents, not only within the academic context, he can contribute to the welfare of the institution. Life stressors and personal dilemma can be mitigated through the engagement of the students in the educational environment. They can distinctly perceive their personal problems through the active engagement in the learning process. Handling educational difficulties of other students, having leading roles, and sharing in a decision-making process will eventually add value to the student resilience' experience.

2.3 Integration

Integration has been dealt with in sociology in the past decades to facilitate group harmony within the diversity context. It is a matter of compromises that are exerted by different group members to empower the conformity of different groups. To understand what integration is, we have to define the term in various contexts. In Merriam-Webster, integration is ‘incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups (such as races)’. While in Cambridge dictionary, it is ‘to end the separation of people by race, sex, national origin, etc., in an organization or in society’. In other dictionaries, it is described as ‘incorporation of new elements in a new system, or to help to co-ordinate the activities of several organs, for a harmonious working environment’.

Taking this into consideration, the term integration is affected by both internal and external factors. The people involved in the integration process and the people who are to be integrated have to work in line to reach the desired outcomes of proper integration. On the other hand, external factors that can influence the process of integration have to be considered carefully; the setting where the integration process takes place is crucial for better integration results (Hall, 2013). For instance, if the integration process is directed to a certain group of people who share the same values and cultures, it is important to bear in mind involving the original cultures of this group. It will not be effective if the setting is only directed towards the desired integrated cultures since the integration process has to be gradually processed.

In the past decades, sociologists have focused on the idea of integration as a compilation of smaller units that will eventually fit in a social pattern (Landecker, 1951). To achieve this, one must analyze the differences among group members and acknowledge the factors that will assist the progress of integration. It is more challenging to identify the needs of the minorities and fulfill them in order to prepare them for integration in a bigger unit, in other terms in the host society. In that case, concerning education for instance, competency’s analysis on the current qualifications of the target integrated group has to be conducted. On the other hand, the ‘bigger unit’ has to be aware of their needs and gaps that they require to fill to be able to embrace the new integrated groups with fruitful outcomes.

There are four types of integration: cultural, normative, communicative, and functional integration (Landecker, 1951). To start with cultural integration, the concept is derived from some cultural

features as ‘universals’, ‘specialties’, and ‘alternatives’ (Linton, 1936). Understanding the discrepancies among these three terms is achieved through drawing the relation between universal and specialties among several cultures to better formulate a well-integrated set. On the other hand, the alternatives are the scale where other distractors appear to hinder the full integration process. Thus, it is to be suggested that when alternatives are less to find, the better for the integration process to be functional.

Normative integration, on the other hand, is measured in regards to the relation between standards and people. The scale of measurement is based on the degree of conformity between the action and the intended norms. In other words, the person abides by certain norm and values that are shaped by a given society. The person in returns decides based on personal values to follow these norms to fit in moral community (Angell, 1974). As a result, when a person adheres to the disposed norms, it is more likely that he behaves according to the expectation of a certain society.

When it comes to communicative integration, the language methods, verbal or non-verbal, used for communication among group members will determine the successfulness of the integration process. While the communication network is crucial for integration, the intention of the intended group to improve their interpersonal skills have vital role. On the contrary, social isolation is a recurring symptom of random communication among certain groups.

Referring to functional integration, it is to be depicted as the ‘mutual interdependence among the units of a system of division labor’ (Landecker, 1951, p. 338). The more the different units are consistent to work together, the better outcomes to be expected from this process. This type of integration was better explained through the interdependence of the division labour (Hawley, 1994). According to A.H. Hawley, the interdependence phenomenon has many aspects; specialization of specific labour reflects the communication needed and lead to functional integration. In other words, the specific functions that correlate a group of workers entail how the integration process can smoothly take place.

2.4 Retention

Many studies have been conducted in undergraduate retention in higher education. It has been observed that around half of the students who enroll in the university manage to graduate in time (Swail W. S., 2004). There are many obstacles that face current students during their study period

and delay the process of graduation in return. Although the rate of university is higher in comparison to past decades, the completion rate is lower due to various factors. Students' aspirations to join a prestigious university, in some cases, negatively influence the retention rate since there is lack of fit between the educational institution and the student. Thus, there are some universities that require personal interviews with students who intend to study in this university.

Based on a study that has been conducted by Yorke (1999), a questionnaire for students' retention received 2151 responses from both full-time and part-time students who dropped out from university. According to the responses, it is stated that:

‘The older entrants were about one-half as likely as their younger peers to make the wrong choice of field of study, and were less likely to be dissatisfied with accommodation. These differences are possibly attributable to: (a) greater maturity, producing a clearer view of what they wanted to achieve in higher education; and (b) having roots in communities and less transience in their accommodation. The older students were more likely to experience financial difficulty, to suffer from the demands of employment while studying and to be responsible for dependents (for some students, these are connected). Just over one-half of Yorke's more limited sample of part-time respondents emphasized the demands of employment while studying as influential on their withdrawal, with the needs of dependents, the weight of the workload, financial difficulty and some organizational problems with the programme all being cited with a frequency of between one in five and one in four. These part-time students were predominantly aged 25 or older, presumably with commitments outside higher education to match.’ (Yorke, 2004, p. 21)

As explained in this study, the reasons for departure vary among students. For some students, the wrong university choice was a strong reason for them to realize that they do not fit the organization's cultures and they do not meet the requirement that enable them to graduate within the allocated study period. For others, it is the sense of belonging to the new the environment where students in many cases they have to travel to pursue their education. When they lack the emotional support from families and friends, they can perform less in their studies. Another highly impact factor is also the age of the students; older students have less completion rate due to various factors. Some of them have financial distress since they have dependents and responsible for their families.

Social integration posits compelling factor that affect student's retention. When he student is comparable with the institution's culture and is a fit in the social context, the possibility for completion on time is respectively higher. According to Tinto (1975), he identifies some factors that influence student's retention:

'Given individual characteristics, prior experiences and commitments ... it is the individuals' integration into academic and social system of the college that most directly related to his continuance in that college ... Other things being equal, the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college system, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion.' (Tinto V. , 1975, p. 96)

There are some factors that define the scope of success and retention of students. The following are factors identified by Swail (1993):

- Academic preparedness: Although entry requirements differ from one educational system to another, some basic skills are required from college students to be able to cope with needs of university educational level. In such manner, when it comes to refugees' students, most of them come from totally different educational systems which do not have that much in common with higher educational system in Europe. Referring to curriculum and learning outcomes, they are also perceived from different perspectives of the native academia. Many students, especially coming from developing countries, lack some essential skills like academic writing, critical thinking, analytical reading and others. Thus, the discrepancy between the educational systems is a burden that the host universities have to take into consideration while accepting refugees' students.
- Campus climate: Campus integration is a critical aspect that even local students face as a challenge in the beginning of their studies. Some institutions take the responsibility to provide student support and plan campus tours which will facilitate the process of integration for new comers. However, the case of students with refugee background requires different perspective of integration. It is not only a matter of providing assistance to students to overcome culture shock, but also it is about how to provide them with proper guidance that help them be part of the new system since they are not just

exchange students who are studying for a certain period of time then they have to go back to their own countries. Universities hold the responsibility to integrate these students within campus and to prepare them later for more profound integration which is within the entire community. Thus, all stakeholders within the universities are required to proactively take part in integrating refugees on campus.

- **Commitment to educational goals and institutions:** It is crucial to closely relate and maintain a strong relation between educational goals of students and the general mission of the institutions. To guarantee better student performance and higher retention rate, institutions should be able to understand the needs of specific students like refugees. Some argue that it is not preferable to establish special degree programmes to refugees to avoid segregation issues. Thus, taking into consideration the different educational backgrounds and expectations of refugee students and include these needs in the current mission of the institutions would boost the students' progress.
- **Social and academic integration:** The process of social and academic integration of refugee students is a priority that universities have to aspire for. The learning environment in the university has to be highly motivating for refugee students through the involvement of academic, administrative staff, and local students. A significant implication of students' commitment to excel and finish their studies relies on the level of integration acquired by the students through the universities regulations and practices.
- **Financial aid:** Another important incentive that would increase the access of refugee students to higher educational institutions is the availability of financial aids provided by the country or even the universities themselves. In the case of refugees, the financial status is quite complicated process. It definitely differs from one host country to another but still this is considered one of the most significant challenge that face refugee students when they decide to continue their education.

Chapter three

Methodology

In this chapter, the overall description of the research design of this study is explained with justifications. In addition, the choice of the research method, qualitative or quantitative or mixed method is being cleared with valid reasons. On the other hand, the data collection methods and venues are to be identified to understand the flow of the process during the research study.

3.1 Research design

According to Cresswell 2012, he identified eight types of research designs which are experimental design, correlation design, survey design, grounded theory design, ethnographic design, narrative research design, mixed method design, and action research design. Since the purpose of this study is to evaluate the current procedures undertaken by Austrian higher education system to integrate recent refugees' students in their universities, the research design has common features between two different research designs, grounded theory and ethnographic designs.

First, the integration of refugees in higher education as a research has not been well-studied in previous settings. Thus, it could be stated that the appropriate research design for this study is 'Grounded theory design'. A grounded theory design could be defined as 'a systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or an interaction about a substantive topic' (Creswell, 2012). The conceptual framework that is used in this study is created to examine the integration of international students in a new educational setting (Tinto V. , 1987). After thorough research, no theoretical framework was found that is designed specifically for students with refugee background.

Through this study, the research design relies on a relevant framework that has similarities with the case study intended to be investigated. The outcomes of this study should draw a clear image on the discrepancies between integration of international students who chose willingly to study in a different educational setting and refugees who were forced to immigrate to another country. Consequently, this study could be considered as a grounded theory research design since the results and findings of this study should establish a new theory to understand the process of integrating refugees in the Austrian Higher education system.

Second, the same study can be identified as ‘Ethnographic design’ which is ‘qualitative research procedures for describing, analysing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group’s shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs, and language that develop over time’ (Creswell, 2012). In this research, specific target group is being investigated which is ‘Arabic refugees’ who recently arrived in Austria after the Syrian war. Thus, a group of people who belong to the same culture and share certain values are the aim of this study.

Within this study, the expectations of students who come from Arabic countries after facing a traumatic situation towards the Austrian higher education system are observed as well as the satisfaction of the current university students from refugee background. As a result, the research design can also be depicted as a process of observing certain group of people so that we can understand a specific phenomenon which is integration is that perspective.

Another aspect is the choice of qualitative research for this study. Qualitative methodology refers to research that is designed to produce descriptive data which could be deduced from people’s words, written materials, or observed behaviours (Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M., 2015). Qualitative method as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2005) as in their Handbook of Qualitative Research:

‘Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.’

(Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S., 2005, p. 3)

In reference to this definition, the research of this study about integration of Arab refugees is concerned about understanding the perception of the process of integration from the students and observes their attitudes towards the current procedures followed by different institutions to promote integration in higher education. Thus, the choice of qualitative method for this study is adequate to the nature of the research.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection process is ‘circle of interrelated activities best displays this process, a process of engaging in activities that include but go beyond collecting data’ (Creswell, 2012). The set of activities that are followed in this process focuses on either a site or an individual or a group of people who share the same values or certain characteristics. The sampling process is done purposefully where specific category of people is the target of the data collection process.

There are three main stages that a researcher has to go through while collecting data. The first stage is recording information through conducting interviews or focus group meetings. Moreover, documents analysis is another approach to gather data for a specific purpose. The second stage is to explore field issues such as accessibility to a specific organization to collect data or ethical issues. The last stage is storing data where a researcher, in some cases, needs to categorize and organize the data to be available whenever required for analysis (Creswell, 2012).

In this thesis, the data collection process as well followed the same pattern mentioned above. In the first stage, recording information has been done through conducting individual interviews with students who come from refugee background and have the willingness to continue their studies in Austrian universities along with current students who already have their asylum-seeking status. Another target group was administrators and professors that deal with recent students who are refugees.

The second stage is exploring field issues related to the scope of research. Since integration of recent refugees in Austria in general has been a tremendous challenge, it is quite an obstacle to integrate refugees in Austrian higher education as well. Thus, one of the main problems that encounter my research is accessibility of data and sample to interview. Many universities have not been cooperative to share their own data or perspective about integration of refugees in their institutions. After an interview conducted with Mrs. Samira Seferovic from Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz, she provided me with a list of emails for twenty-three coordinators from MORE initiative (which provide courses for refugees who want to continue their education). Unfortunately, not a single reply has been received from any of the twenty-three coordinators which has a negative impact on the research progress.

On the other hand, ethical issues are an implicit hurdle during my research since in some cases revealing data or information about refugees is perceived as a discrimination act towards a group of people. Some students with refugee background refuse themselves to reveal their identity as a refugee since they avoid to be categorized with a specific entity.

The final stage of data collection is data storage where the data collected has to be classified into different themes in accordance with the theoretical framework followed in this research. In relevance to the scope of the research, the data collection process takes place through three different phases. The first phase is to examine the background of the students in regards to their family background and educational background as well. The second phase of collecting data is to evaluate the commitment of the students towards their educational goals as well as educational institutions. Most importantly is the phase of integration process which is divided into two themes; academic and social integration.

Interviews are designed for three target groups; students, administrators and professors. In all interviews, the three main categories that have been explained above are included in the set of questions for each target group. The time allocated for each interview is about 45 minutes. Many interviewees have shown meritable interest in the research topic that encouraged them to add more relevant valuable information to the research questions. During the process of conducting interviews, some questions were refined to correspond to the different perspectives of interviewees. The following table show the number of interview's participants by their roles.

Table 1. Table of interviewees

Role	Institution	Interview method
Director	University Preparation Programme Vienna	Personal interview
Director	UNIKO	Personal interview
Education consultant	Quali-Fair Vienna	Personal interview
Education consultant	Quali-Fair Graz	Skype interview
Grants officer	OeaD	Personal interview
Student counsellor	Student Union Vienna	Personal interview
OLIVE coordinator	University of Vienna	Personal interview

University administrator	University of Vienna	Personal interview
Language teacher	University Preparation Programme Vienna	Personal interview
Four university students	University of Technology Vienna	Personal interview
Four pre-college students	University Preparation Programme Vienna	Personal interview

When it comes to the recoding tools, a personal laptop was used to record the data during conducting interviews. Interviewees were asked beforehand if they are willing to have a recorded interview to insure the credibility of the information provided during the interviews. Some interviewees preferred not to have recorded interviews in order to have a more relaxed setting without pressure. Some interviews were conducted through skype because of the far location of the interviewees. Recording interviews through skype was challenging to some extent.

3.3 Sampling Strategies

Sampling methods in both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used interchangeably. However, there are some discrepancies in some features when conducting a specific type of research. Some issues to be considered are sample size and selection procedures depending on the nature of the research. To start with, selection of the target sample is critical approach that requires meticulous considerations in regards to the field of study. The purpose of the sampling methods is to draw a generalization upon a represented sample of certain population. The most common approach of sample selection is random. There are two types of random selection; stratified random sampling and area random sampling which allow more thorough analysis for a subgroup which eventually draw better results (Marshall, 1996).

On the other hand, the aptitude of the sample size for qualitative research is depends on the relevant judgement for the specific qualitative research. In qualitative research, the sample size can be considered too small or too large based on the intended purpose of the study. It could be adequate to have a sample size of 10 which is suitable for certain kinds of homogeneous or critical case sampling. However, the same sample size could fail to attain the needed findings for a complex

phenomenon or in the case of grounded theory as well. In other cases, it can be even a big sample when it comes to narrative analyses (Sandelowski, 1995).

In this research, the method of sampling used is purposeful where the participants are the most relevant and active sample relevant to the research questions. Based on the theoretical framework for this research, participants have been selected. Thus, there are three main target groups that take part in the sampling process for this study. The first is students from refugees background where there are two main categories; students preparing themselves for higher education and students who are already enrolled in Austrian universities. The second sample group is administrators in both bridging programs and universities. Finally, professors who can assess and evaluate the integration process on campus.

3.4 Data Analysis

In qualitative data analysis, mass number of words that are produced through interviews or documents must be described and summarized in order to draw a relevant conclusion. Hence, it is the main task of the researcher to seek relationships between different themes among the variables in the intended study. These variables can be categorized according to the observational behavior among certain group (Lacey A., Luff D, 2007). The interpretations that should be deduced from the data are coherent with the theoretical framework. Data analysis process is derived from the codification of data available through which research findings are realized based on the correspondent relationships among various themes within the research.

Data analysis process follows five stages so that a researcher can successfully attain reliable findings (Miles M, Huberman A., 1994). The first stage is *Familiarization* where the researcher is immensely exposed to the collected raw data through listening to recordings of interviews, reading transcripts, and examining further notes if available. Next stage is *Identifying a thematic framework* when the main purpose is to identify the main issues or themes through which the data can be analyzed. The categorization process of the data into specific themes relies on the theoretical framework and research questions that determine the data collection methods. The result of this stage is to code data under certain categories to retrieve data for further exploration. Moreover, *indexing* is another process where the data is coded based on identified themes with short descriptions for index headings. The fourth stage is *Charting* where key themes are rearranged into charts where the data is selected and introduced under relevant themes. Final stage is *mapping and*

interpretation when data is analyzed within authentic typologies to locate logical relationship among distinct data.

In relation to the theoretical framework, the data acquired is divided into three categories; personal and educational background, educational commitment, and integration process. Thus, the interview questions and other data collection methods revolve around these three main themes. There are subcategories for each theme identified to be able to examine minor details and make fruitful use of the data. Numerical codes have been given to the variant responses from participants in reference to the assorted key themes.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

In this chapter, the findings and results that are interpreted from the data collected is presented. The results are classified in accordance with the theoretical framework used for the study. The different sections are student background, educational commitment, academic integration, social integration, and educational institutions' initiatives.

4.1 Student background

- **4.1.1 Individual Attributes**

In the light of the significance of the impact of the student's background, it is crucial to underline the different facets that constitute the pre-college experience of the students. One of the aspects is the age difference and how it could affect the motivation of the student towards their educational goals. Another aspect is the country of origin and the background culture of the student that abundantly formulate the student's expectations for their studies. In addition, family conditions and support for the student play a vital role in shaping the decision of the student's education; for instance, institution's choice, specific field of study, or even retention in education. Equally important to these factors, which is closely related to the research topic, is the asylum-seeking status of refugees when they intend to continue their education. There are many obstacles that face refugees when they decide to join higher education because of their status in several European countries.

To begin with the impact of age difference on the educational progress and retention of students, it is more expected that the motivation of nontraditional students (25 years of age or older) is considerably higher than traditional students (less than 25 years of age) (Howard, J. R., Short, L. B., & Clark, S. M., 1996). In the case of refugees, the target research group, they were equally distributed among both different student's groups; traditional and non-traditional students.

Table 2. Table of students' age group.

Interviewee code	Age	Category
S1	20	Traditional
S2	28	Nontraditional
S3	20	Traditional
S4	23	Traditional
S5	27	Nontraditional
S6	27	Nontraditional
S7	26	Nontraditional
S8	22	Traditional

As shown in the table above, four students belong to the category of traditional students where their age ranges from 20 years to 23 years, while the other four students are nontraditional students. Correspondingly, the main discrepancies that are identified between traditional and nontraditional students are in relevance to their academic performance (Eppler, M. A., & Harju, B. L., 1997). In regards to traditional students, the dire demand of the labor market to hold a university degree in order to be able to compete among other graduates for a well-paid job necessitate their decision of university's participation and retention.

On the other hand, there are other factors that motivate under-represented students to complete their own studies. Under-represented students are described to be 'achievement oriented, highly motivated, and relatively independent with special needs' since most of them hold other responsibilities besides education (Benshoff, 1992). After a period of educational interruption due to several reasons, some students decide to proceed with their educational goals one more time. However, the decision of completion is frequently associated with other personal duties that delay this process of re-entering the university.

Similarly, gender influences students' educational choice as well as their persistence to accomplish their studies. Many researchers that conducted studies on gender issues have paid great attention to the disadvantage of women in higher education (Jacobs J. A., 1996). Various concerns have been raised in literature about the low participation rate of women in higher education. On the

other hand, some argue that female students' disadvantage emanates from their educational choice perspective. Some female students choose mathematics, technology, and sciences major yet they are less than male students. More females tend to enroll in humanities and social sciences which derive from the expectations from the surrounding society or the preconceived idea that female students are not qualified enough for these field of studies (Ayalon, 2003).

Based on the conducted research, there was only one female student among the interviewees. The researcher managed to interview another female student but the recording was not clear enough, thus it was discarded. However, based on personal observations, the percentage of female refugee students is relatively low in comparison to the male refugees. Lack of appropriate educational background and culture differences could be predominant reasons behind the low participation of female refugees in higher education.

Unquestionably, there is a dire need to afford equal educational opportunities to ethnic minorities when it comes to access to higher education as well as academic achievement. It is imperious to understand the forces that foster increasing educational chances for ethnic minorities. Many factors have contributed to the low achievement rate of ethnic minorities in higher education such as high school dropout rate, academic preparedness, low socioeconomic level, and isolation from the university environment (Loo, 1986). With attention to the origin of a specific ethnic minority group, the factors that highly affect the educational opportunities of these students differ accordingly.

Most of the refugees that have been interviewed do not belong to a certain ethnic minority; they mostly are Arabs. Nevertheless, there were two students who belonged to Kurdish ethnicity. One relevant remark to that issue could be the equal educational opportunity in higher education. In Kurdish communities, although they are also considered Arabs, they value women's education and role of women in society in general. It is well-known that Kurdish society allow woman to take part in war which is considered to be unacceptable in the Middle East where they actually live. As a result, a positive indication about ethnicity among that group of students is the substantial support provided for female students that belong to this ethnic minority for educational attainment.

By the same token, the family support in regards to student retention is conceded to immeasurably induce the capacities of these students. In educational literature, the failure of students during the study period eventually causes distress among family members. A thorough acknowledgement of

the student retention reveals that ‘replicating the extended family structure within the college culture enhances the student’s sense of belonging and leads to higher retention rates’ (HeavyRunner, 2002, p. 29). It is essential to provide all types of students regardless their background a familiar environment to facilitate the learning process.

Among the participants of interview, three students out of eight currently live with their families. Having their families provide resilient support them to endure the difficulties they encounter during their different educational experience. As stated by one interviewee ‘My parents’ main reason behind their journey to Austria was to provide us with better educational opportunities’ (Student 3, 2nd of April, 2017, personal interview). For other refugees, they also aspire to complete their education in Austrian universities to dedicate their personal success to their families back in their home countries.

- **4.1.2 Pre-college schooling**

Identifying the educational qualification and skills of prospect university students is pivotal to precisely estimate the retention rate of newly enrolled students. Major research advancement was achieved to determine the possible students who may face difficulties during their study period in the university which could probably results in early dropout. There are many reasons that can be closely related with early college leave; unrealistic expectations, poor academic and social preparation, lack of financial support, low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and inadequate parent support (Hicks, 2005). Referring to pre-college educational background, all students more or less study the same subjects during their schooling period; however, they specialize in various majors when they join the university. Thus, it is essential to better analyze the potentials of these students to achieve study success in certain field of studies.

Previous educational attainment and performance indicate the feasibility of student progress during college period. One important factor that should be should be considered is the type of studies done before college period. Examining the curriculum in school-based learning elaborates the expected learning outcomes of the students (Swail W. S., 2002).

According to Tinto (1975) integration model, there are bounding antecedents that determine the previous educational of students before college period. First aspect is the type of studies that are obtained before college time.

Table 3. Table of students pre-schooling experience

Student Code	Pre-college education
S1	High school diploma
S2	B.A. in Civil Engineering
S3	First year in Medicine college
S4	High school diploma
S5	B.A. in Telecommunication
S6	B.A. in Telecommunication
S7	Two years in Computer Science faculty
S8	First year in Computer Engineering

Most of the students had previous university experience, either completed degree or interrupted study period. Two out of eight students managed only to accomplish their high school diploma. Study success of these students mainly relies on the elementary and secondary level of education obtained earlier. Early schooling system definitely prepares students for university level through having a minimum knowledge of all major subjects (Helgeson, 1977).

- **4.1.3 Educational Interruption**

Another relevant factor is interruption of education that all refugees' interviewees have encountered during their study period under the war circumstances. Students who re-enter university bear hardships with various issues such as time management, fear of failing, admission process, low self-confidence, less studying and learning skills, and fear of poor memory. Academic difficulties arise more with the students in case the period of interrupted education is longer in time (Lance, 1979). After leaving school or college, students lose their motivation and they underestimate their capacities to be able to continue their education.

For many refugees, leaving education as a consequence of war had an effect on their learning expectations. Although some of them have managed to accomplish their bachelor degrees, they cannot cope with the new studying experience in Austria because of discrepancies in educational systems as well. The gap that occurred between school and higher education, or previous degree and the new one, can reduce the academic self-concept of the students (Michie, 2001). Moreover,

the reasons behind interruption in education influenced the understanding of the student's behavior towards continuation of the study.

Concerning refugees, they encountered dreadful situations and a life-threatening journey to survive war. Confrontation of death on daily basis and personal fears caused traumatic effect on these students which eventually result in personal conflict. In some cases, leaving a family behind or even friends could alleviate the grief and the tendency to disregard future expectations. One of interviewee stated that:

‘I finished high school in 2012 and after that time, I did not study anything. Later, I moved to Turkey and I started to learn Turkish and I wanted to join the university but I did not and I came here to Austria. I go accepted in the university in Turkey but I did not start my studies there. I think almost four years that I did not study’.

(Student 6, personal interview, 25th May,2017).

Bearing in mind this situation, the student faces external factors that are pressing need and affect his educational goals. His constant movement and unsettlement caused uncertainties about his future studies. Students suffer during the journey searching for a haven to settle down and continue what they have been doing back in their countries. No educational attainment could be achieved when a student feels insecure about his life as well as his future.

4.2 Student's Commitments: Educational goals and institutions

- **4.2.1 Commitments to Educational Goal**

Major challenges that face traditional students when they join the university occur during the transitional phase from one educational system; high school to a different one which is higher education along with their discrepancies (Reid, 2008). Although it is the conventional route for many students to join higher education after the completion of high school diploma, it is challenging for many students to transfer their past learning experience and move forward to the new one, expected in university (Hsiao, 1992). Consequently, pre-college preparation is essential to strengthen the potentials of students when they move to university level.

Most of the refugees after their arrival to Austria, they only had the chance to improve their German language. They are fully aware that their foremost means to access higher education in Austria is having good command in the German language. It is a basic requirement from all Austrian universities that all students, international or refugees, should prove that their German knowledge is minimum B1 level in order to be admitted in the university. Thus, the main mission of refugees is to do their best to boost their level in the German language to facilitate their admission to any Austrian university.

Half of the refugees that were interviewed are currently students in ‘Vorstudienlehrgang der Wiener Universitäten’ (VWU) which is university preparation programme of the Vienna Universities. It is a university preparation course that under the supervision of the OeAD-GmbH (Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research – OeAD-GmbH) and in cooperation with other six universities of Vienna. There are three main goals that VWU aspires to achieve through these preparation courses provided to international students; to help with integration, provide expertise education, and act as bridge-building for those students. In this institution, international students, in general, take some preparation courses before their actual enrollment in any Austrian university. Its main role is to assist students with academic preparation for supplementary examinations that some students have to pass through before they join the university. All courses that are offered in VWU are intensive ones; mainly German language, along with English language, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History, and Geography (OEAD, 2017).

After seeking various channels to join Austrian universities, some refugees manage to apply to continue or start their studies in some Austrian universities. However, they are required to complete some course before they eventually join the university. It is mandatory for foreign students to study in VWU to study the required courses that have been suggested from the university. For refugees, it depends on each case of student which subjects he/she should study to be well-prepared for the university. Most of the interviewed students study only German language, few of them study other subjects. One student explains that ‘I only studied German here but I am planning to study physics on my own in the Summer to be familiar with the different terminology in German language’ (student one, personal interview, 29th March, 2017). Another student has to

study German, physics and chemistry to prepare herself for Medical University in Vienna (student three, personal interview, 2nd of April, 2017).

Another aspect that is relevant to the refugees' educational goals is the learning expectation that they aspire for through a different higher education system. Education has a significant influence on both the individual and the society as well. It is the rite passage for better social and economic status through which people can decrease poverty and deprived social circumstances (Swail W. S., 2000). The notion of learning outcomes explains the process of observation and assessment for a specific course. Currently, the agenda of higher education highlights the impact of outcome-based education which is considered to be more student 'centered approach for the assessment process (Harden, 2002). Thus, the acknowledgement of the expected learning outcomes is crucial, especially for students who are in a resilience conditions.

The refugees' group that has been interviewed for this research is divided into two categories; university students and pre-university students. As a result, the learning expectations of both types of students is divergent based on the stage they are in. To begin with university students, they assume that being able to accomplish a degree program will eventually results in providing easy access to labor market. Coming from third world countries, refugees have higher expectations from their study experience in Austrian university. One of the refugees studies master degree in Technische Universitat Wien (TUW) expects that being a TU graduate will provide him with better chances in the labor market since it is a prestigious university in that field of study (student 7, personal interview, 25th of May, 2017).

Quality of education is another issue that identifies the degree of commitment of students towards their studies. One factor of retention of students in higher education is the perception of students about the quality of courses provided in a specific higher educational institution. In higher education, sustainability of quality in higher education improves the rate of student satisfaction, boosts retention, supports student engagement in the educational process (Nadiri, 2009). Both perceptions, from higher education systems and students, of quality should frame the valuable characteristics of qualified education.

Referring to the perspectives of refugees, quality of education is measured through a comparison between higher education system in their home countries and in Austria. The interviewees from refugees have established higher expectations for the Austrian higher education system; taking

into account that Austria is a well-developed country. As for one student, she thinks the quality of education is good. In her opinion, it is the same like the subjects she used to study in Syria but now she studies them in German (student 3, personal interview, 2nd of April, 2017).

Another student has shared his opinion about the quality of teaching and teachers. He explains that ‘the professors in WVU have long years of teaching experience which make them aware of the best teaching techniques’ (student 2, personal interview, 29th of March, 2017). Students’ past experiences influence their evaluation of quality in different educational settings. They always rely on their personal understanding of quality as a notion and add their aspirations for more qualified educational opportunities.

Comparing past learning experience with the actual study experience is inevitable for students when they transfer from one stage to another, or from one system to a different one. Although the common trend that invaded higher education systems in the past few decades is massification, the approach that has been followed through various nations was disparate. Each national educational system carved its own means of increasing the educational opportunities for the mass (Teichler, Changing structures of the higher education systems: The increasing complexity of underlying forces, 2006). However, the question remains related to the actual learning experience of the students after being granted more educational chances than before.

Regarding refugees’ past learning experience of refugees, they come from national higher education that foster massification and free education for the public. It is totally expected from any school graduate to continue their education and enroll in universities. In developing countries, the least educational attainment that a student should acquire is a bachelor degree in order to be able to compete in the labor market. Refugees, when asked during the interview to compare their learning experiences between their home countries and Austria, pointed out that there are immense discrepancies between both educational systems. One student clarifies that:

‘My learning experience in Syria was great. It was an easy process to study in my school but the last few years in my high school was very difficult. During war time, it was very challenging to follow up with the studies as a regular student. I had to do a lot of self-studies in order to be able to succeed in my secondary school final exam. The Syrian educational system was good and precise. When I compare what my siblings study in

schools now and what we used to study in Syria, I find the syllabus is the same, there is very slight difference between both systems in my opinion.

But teaching in Austria is better than Syria because they focus here on practice while in Syria they did not. In Syria, students just study for their exams and not for long term life goals'. (student 7, personal interview, 25th of May, 2017)

For other students, the difference was mainly confined to the learning experience inside classrooms. Some students illustrate that the teaching methods in the classrooms is different. In their home countries, students are passive participants who only receive the newly given knowledge and has to study by hard for the final exams. On the other hand, their learning experience in Austria is more fruitful since they are active and take part in the learning process. Moreover, they learn new skills during the study period; not only the content of the required course, but also other learning skills such as presentation skills.

- **4.2.2 Commitments to Educational institutions**

Educational choice relies on many aspects that concern students as well as other parties involved in the decision-making (María Cubillo, 2006). A critical factor is the financial status of the student and the willingness of the family to support and invest in their children's education. In some cases, families start to think about their own savings for universities at a very early stage.

Moreover, quality of education and university's ranking is a major element that affects the student's choice. Frequently, the degrees of choice for students vary to the extent that geographical conditions can influence their decision (Reay, 2001). There many educational opportunities that are accessible for several students regardless their race, ethnic group, and even social status. However, the selection of a specific college or any higher educational institution becomes more perplexing due to the variety of alternatives for all the students.

On the other hand, some students face a situation where they are directed to a particular institution for certain reasons. A group of refugees that were interviewed has encountered a situation of no educational institution choice. These students, after showing the intention to join higher education, applied for admission in certain Austrian universities. The universities' administrations, after processing their applications, advised them to take preparation courses in 'Vorstudienlehrgang der Wiener Universitäten' (VWU). As explained before, it is an institution that is specialized in

preparing foreign students to study in Austrian universities. Thus, these students had almost no choice before enrolling in VWU, however, they definitely have the choice when they join universities based on their preferences and qualifications.

On the other hand, the second group of refugees was able to directly enroll themselves in the university. All the university students who were interviewed are registered in Technische Universität Wien (TUW). Each one of them has different reason for his choice, however, they all agreed that the ranking and well-reputation of TUW has encouraged them to choose this university over others. For some students, the decision-making process depended on recommendations from their acquaintances or friends who had successful experiences in this university.

Based on the university choice, students' study performance and retention may vary. Recently, many discussions have been raised in relation to study success and rate of degree completion in European higher education system. Although the access rate to higher education has eminently increased in the last few decades, there is only about third of the students that do not have an accomplished degree (Berg, 2005).

In fact, the urgency to be a university student to boost the welfare of the modern society is more prominent than the dire need for university graduates. Governments foster providing better educational opportunities to enhance the human capacity, even though, the supply of higher education systems is higher than the demand of the labor market.

Consequently, the role of higher educational institutions is vital to promote the facilities and services that can increase study success and retention. In this research, two educational institutions have been mentioned through the refugees during the interviews. One is VWU that prepares students to study in Austrian universities and TUW which is a university that is specialized in technology as a field of study. Referring to VWU, refugees have positive feedback about the quality of education and teaching in this institution. A refugee explains 'teachers discuss with us the laws, the lifestyle, and the different behavior between the Arabs and Europeans. They also have section for field trips where we visit important places in Vienna which help us know more information' (student 2, personal interview, 29th of March, 2017). Many refugees were satisfied with the quality of teaching and the skillfulness of the teachers in VWU. They also find that this institution provides all the support to prepare them well to the university system. As clarified by one refugee,

‘I think in WVU we learn how to cope with the university system. We learn how to take notes fast, how to follow up in a lecture, and to understand the important information. So, I feel the way of teaching is more like the university more than the school system. Also, preparing for the exam in each semester in WVU allows us to be familiar with the Austrian examination system’. (student 3, personal interview, 2nd of April, 2017)

When it come to the other institution, TUW, students believe that the role of the university is not well-supported by various facilities that would enhance their study success. One student points out that the only unit that provides assistance to TU students is the student union which encompasses volunteering TU students to help their peers (student 7, personal interview, 25th of May, 2017). On the other hand, some facilities that are offered by TUW allow some students to benefit for their own future. For instance, there is a career center for TUW students to contribute to increasing their career opportunities after graduation. They provide seminars that prepare students for the labor market. In addition, TUW organizes job fairs to connect the students with their prospect employers in the future to be aware of the qualifications and skills required to compete in the labor market (student 8, personal interview, 29th of May, 2017). Nevertheless, based on the information acquired through the interviews, there is currently no specific unit in TUW that accommodate the needs and queries of refugees who study in the university.

4.3 Academic integration

The main purpose of higher educational institutions is to establish efficient educational academic channels for students during their study periods. One of the major quality-based assessments for education is the academic credibility provided through the staff in a specific university. It is to be mentioned that students aspire to receive more facilities from a certain institution, however, the academic progress is a priority for any student who seek a university degree. Academic staffs as well as administrative ones take vital part in the knowledge transfer process along with students. Encompassing diversity in an educational institution is an unyielding aspect that requires immense considerations while delivering knowledge to students.

In-class academic experience influences the decision of persistence among students, especially in their early first years (Braxton, 2000). First impressions acknowledged from students occur inside classrooms when they first encounter the academic perspective through professors and syllabus. In some cases, students can build their own judgements about their academic learning expectations

from an early stage after university enrollment. To be considered is the difficulties that student might face during his first years in college inside classroom as well as outside. On the other hand, some could argue that time is a relevant factor to measure the readiness of the students for a certain study.

According to Tinto's (1975) student integration model, academic integration of the students depends on three main pillars; the grade performance of the students and their intellectual development, and formal interaction with academic staff for educational support. Within this study, students were asked to state their current study performance in Austrian educational institutions as well as do a comparison with their past learning experiences and grade performance in their home countries.

In addition, through the interview questions, students are asked to inform about the newly acquired qualification and skills after their active participation in educational institutions in Austria. Based on their personal experiences, what are the skills they benefit the most from their learning experience in Austria so far and how they acknowledge the benediction that result from the recent learning process. On the other hand, formal interaction with the academic staff and how do they evaluate the relationship they encounter with their professors during the learning experience.

To start with the grade performance, students have divergent views about their current study performance in Austrian educational institutions. The first group of students who study at 'Vorstudienlehrgang der Wiener Universitäten' (VWU) have explained that their grade performance during their current studies is lower in comparison to their grades in their home countries. Most of the students encounter difficulties with the language acquisition and how they can improve their language for better performance during their future studies in the Austrian universities. As explained by one of the students:

‘When I as in Syrian, I was a very good student. But in languages, I always had problems with English and Arabic too. I used to study these languages. Here, I also have the same problem. I usually do not like to study German at home. I am good at German Grammar but I am not that good with vocabulary and reading. In general, I can say that I am good and my average grades are also good. In Syria, students need very long time to prepare themselves for the exams but here it is simpler’. (student 1, personal interview, 29th of March, 2017)

As mentioned by this student, his main concern during his learning experience was the slow process of language acquisition and how that in results affects his grade performance. Other students have discussed that the new educational system assists in providing support to cope with the new learning process and that through more efforts exerted from the side of the student, one can achieve better grade performance (student 2, personal interview, 29th of March, 2017). Students understand that the distinct characteristics of Austrian education have explicitly influence their academic performance and they need to cope with these differences and deal with them for further academic improvement.

On the other hand, the second group of students who shared their actual learning experience in Austrian universities have slightly different views concerning their grade performance. One crucial factor that they have in common with the other students is the language barrier and the difficulty they face to perform better due to their lack of competencies in the \German language. As stated by one student ‘I here do double efforts to fully understand the subjects in comparison to Syria’ (student 7, personal interview, 25th of May, 2017).

Some students have explained that, based on their field of studies, they encounter difficulties during the learning process. For some, they re-read the information in the text books or from the lecture notes more than once in order to understand well the new concepts. For other students, the university system and the new learning environment influence their academic performance. One student clarifies that ‘In Syria, my study performance was good and I did not have any difficulties during my studies there. But in Austrian university, I always felt that I do not belong to the studies. Most of the tasks and assignments were challenging for me’ (student 5, personal interview, 25th of May 2017).

Referring to intellectual development, academic and social integration are to be considered to have direct effect on the learning and intellectual development (Pike, 2005). When the students is well-integrated in the university system on both the academic and the social aspects, it is to be expected to improve the students’ intellectual I development. On the other hand, the students’ apprehension of the university’s environment as well shapes the impact of intellectual development on the students (Pascarella, 1985). If the students are fully aware of the university’s environment the

required capacities that need to be previously acquired to better grasp the knowledge, higher level of intellectual development is to be expected based on that factor.

Students with refugee background intend to improve their learning experience in a faster pace so that they can increase their chances for better integration in the labor market and in the host society as well. For some students, the learning process is easier than others and the newly acquired skills have apparent impact on their educational experience. They acknowledge that the new host learning medium has obviously enriched their potentials and improve their interpersonal skills. According to one student who is yet a pre-college one, he illustrates:

‘In Iraq, all the study efforts are on the students but here we share the efforts with the institutions by attendance and participations which give us more communication skills. Another new method is variety of sources of knowledge so we do not only depend on course books to get the information as we used to do in Iraq’ (student 2, personal interview, 29th of March, 2017).

In his point of view, being an active participant of his own learning process allows him to expand his capacities. He compares his learning experience with his home country and explains that in his current studies he takes part in his own learning through class participation and attendance which is on the other hand well-acknowledged through the university system. For him, it is better that the role of the student is vital and he does not have to depend solely on the information provided to him through course books or merely lectures. Another student confirmed that being an independent learner has cultivated his learning experience and he added that he developed time management skills during his study period here in Austria which is a worthy asset to his capacities (student 8, personal interview, 29th of May, 2017)

Other intellectual skills that have been acquired by some refugees are research skills and reading skills as well. One student asserts that although he has completed his bachelor degree in Telecommunication in a Syrian university, he did have good research skills (student 3, 2nd of April, 2017). Since students back in their home countries have claimed that most of the information acquired through their study experience has been a one-side learning process. Students take notes from the lectures and study by hard the information in the course book taking into consideration

the lectures' notes from their professors. Other interpersonal skills, f acquired from the refugees, have been a result of self-study to improve their own potentials.

When it comes to the formal interaction with the academic staff, students have claimed that their current relationship with their professors is mainly inside the classroom and quite formal. However, they confirmed that they received immense support from most of their professors when help needed from their side. For other students, they did not establish themselves a communication channel with their professors since they are used to have a very formal, unfriendly interaction with previous professors in their home countries. One student clarifies that a student needs only to be very intelligent and active to be able to establish communication with the professors (student 4, personal interview, 10th of May, 2017).

4.4 Social Integration

Social integration which is the second integration model for students highlights the connection between the students and their institutions in informal contexts. Students who commit to formal academic learning as well as active participation in the social and cultural activities of the academic society in the university tend to be more persistent in higher education than others. Academic achievement and preparation for the labor market require that the students establish effective interaction with their peers and academic staff. On the other hand, alienation and being marginalized is the result of not adequately build successful communication with the students' counterparts (Torres, 2001). As a result, one reason behind student' dropping out is not being able to integrate himself in the system and the lack of support from the university side.

Measuring social integration in this study relies on three aspects; campus facilities, peer interaction, and extra-curricular activities conducted mainly for integration. Based on previous studies conducted on student retention and the direct relation with the use of facilities that are provided through the university service reveals that students with low grade performance or student who dropped out were more prone to not to use campus facilities than other (Churchill, 1981). In regards to that matter, students who tend to distant themselves from the campus services are more likely not to be academically unsuccessful. Students should increase their involvement in the learning process not only through academic aspects, but also through being active participant in the university.

The pre-college students have relatively shown less interest in campus facilities. They claim that VWU is similar to university environment, nevertheless, there are many discrepancies that they acknowledge. They do not have various support facilities as they aspire for as higher education students. Referring to VWU, facilities are not that comprehensive as similar to actual campus services. As described from one student, he said:

‘They provide some channels for meeting more locals but it requires some formalities. VWU is part of OaeD which is considered as a support for students and it can provide them with ‘Beratung’ advice in different sectors. However, I cannot evaluate the quality of this advice services since I did not try it myself’ (student 2, personal interview, 29th of March, 2017).

On the other hand, some students as mentioned before believe that the role of VWU is more limited in comparison to university services. One student explains that VWU focus mainly on how we are academically adequate to join the university and meet the basic requirements and they do not give more attention to involve the students in university-related activities (student 3, personal interview, 2nd of April, 2017,).

For refugees who are currently registered as university students, they have different point of views when it comes to university facilities. Most of the students conform that their university provide many facilities and services, not only as refugees but for all students. However, many of refugees tend not to use these facilities because of the language barrier. For other students, they were highly satisfied with the e-learning platform that provides academic facilities. TES, which is the e-learning platform for Technical University of Vienna (TUW) helped many students to organize their time and to follow up on their assignments and tasks (student 5, personal interview, 25th of May, 2017).

Another aspect that contributes to social integration on campus is peer interaction. Communication among students rather than the mere student-teacher interaction influences the student academic performance to a great extent. However, peer interaction in some cases has to be initiated by academic staff through involving the students in group or pair learning modes. Professors or teachers can use these teaching techniques to raise student motivation and involvement in the learning process (Damon, 1989). Peer interaction, on the other hand, raises the student’s self-esteem and improve his interpersonal skills.

One form of peer interaction takes the shape of student unions in the universities. Students tend to take part and share responsibilities in the educational process. Being part of such entities provide the student with sense of belonging which by all means reflects on the academic performance of the students in a positive manner. According to Webster and Sedlacek (1982), the formation of student union contributes to student retention in university. In addition, minority students, or in this case students with refugee background can use the student union to create social integration means to help them increase their sense of belonging within the university environment (Mallinckrodt, 1987). In addition, student tutors that usually occur between senior and freshmen student increase the sense of responsibility of the student and provide more room for better academic interaction.

Refugees seek to establish peer interaction with their peers not only for the purpose of academic achievement but also for social integration in the society in general. Many refugees have not enough contact with local citizens. Consequently, they show to have more tendencies to establish relationships with their peers to improve their German language as well as be more integrated in the society. Refugees who studies in VWU have shown their positive feedback about their peer interaction with their classmates. One student affirms that:

‘In last semester, we are only two students from Syria and the rest come from different countries which helped us to know more cultures. But this semester, there are not a lot of varieties, we are five Arabs, five Kosovo and one from Georgia. I can say that we have good harmony among us, we share the similar problems and interests’. (student 1, personal interview, 29th of March, 2017)

Moreover, refugees have shown interest in having more diverse classmates. Some explained that they feel more confident and comfortable in an international classroom setting. They share their experiences and educational background without feeling the difference among their classmates which reduce the tension among refugees. As confirmed by one student ‘I prefer to have classmates from different background. I prefer when I learn a new language to practice it with people who do not speak my native language’ (student 4, personal interview, 16th of May, 2017).

On the contrary, some students showed their frustration from the lack of peer interaction on campus during their study period. One student says ‘it is not easy to make close connection with my

classmates' (student 6, personal interview, 25th of May). It is quite challenging for some student to establish good communication with their peers in the university. For some students, the language is a huge barrier that does not enable them to have proper communication with their peers. For other students, it is the cultural barrier that hinders refugees from understanding the appropriate way of maintaining communication with their peers. As stated by one student:

'The relationships among my classmates were not that strong. I have noticed that here, there are no such thing as study groups or students who like to study together. I remember that I had a good contact with one Austrian student and the next day he did not even say hello to me. I only had one good classmate from Burgenland and we went out together for a coffee but we did not discuss matter related to our studies a lot' (student 6, personal interview, 25th of May, 2017).

Differences in cultures and language barrier have been the two main obstacles that deter students from suitable peer interaction. Refugees, as being a similar case to minority students, need more channels through which they can establish effective peer communication with their peers in the higher education setting to provide more integration opportunities for them.

4.5 Extra-curricular activities

Student involvement results in better academic achievement as well as strong commitments. Based on a longitudinal study, students who participate in social group work or any type of extracurricular activities have higher possibility of college retention (Astin A. W., Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education, 1984). When students are given the chance to actively take part in social activities during their study period, they tend to dedicate more time towards their academic achievement. Active students have more time management skills since they have multi-tasks and they always aspire to be committed to all activities as it was based on their personal choice.

Refugees seek more social involvement to improve their integration in the host society. They are willing to be open to new traditions and cultures to allow more room for civic engagement. Consequently, student with refugee background pursue chances that provide them with more chances for better integration in the university setting. An important aspect to be taken into

consideration is that many refugees did not encounter during their past learning experiences being part of extra-curricular activities. Many of them claim that the educational system back in their countries is a teacher-based learning system where the role of the student is limited. However, some of the interviewees asserted that extra-curricular activities are crucial and influence their academic achievement. As explained by one student:

‘Only at the beginning of the semester, they made a welcoming party for the new students and we went to a place outdoors with the professors. It was a nice event where I met new people. There is also a trip that will be organized for the students. Also, some organizations cooperate with WVU to establish some events for the students. I registered myself in an activity called ‘Burgtheater’ where I will sing. It is the first time that I do something like that but I want to try’. (student 3, personal interview, 2nd of April, 2017)

According to Tinto (1975), the first aspect that affect student commitment is the student’s background characteristics. After the academic involvement of the student during his early college’s experience, the student begins to understand and be part of the social dimension of the educational institution. Students who tend to be adequately integrated into the social and academic systems of their universities are more likely to be graduated (Christie, 1991). To focus on social integration, students can achieve that through participation in extra-curricular activities, establishment of peer interaction, and belonging to a social fraternity. Students with high commitments towards these types of engagement activities appear to prove their absolute intentions for longer retention in the university. If refugee actively take part in social activities and understand their social role in the university, they eventually increase their retention rate for longer period during their studies.

4.6 Higher Educational institutional initiatives

4.6.1 MORE Initiative

An unstructured interview has been conducted with the former MORE initiative coordinator Mrs. Nadine Shovokar in December 2016. As she clarified, there are 21 universities that participate in this initiative which are located in Graz, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, Leoben, Linz Salzburg and Vienna. This initiative has started in Fall 2015 though uniko (Osterreichische Universitaten Konferenz) which is a non-profit organization that assists Austrian universities mainly in regards

to scholarship and research. A variety of courses are provided to MORE students with more focus on German language courses. Other courses are provided from different departments and students are welcome to participate according to their preferences regardless their background. At the beginning of the program, around 2,600 students have enrolled in MORE courses while in the last Fall semester 206/2017 about 855 people register in MORE initiative (Mrs Nadine Shovokar, personal interview, 10th of December, 2016).

Through MORE initiative, refugees are allowed to enroll in different university academic courses, artistic studies and German courses as well. Students are free to choose between courses taught in either German language or English language based on their language proficiency level. Each university set a quota for MORE students in their academic courses. MORE initiative established MORE perspectives which is a platform that encourages refugees to share their own knowledge and experiences with the public. Through this platform, refugees themselves can transfer their own skills and teach different courses to others if possible which will eventually have a positive impact in the integration of the refugees in the university setting.

On the other hand, MORE initiative has acknowledged the vital role of social engagement of refugees along with the academic achievement. Thus, MORE initiative created ‘MORE Activities’ to encourage the students to be an active stakeholder and not just being an observer participant. There are a variety of activities offered by MORE initiative in different fields (MORE initiative, 2017):

- Arts and cultural events
- Sports activities like soccer which is mainly offered by the university sports institute (USI)
- Science communication
- Public lectures or panel discussions

4.6.2 The Austrian National Union of Students

Through ÖH-Bundesvertretung, all the students in Austrian universities are legally represented at public as well as private ones. This entity has been established in 1946. Students in Austrian universities are represented on three different levels. The main purpose of the Austrian National Union of Students is to politically represent the students and to seek continual improvement for

their conditions during their study period in the higher education sector. In the Student Union, free educational counseling and other facilities are provided to all the students who study at Austrian universities. Some of the services available to all the students are bulletin board, progress magazine, student union helpline, queer funding pool, funding for other projects, accommodation funding pool, ÖH social fund, student platform, student union newsletter, and ÖH insurance (ÖH, 2017).

Based on an interview conducted with an employee in ÖH, he explained that in an average of 2 to 5 refugees come to his office seeking advice for their education starting from 2014. According to his experiences with refugees, he pointed out that there are common issues that he dealt with the refugees when they sought his consultation.

One of these issues is the field of study they should pursue based on their educational background and their previous acquired degrees as well. There is the service of 'Matura Beratung' where ÖH team conduct an interview with the refugee to analyze his interests and try to advise him with the proper field of study. Another issue is the admission process where they lack information about how to enroll in an Austrian university. They usually ask about the documents required in order to be able to apply in any Austrian university. A major problem that they face is the online application form that they have to go through the online portal 'study point'. Many of them find difficulties to deal with this online platform since they either have no proper access to computer or internet services where they can upload their needed documents. For some refugees, they are not even familiar with such process and they are sometimes unable to do the online application on their own and they ask for help. Moreover, some refugees have no documents to prove their past learning experience and they ask what to do if they have the intention to continue their studies in Austria. He always advises them to bring any proof such as a copy of any certificate, university card or even lecture notes; any evidence that assures their previous study period.

Another crucial matter is the financial aid that they require to sustain a proper student life. Many refugees ask about the funding sources and financial aid that they can receive when they get the student status since by law they are not allowed to receive the social aid from the government if they become student. He informs them that they are only eligible for Austrian scholarship if they are regular university students. ÖH also provides legal advice for the students who face any

problems with any Austrian universities and it is a free service (Shirin Omar, ÖH employee, personal interview, 6th of June, 2017)

4.6.3 OeAD4refugees

Higher education for refugees is the one of the current priorities of OeAD. Therefore, an initiative has been taken to provide valuable information for refugees who seek to continue their education in Austria. The target group of this initiative is both refugees and asylum seekers who have the intention of enrollment in higher education sector. On this platform, refugees can find information about higher education in Austria in general, sources of financial aid and student accommodation options. One of the challenges for the creation of this platform is the unavailability of various translations of the information that should benefit the proper target groups (Werner Fulterer, OeAD4refugees creator, personal interview, 31st of March, 2017).

Since the language is a crucial requirement for any refugee to have proper access to higher education, in this platform, some information is available to allow refugees get acquainted with all the possible chances for German language improvement. Through OeAD4refugees platform, refugees have access to different venues where they can study German language as well as funding possibilities for their language courses if needed.

On the other hand, it has been explained that refugees have also access to academic courses in some Austrian universities and some initiative; for example, MORE initiative and Open Class for Refugees. These initiatives aim to integrate refugees in the university and prepare them for a learning environment.

Another aspect that is clearly illustrated through this platform is the several preparatory university programmes that are available for students who aim to continue their education. In some cases, students are not eligible to directly enroll themselves in the university due to either lack of language proficiency or pre-requisite supplementary subjects for a certain field of study. In that sense, the university usually recommends that the students should join on of these bridging or preparatory programmes that would improve their potentials so that they eventually can register themselves as regular university students. The university preparation programmes ‘Vorstudienlehrgang’ are officially available in Vienna, Graz and Leoben.

Furthermore, there are preparatory programmes that are offered by universities of applied sciences as an alternative educational chance for refugees. For instance, Technikum Wien Academy offers two different preparatory programmes; the ‘Pre-College Program’ and the ‘Pre-College Program Extended’. Through these programmes, students are prepared for the entry examinations and improve their academic qualifications in order to be able to enroll in Technikum Wien Academy or any other university of applied sciences.

In Linz, there is a German Preparation Programme that is available in FH Upper Austria which allows students to improve their German language for better study performance in the German study degrees in the universities in Upper Austria. Similar to that, there is an English preparatory programme ‘International Foundation Programme’ that target the student who are willing to apply for English-taught study programmes. In addition, the University of Applied Sciences FH Burgenland provides preparatory courses for international students as well. It is to be taken into consideration that most of these preparatory programmes are not merely dedicated for refugees, however, there are other facilities and funding schemes that are offered to facilitate the admission process for refugees in particular (OeAD4Refugees, 2017).

4.6.4 Open Learning Initiative (OLive) Courses for refugees

This initiative is taken by University of Vienna where academic courses are offered for free to refugees and asylum seekers. This project was first adopted in Hungary, Budapest in the central European university, they had the concept. The project was first established for Romanian refugees in Hungary, mainly targeting minorities. After the refugees’ crisis in 2015, the university sought partners to establish the same concept but for recent influx of refugees (Izabela Korbiel, OLive coordinator, personal interview, 4th of July, 2017).

In this initiative, OLive, non-degree academic courses are provided for refugees who have an interest in continuing their education in Higher education sector. This non-degree programme lasts for 12 weeks every Saturday. During each session, students take academic English courses, academic lectures about various topic along with discussion groups, tutorials in various fields such as academic writing, professional skills, and creative skills (OLive, 2017). After the completion of the project, the students are entitled to receive ‘Non-Degree Programme Certificate’ (OLive, 2017).

The first cycle of OLive project commenced in April 2017 where they accepted 45 students to enroll for this batch. There is no specific pre-requisite for joining this programme, only an English placement test was conducted to better allocate the students in their adequate language proficiency level. In this batch, students were divided into three groups in regards to their English proficiency level. On the other hand, students have the free will to choose among the creative skills courses such as video and theatre workshops.

Moreover, OLive students have some beneficial facilities through the participation of this project. They have access to the University of Vienna libraries and they are entitled to hold a library card with their identity although they do not have the actual student status of the university. In addition, OLive students are allowed to actively participate in the students' activities on campus for better integration in the university setting. They can also audit some university courses in other departments based on their personal interests and academic background.

Most importantly, educational consultation on individual basis is provided to the students. They are informed about the registration process in the university and be acquainted with the basic requirement for admission. Furthermore, specific individual tutoring for students interested in political science is available for OLive students. Students can attend student union's events; orientation session and scholarship information. In addition, they have free access for computer rooms and the university's e-learning platform.

Another project that is organized within the same scope is Open Learning Initiative- University Preparatory Programme (OLive UP). This initiative is a full time preparatory programme that assists the student to be fully aware of the Austrian universities system and prepare them for university application or entry exams if required for university admission. In OLive-UP, academic courses in media and communication are to be offered along with other disciplines if desired but students. In addition, language proficiency courses, in English and German, will be provided to students to prepare them for studying in the university and meet the language requirement for either a bachelor or a master degree (OLive, 2017).

4.6.5 Quali-Fair Open Learning Center

Quali-fair project is dedicated to help non-native German speakers who have the intention to pursue educational goals. This project is currently funded and supported by the Federal Ministry

of Education and the Federal Government's refugee initiative under the supervision of Diakonie charity organization. Through this project, immigrants as well as refugees receive educational consultation based on the individual needs and preferences. The main aim of this project is to facilitate access to higher education. Participants attain support in regards to the structure of their learning process along with an individual educational plan.

It started 2013 with cooperation partners as Caritas, Bildung Freude Inklusiv (BFI) in Tirol, and Diakonie. This project commenced with the aim of providing assistance for refugees or migrants with the aim of seeking higher qualifications. First aim was to explain the higher education system in Austria, help them with their educational plans and to analyze their actual competences in order to guide them for further professional development. In 2014, the project stopped because of the lack of financial support. Eventually, they project started again in 2016 and the main aim is to assist them to achieve their goals. The project helps them with information about the requirements to university admission and we make a reality check. Moreover, the project seeks to help with allocating available financial aid. About 100 students have received consultation in the project but not all of them still seek admission to university. Based on the allocated budget, the project can serve around 80 or 90 participants per year. Currently, there are two different projects; one works with teenagers and the other one work with participants above 17 years old (Ulla Pavlicek, educational consultant at Quali-Fair, personal interview, 23th of June, 2017).

In this project, Quali-fair team provides consultation in the field of education, matura, university entrance exam, and professional trainings. The university tutors in English, German, and Math subjects to prepare them for the university or higher educational institutions in general. We also aspire to provide computer courses in the future. Refugees or asylum-seekers are eligible to request support if they fulfill certain requirements. They should be at least 17 years old, obtained compulsory education, have A2 German language level, and have specific educational goals. The Open Learning Center provide other facilities to the participants such as computer workstations with internet free access, individual consultation for learning difficulties, group learning, and ongoing educational workshops (Quali-Fair, 2017).

4.6.6 REFUGEES WELCOME at TU WIEN

The Vienna University of Technology has taken many initiatives to highlight the significant role of universities in respond to the refugees 'crisis in Austria. TUW is one of the universities that take

part in MORE initiative to provide academic courses for refugees on an audit basis to prepare them for higher education. The university has decided on free academic places available for refugees in different faculties where students can experience the actual university setting along with effective knowledge transfer.

Another initiative is Open University project which is a sub-project of the future Lab in initiative. Through this project, the Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Planning attempts to respond to the refugees' issue through understanding the usual practice of asylum policy and education in order to effectively deal with the problem. In this project, many lectures, seminars and workshops will be available to public to benefit from knowledge share. The main stakeholders of this project are teachers, students and refugees themselves.

Furthermore, the higher education institutions at the university established support programs for refugees and provide translation services for those who need them to facilitate the administrative tasks. In addition, the Continuing Education Center has launched the project 'Entrepreneurship for Refugees' through which free courses are given to them to inform them about the formalities and requirements for establishing a startup business in Austria as a means to compensate for the financial aid for refugees when they choose to be students. In an attempt to prepare refugees for entry examination, a project called 'Chemistry.TU.do' has been settled to provide a three-day workshop where refugees learn basic chemistry knowledge that they need in case they seek to continue education in that field of study.

On the other hand, in an understanding that the university role is significant in social integration as well as academic one, the university initiated AMAL support program for integration. It is acknowledged that recent refugees or migrants require support for both language and culture awareness. In this initiative, German language informal courses and cultural events are organized to help refugees better integrate in the society. AMAL project target men, women, youth, as well as children with refugees' background (TUW, 2017).

4.6.7 Perspective project from AST Wien (Beratungszentrum für Migranten und Migrantinnen)

This is a consultation department where migrants and refugees are allowed to seek support concerning their education and career support. They offer personal counselling to people who need to do further education. In Perspective, employees provide many services such as assistance in

recognition of prior qualifications, clarification of necessary formal recognition of qualifications, and individual support for the process of recognition and qualifications' evaluation process. They also have the educational experience to contribute to the refugees' educational choice.

The services that are accessible in this department are available in 12 different languages; German, English, Arabic, Bosnian, Turkish, Russian, Polish, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese, and Persian which entail the diversity of the educational consultation system in the project. In addition, they can help refugees with information about various financial support channels to fund their own education (Perspektive, 2017).

4.6.8 University of Vienna – We help refugees

University of Vienna has been obviously responsive to refugee influx in Austria in the past few years. It has acknowledged its vital role as one of the main public universities in Austria to be an engaging participant to solve the issues and respond to the current needs of refugees. Based on an interview with administrator from the Teaching Affairs and Student Services department in University of Vienna who is responsible for providing information and counselling for refugees who intend to continue their studies in the university, it was mentioned that University of Vienna have created an online portal that provide relevant information to refugees about enrollment in the university as well as some other initiative that take part in the integration process.

In this website, there are several aspects that are considered crucial to be disseminated to help refugees better improve their educational chances after their arrival in Austria. To start with their opportunities to study in the university, there is an information session that is conducted once per month in English and German for both students with refugee background or and organizations' employees who are directly involved in helping refugees and asylum seekers. In this session, participants receive an information sheet in both English and German language where they can find some useful data about various subjects such as admission, financial aid, selection of degree programmes, and nostrification for certificated if required from the students (University of Vienna administrator, personal interview, 12th of July, 2017).

On the other hand, the University of Vienna has launched many initiatives that can support refugees either during their study period or to better integrate in the society as a whole. The current initiative that take place in University of Vienna are:

- **Certificate course for former refugee teachers**

The University of Vienna has cooperated with Vienna Regional Education Board and The Public Employment Service in order to start a certificate course for refugees who have been formerly working as teachers so that they can be prepared for the Austrian labor market. The Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration, and Foreign Affairs is the main funding agency for this project.

- **Open Learning Initiative (OLive)**

There are free academic courses that are offered to refugees as well as asylum seekers in University of Vienna. This OLive project is running between 2017-2018 and it is funded by ERASMUS+ programme. Through participation in OLive, students are offered a range of various courses that can prepare them for university studies. There are two different forms of courses in OLive project: the first one is OLive where students are enrolled in a 12-week programme which occur every Saturday in order to suit their schedule. On the other hand, OLive-Up is another form of courses that is on a full-time basis where students have to attend for 6 months with the direction to be enrolled in a BA or MA University degree programme after the course's completion.

- **UniClub plus**

This programme is dedicated to help young refugees above 15 years old to better integrate in the learning environment. Many young refugees attend either school or courses to improve their German, however, they might lack the chance to practice speaking German with many native speakers in the field of education. Through this project, young refugees receive support in their school assignments and tasks along them providing them with some educational knowledge that would allow them to shape their future education in the university. The Centre for Teacher Education is the main sponsor for that project.

- **SOLidee**

This initiative is commenced by the Department of Education and its aim is to enhance the welcoming culture for recent refugees to better integrate them in the society. Academic staff

members as well as students are directly involved in the process of integration with refugees, they dedicate their time and effort on a voluntary basis to provide aids in different aspects for refugees who are in dire need for help.

- **ACCESS - Educational access and social participation for refugees**

This initiative is created by the academic staff and the students of Geography department in the University of Vienna. The project aims to target refugees to be better integrated in the city as well as the culture. Based on the values of the department, the successful integration of refugees should be the responsibility of public educational institutions as well. Through this project, knowledge share is one of the main aims where information about the city and its cultural aspects are to be explained to refugees for better integration. They offer excursions and lectures to explain more information about the city of Vienna. In addition, there is a working group that in cooperation with the Rectorate is providing support for refugees who are willing to continue their education in that field if possible.

Chapter 5

Discussions and conclusion

In this chapter, the discussion of the findings is presented to understand the various co-relations among the different findings. Second, the conclusion is drawn based on the findings that have been discussed. Third, the proposed recommendations that should be taken into considerations based on the findings. The final section is describing the limitation of the study.

5.1 Discussions

According to Swail (1993), students' retention in higher education is confined to specific factors that enhance the study success of the students. Academic preparedness, campus climate, commitments to educational goals and institutions, social and academic integration, and financial support are relevant factor that determine student's intention to retain his education. In this respect, refugees' integration in Austrian universities can be well-explained through understanding these aspects and how effective in reality are they within the Austrian context.

Initially, academic preparedness is a critical element that from an early stage can entail the possibility of a student to continue and succeed in his studies. Considering the case of refugees, students have distinctive educational background. Some students with refugee's background, when they arrive in Austria, they managed to finish high school in their home countries and they aspire to join higher education for the first time. In that case, the preparation process for these students is limited to the acquisition of the German language. When students achieve the minimum required level of the German language, they are supposed to be able to cope with academic context of a given field of study. However, some refugees will face difficulty if they have experienced long period of interruption from education. Some refugees did not have access to education for a duration up to 5 years which will obscure the learning process for them.

On the other hand, some refugees seek to continue their education in Austria; they left their universities during war time and were not able to graduate. In that particular case, refugees have to determine if they will continue on the same field of study or have to adhere to a different study choice. The study choice, in that matter, is deemed to be an obstacle for some refugees.

Furthermore, the discrepancies between educational systems will influence the student's choice. As mentioned earlier, some field of studies can have immense divergence from one country to another where foreign students have to do some preparatory courses to complement the educational gap between both systems. Differences in curriculum and learning outcomes could cost refugees to either start from the beginning their studies or change the field of study.

Referring to campus climate, the characteristics of universities entail the significance of social integration among their communities which results in having a special organization culture (Bartell, 2003). The complexity of the structure of universities and their culture act as a hindrance towards fulfilling the social role of the university. To enhance the social dimension of the university and boost the diverse academic climate, strong culture has to be promoted since it provides more channels for adaptation. In addition, universities should have externally oriented culture that act responsively to the demands of the outside influences (Sporn, 1996).

Consequently, Austrian universities hold the responsibility to adjust their organization cultures in accordance with the current needs. Having many refugees who seek to continue their education in the university necessitates enfoldng new policies and strategies to foster a more inclusive learning environment. Although internationalization in higher education increases diversity culture in universities, this trend is not relatively relevant to the inclusion of students with refugee' background. Higher educational institutions, in that matter, should investigate the expectations of this new target group, refugees, to manage to achieve the organizational culture fit. Many Austrian universities facilitate the participation of refugees in campus activities, however, they do not trace the effectiveness of these activities on the integration process.

Educational commitment from both sides, universities as well as students, intrinsically strengthens integration and retention of students. To highlight the role of the university, it is to be discussed the internal strategic plans and missions of the university that occasionally have to adapt with the current trends that affect not only higher education sector, but also the whole society. In Austria, there are some internal initiatives from the universities to support refugees. In addition, MORE initiative is an institutional cooperation among various Austrian universities to respond to the refugee's crisis in Europe. However, the impression from various interviews from university's

perspective is that not all departments are actively involved in welcoming refugees in the academic sphere. Hence, it is significant that the main mission of universities should entail the dire need for involvement of all concerned stakeholders in educational institutions.

From the student's point of view, educational commitment relies on various factors before and during his study period. Parental support and guidance has a major impact on student's commitment. Many parents plan university education for their children at a very early stage. In Arab culture, many families aspire that their children join certain field of studies such as medicine or engineering to bring source of pride for the whole family. This attitude can be an immense pressure for the student to commit to his studies so that his family will be satisfied from his educational achievement.

Another factor that influences student's commitment is the study performance and the adequate potentials of the student. Some of the interviewees are former students in University of Technology in Vienna, they dropped out from their studies because they found themselves under-qualified to continue their studies there. One student suggests that TUW has to conduct entrance exam as one of the admission procedure since it is difficult field of study (student 5, personal interview, 25th of May, 2017). Thus, it is crucial that the student is fully aware of his own potentials and qualification in order to predict his study performance and eliminate the drop-out rate.

A substantial dimension that is an essential aspect in Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model is academic and social integration. In addition, there are four concepts that influence integration process: 'academic-, social-, personal-, and emotional adjustment and attachment'. Academic adjustment reflects the rate of students' success and their study performance. Social adjustment is the ability of the student to communicate on campus and to establish social relations among his peers. Moreover, personal and emotional adjustment indicates the psychological and physical readiness of the student to cope with the newly academic setting. On the other hand, the term 'attachment' depicts the educational commitment of the students towards a specific institution (Rienties et. al, 2012).

Taking into consideration all these aspects, universities as well as refugees have the responsibility to measure the integration process during the study period to avert the drop-out chances. Each

factor for student integration has to be deliberately scrutinized to ensure that the students with refugee's background, with all the distress and affliction, have better chances to continue their education in the host university.

Although financial support is thought-through to be oblique; not a direct impact on student integration, however, it affects student's decision for retention. Concerning refugees, many of them encounter hurdles in regards to financial aid. By law, refugees are deprived from the social aid they receive from the government once they declare their student status. As a result, students seek to find other funding sources. There are some governmental initiatives to support refugees to continue their education in Austrian universities; for instance, 'Check-in Plus'. Nevertheless, more funding sources should be accessible to refugees who are willing to invest their own capacities in the host country.

Other challenges to refugees' integration

The complexity of higher education system resists the tendency towards drastic changes due to new rising circumstances. As a result, the responsiveness of higher education institutions in regards to major challenges is considered to be relatively slower than it should be. The recent influx of refugees that fled from their countries to Europe to survive from severe life threatening situation is an intriguing challenge that not only higher education systems face but various governmental sectors in European context.

Many obstacles are encountered by the governments on daily basis so that they can assure the proper resettlement of the newcomers who seek a safe haven. On the other hand, refugees themselves pass through various hardships that result in facing more complications in the new host country. Consequently, governments have more duties towards these people who pursue a better future in a secure shelter.

A significant aspect that requires serious attention from European higher education systems is the process of needs-analysis that examines the competencies of refugees after their arrival. Many refugees have the intention to proceed with their education right after their landing in the host country. However, they encounter some difficulties with even the study choice. In some cases, their educational backgrounds do not match the available field of studies here in Austria or in

European universities in general. Another facet to the problem is being exposed to a different educational system.

Students with refugee background have distinct expectations about the characteristics of the Austrian higher education system. Being part of a different education systems, refugees face difficulties to fit in the new system. Furthermore, the higher educational institutions, on the other hand, have in most cases higher expectations from students with refugee background. For instances, as stated by MORE coordinator in University of Vienna ‘sometimes we have to help student with uploading documents and online-application process’ (University of Vienna administrator, personal interview, 12th of July, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the actual potentials and qualifications of refugees when they show the intention of continuing education.

Corresponding to this issue, recognition of prior learning is another obstacle that many refugees go through when applying to study in another university in Austria. Many refugees experience atrocious circumstances during their journey to any European country. In some cases, they have to walk very long distances that can take up to months going through difficult paths. In other cases, some refugees shared their stories that they had to cross river by swimming. Thus, it is challenging for some to preserve their educational documents while encountering these obstacles.

Lack of proper documents impedes the admission process for students with refugee background. Nevertheless, some Austrian universities lack the mechanisms that will allow them to acknowledge the actual qualifications of these students. They, on their side, insist that the required documents for any foreigner student who seek to study in an Austrian university should apply also when it comes to the case of refugees. Along these lines, many refugees lose their chances to complete or start their studies due to the absence of required documents.

Besides that, another challenge that refugees deal with is access to specific field of studies in Austrian universities. When it comes to natural sciences, many Austrian universities conduct entrance exams for students in order to measure their qualifications. However, the challenge for some refugees is that they take the same entrance exams that are conducted for Austrian students which are considerably different from the exams targeting foreign students. In that case, refugees face difficulties concerning the content of the exam as well as language barrier. Although refugees in order to be admitted to any Austrian university has to prove that they have upper-intermediate

level of German (B2 level according to the European language framework), it is difficult to perform in similar level along with Austrian students. Their educational background about the field may differ in some aspects which in returns will not allow them to provide same level of information as Austrian students. As explained by one refugee:

‘I am planning to join University of Medicine in Vienna and I am preparing some studies in VWU. The problem is...there is a quota for admission and we as refugees will compete with Austrians which will make our chances way much less to be accepted in the university’ (student 4, personal interview, 16th of May, 2017).

A further hindrance is the lack of dissemination of information and guidance for refugees who seek to enroll in higher education in Austria. Many refugees during the interviews voiced their distress about the availability of information in regards to admission to Austrian universities. It took long time for them to understand the higher education system and be able to know the requirements for university’s admission. Although there are many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that deal with refugees or asylum seekers from their arrival day, refugees asserted that they could not receive any convenient information regarding studying in Austrian universities from these organizations. On the other hand, some universities have provided information about access on their websites but the information available, in many cases, is displayed in German or English which hinder some prospect students to understand properly the guidelines.

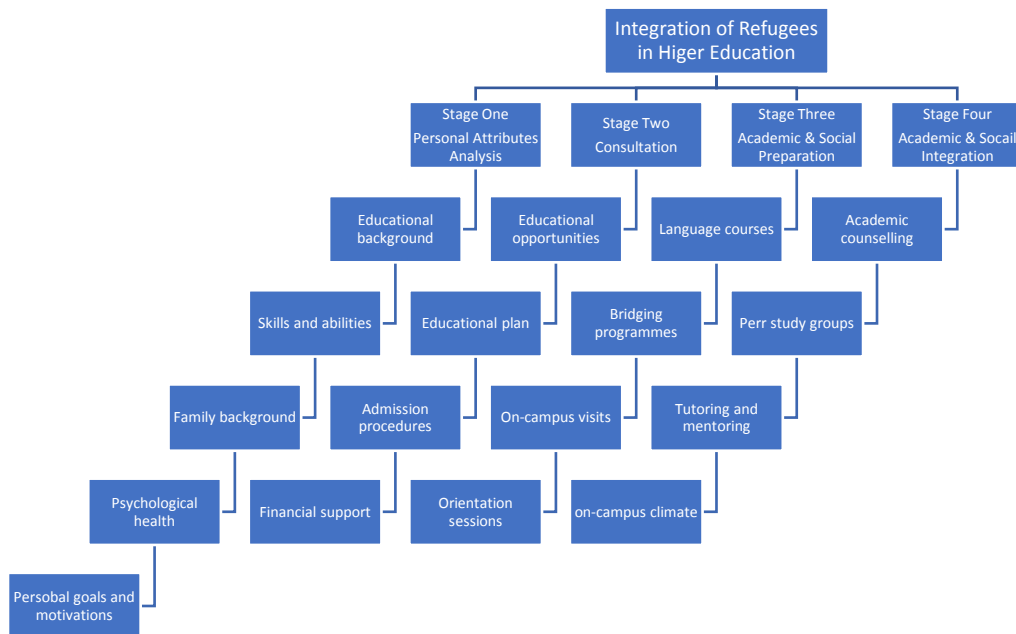
5.2 Recommendations

Since the purpose of this study is to investigate the current methods that are practiced in Austrian higher education system to prepare students with refugee’s background to better integrate in the system, the suggestion for best practices is based on literature and actual experiences. The recent influx of refugees caused some hurdles for higher educational institutions. The lack of readiness to deal with new target group of students, refugees, who require specific measures and methods due to the personal dilemma they have been through brings about inefficiency in respond to this crisis from the institutional level. Universities as well as preparatory programmes encounter the challenges of integrating these students into the educational system.

Although this study is based on Tinto’s Student Integration Model (1975), the institutionalization and practice of this theory will not be utterly applicable in the refugees ‘case. A criticism that can be directed towards the relevance of Tinto’s model to the integration of refugees is the absence of the psychological aspects. Refugees passed through severe calamity in their home country and on their journey to the host country. Thus, the psychological health of the students is crucial to be examined to ensure the efficiency of the integration process in the higher education system.

The recommendations proposed in this study depict stages that both the institutions and students should pass through with regards to the effectiveness of the integration procedures. There are four stages through which the integration process can be achieved. The stages are personal attributes analysis, academic consultation, academic and social preparation, academic and social integration, and monitoring for retention. In each stage, there are some variables identified that ensure the efficacy of the processes that the student with refugee’s background takes part in. In all the stages, it is required from the university or preparatory programs or any other projects to allocate the proper time span for the implementation. Moreover, it is crucial to argue that more variables can be applicable for practice in each stage that differs from one institution to another. However, it is the responsibility of the university’ administrator to identify the relevant variables according to their organization’s culture.

Figure 2. Integration framework of refugees in Austrian Universities



Source: The author composes the framework based on research's findings

Stage one: Personal attributes analysis

Higher educational institutions should investigate various variables to acknowledge the readiness of the student to proceed with his education in Austrian universities.

- Educational background: it is important to not only validate the previous educational certificates that the student presents as a proof for previous learning experience, but only to examine the actual content knowledge that the student possess.
- Skills and abilities: besides academic potentials, college students require some interpersonal skills. Critical thinking, ICT knowledge, problem-solving and other skills can promote the student progress during his study.
- Family background: in case of refugees, some students leave their countries on their own and other are here with their families. Understanding the personal circumstances of the student and the availability of family support has an impact on the future performance of the student.
- Psychological health: although it might be not directly the responsibility of the university to examine the psychological health of the prospect student, it is crucial to perceive the psychological factors that can affect negatively on the study progress. Thus, psychological counselling is a relevant solution that can predict the student's readiness to pursue his studies.
- Personal goals and motivation: students with refugee's background, in many cases, have distinct educational intentions. The recognition of the actual educational intentions of the student can foresee the persistency of the student in his studies.

Stage two: Consultation

After the realization of the personal attributes of the student with refugee's background, it is the main role of the educational institutions to assist students with educational planning. There are certain procedures through which the universities or any other educational institutions to help students to find their educational path

- Educational opportunities: educational institutions can cooperate together to allow a quota for refugees in different field of studies. They can also develop outreach programs in refugees' camps or residencies to inform them about their educational chances.
- Educational plan: educational institutions should help the students to plan their studies in case they find their prospective university.
- Admission procedures: educational institutions should develop some mechanisms that can recognize the students' previous qualifications in case of absence of documentation.
- Financial support: a database of possible financial aid for students with refugee background should be created to support students with information on how to fund themselves during their study periods.

Stage three: Academic and social preparation

Some students will need a preparation period to be able to fully enroll in the university and be a regular student. Thus, it is crucial to invest in the student during the preparation period to well-establish his capacities and potentials for ensuring retention and study success.

- Language courses: one of the main obstacles that students face is the acquisition of the German language in a short period of time. There are many language courses offered in the country, however, some of these courses are not well-customized for prospect university students. Some interviews voiced their complaints that they were allocated in language courses with different age groups which delayed the learning progress due to the discrepancies in the students' learning abilities. It is efficient to establish language courses that are merely for refugees who are planning to continue their education in Austrian universities.
- Bridging programmes: pre-college students need to sharpen their knowledge about specific field of studies. It will be more efficient if students with refugee background enroll in some academic courses as audit students to prepare themselves academically for university period. On the other hand, if the university decides to provide these courses as credit courses for the non-regular refugees' students, it can be monitoring scale for their future study performance.

- On-campus visits: universities should arrange on-campus visits for prospect students from refugees to enable them to be aware of the academic as well the social culture of the Austrian universities.
- Orientation sessions: universities should hold orientation sessions not only for newly registered freshmen students but also for everyone who intends to join the university. Thus, orientation sessions in various languages should be organized to provide important information for students with background refugee on how they can proceed if they need to enroll in the university.

Stage four: academic and social integration

When a refugee is considered officially a regular student, there are several procedures that need to be taken into considerations to ensure the retention and high completion rate of their studies. Refugees have different learning experience in their home countries and they will definitely need some guidance during their study period to assist them in their study progress.

- Academic counselling: academic advising is an efficient method to help students in their study success. However, refugees will need more in-depth counselling due to their ordeals. Thus, it is significant to establish training for all faculty staff on how to deal with and consult these students within their circumstances.
- Peer study groups: refugees need to be well-integrated into the academic sphere through direct contact with their professors as well as their colleagues. Hence, faculties should organize study groups session that can help refugees to integrate more into the academic setting in a less formal context.
- Tutoring and mentoring: senior students and teacher assistants can take part in the integration process of refugees in the university. They can be academically responsible for students with refugee's background. They can assist students with adjusting their study plans for each semester, facilitate learning materials and tools, and provide supplementary instruction.

- On-campus climate: extra-curricular activities play a vital role in the integration process. Students should embrace the multi-cultural environment on campus and should improve their sense of belonging to the institutions through their actual involvement in outside classroom activities.

5.3 Conclusion

The problem statement of this research is to investigate the current methods used in higher education sector in Austria where students from refugees' background benefit for better integration in the system. Through the study, there are two types of educational institutions that have been identified in this process; universities and preparation programmes. Universities have collaborated in a governmental initiative called MORE where they provide free academic and language courses for refugees and asylum-seekers. In addition, some universities take autonomous initiative to provide preparation courses for refugees as well. Referring to preparation programmes, they are directed with specific mission to prepare all international students for Austrian universities. Hence, some refugees take part in the same programmes as considered part of international students. Consequently, there are some needs from refugees that are not fully fulfilled since these preparation courses are not entirely targeting refugees.

Another aspect that has been meticulously investigated is the refugee's perspective about the integration process. Most of refugees are obliged to attend integration courses as part of the German language preparation, however, in their opinion, these integration courses do not provide them with sufficient information about higher education system in Austria. Moreover, they articulate their concern about the educational experience gap between their past learning experience in their home countries and the Austrian academic context. Many refugees believe that they need at least one-year preparation year to prepare themselves to study in Austrian universities. Most significantly is the language barrier from their perspective. Some refugees wait for long time to be registered in a German course and as result, their opportunity to join university is delayed accordingly.

Ultimately, the role of higher educational institutions in Austria is vital to promote the academic performance of refugees as well as integrate them in social activities. It is crucial to understand their needs and potentials to be able to provide the adequate methods that accelerate the integration process. On the other hand, refugees themselves have eminent responsibility towards their studies

and their educational institutions. They must be aware of their own capacities and potentials and identify the barriers that will hinder them from the study success.

5.4 Limitation of the study

One of the major challenges that the author encountered during the research is conducting interviews with representatives from higher educational institutions. After a formal meeting with MORE initiative coordinator, the author managed to send emails to MORE coordinators in twenty-three Austrian universities. Unfortunately, no single reply was received from any of MORE coordinators which has reduced the rate of participants in the study. The scope of the research is to examine many activities and methods that are followed by several universities to integrate refugees into the system. The limited number of research's participants from higher education sector has confined the expected findings from the study.

Since this research is conducted through a master thesis study programme, the required number of interviews is not relatively extensive. Concerning the willingness of refugees to participate in the research was considerably high, however, the number of interviews is limited. For further study, a survey can be conducted to measure the learning expectations of refugees from the Austrian higher education system that widely allow a high percentage of participation. Higher participation rate from the refugees will definitely broaden the insight about their capacities and needs.

Sampling technique in this study is random due to the lack of a unified source of information on the national level that allow researchers to map the distinct strategic plans and activities followed by higher educational institutions to integrate refugees. During conducting interviews, many participants have suggested other interviewees who can be beneficial to the study. Referrals was a main means to select relevant participants to the study. Many participants who are actively involved in the integration process of refugees did not have extensive information about other activities or methods followed by other universities outside their scope.

For further considerations, large sampling for both refugees and higher education sector representatives among various Austrian higher educational institutions is an added value to the research. Perceiving the expectations and the actual needs of both participants will bring about more substantial results that can be institutionalize and put in practice for enhancing the educational integration process.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview questions for students

Section One: Background

General background information

- Age / country of origin / ethnic group/ status (married / parent / younger person with or without family etc.)
- When did you arrive in Austria?
- What is your asylum-seeking status?

Pre-college schooling in home country

- What did you study in your home country? What subject(s)? Why? (Career goal / parental expectations).
- Did you learn / speak German in your home country? (To what level?)
- When did you leave education?
- What are your current qualifications and skills based on your past learning experiences?

Section Two: Commitments

Individual educational goal in the host country

- What kind of studies or training that you have done since you've been in Austria?
- What are your sources of information for your further education in Austria? Were this adequate? Is there any other information / help that you would like that you haven't been able to find? What sort of information / how should this be communicated?
- What are the expected learning outcomes from your current studies?
- Are you satisfied with the quality of courses? Why?
- What are the differences between both study experience (home country and host country)?
- Have you had any problems finding or getting on a course that you would have liked to have done (why, e.g. not available / qualifications not recognised / financial reasons?).
- Have you had any other problems which have made it difficult you to do or continue with education (e.g. housing, health etc.).
- Have you decided or thought about dropping out from any courses? Why?

Institutional goal in the host country

- What are your reasons behind the choice of a specific educational institution?
- How do you think this institution will help you in your future path?
- What are the obstacles that you face/might face while studying in this institution?

Section Three: Integration process

Academic system

- How do you evaluate your study performance now?
- What is the average grade for your courses?
- What are the newly acquired qualification/ skills from your courses so far?
- Do you have a good interaction with your professors? Why?
- Do you have academic advisor? What are the benefits if yes?

Social system

- What are the facilities provided for you on campus?
- How do you describe your relationship with your classmates?
- What are the extra-curricular activities offered in the institution? Do you participate in them? Why?
- What are the support services you receive from the administration?

Opinions on possible action

- What do you think are the main things that need to be done to encourage / help refugees to take courses at college or university? (Explore other problems that s/he thinks may be faced by certain types of refugees and possible solutions).
- What do you think schools / colleges / universities / community groups could help you achieve your learning / training / career goals?

Appendix B: Interview questions with educational institutions' staff

Academic staff

- How many refugees are enrolled in your courses? What are their nationalities? What are their asylum-seeking status?
- What is your opinion about their study performance in your course?
- How does their previous educational background affect the learning process?
- What are the learning skills required from refugees to perform better in their studies?
- Do refugees receive academic support to facilitate the learning process? How?
- What are the obstacles towards their study success and retention?
- What are the teaching methods followed by professors to integrate refugees in classrooms?
- What are the extra-curricular activities that are organized to better integrate refugees?
- What need to be done further to increase their educational attainment?

Administrative Staff

- How many refugees and asylum seekers were enrolled at your institution this academic year?
- What are the title of courses attended by refugees and the numbers who have attended this academic year?
- Does your college / centre / university formally offer any services specifically to refugees or asylum seekers to support their studies? What are these services?
- Do you have a member of staff with a specific responsibility for the support of refugees? If yes, what are his/her responsibilities?
- Do you think the refugee students within your institution require more support? why?
- What are the difficulties that are faced by refugees concerning administration issues?